

# Is it Dangerous for Cats to Eat Dog Food?

by Susan Paretts, Demand Media 



*Never purposefully give your cat dog food.*

While an occasional nibble of your dog's food won't hurt your cat, long-term feeding of food formulated for dogs certainly can. For proper nutrition, feed your kitty only food specifically labeled for cats. Cats have different nutritional needs from dogs and become malnourished if fed a diet designed for canines.

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## Proteins

Dogs are omnivores and can obtain the nutrients they need from both plant- and animal-based sources. Unlike dogs, cats are obligate carnivores, meaning that they must eat animal-based proteins to obtain the nutrients they need to survive and maintain their health. The nutrient profiles of the Association of American Feed Control Officials state that the minimum amount of protein required by a dog food is 18 percent, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. This is 8 percent less than the minimum amount of protein required for a cat food, which is 26 percent. Not only does dog food contain less protein than is necessary for a cat, but it may come from plant sources, which won't provide your cat the nutrients she needs to stay healthy.

## Essential Amino Acids

Animal-based proteins like meats and meat byproducts are made up of 23 types of amino acids, 11 of which your cat needs to survive, according to the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine. A cat cannot synthesize these 11 essential amino acids and must ingest them to maintain her health; dogs need them too, but not all of them. One such amino acid is taurine, which isn't required by AAFCO to be included in dog food. A dog's body can manufacture taurine, but a cat's can't. Unfortunately, if a cat is eating dog food, she won't get this vital amino acid and can become ill.

## Other Ingredients

Cats require both arachidonic and linoleic acids from animal-based fats in their diet, while dogs need only linoleic acid. Dog food doesn't contain arachidonic fatty acid, which is necessary to maintain your cat's coat and kidneys, according to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. For proper nutrition, cats and dogs need different amounts of vitamins and minerals in their diet. Dogs need smaller amounts of B vitamins, including niacin and thiamin, and less folic acid than cats. Their food therefore contains less of these substances, according to the FDA. This will result in a deficiency in them if your cat eats foods that are nutritionally balanced for dogs.

## Improper Diet for Cats

Feeding your cat an improper diet, namely food formulated for dogs, can result in a variety of illnesses. A lack of taurine, which is not found in dog food, can cause blindness, heart problems and deafness, according to PetMD. Other possible effects of an improper balance of vitamins needed by cats include lethargy, seizures, poor posture, poor coat condition, impaired reproduction and even death. In addition, the improper balance of proteins, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals may cause gastrointestinal upset in your cat if she eats a large amount of dog food.

Eating a bite of dog food here and there won't have a large impact on your cat's health, but continued snacking on your pooch's food can harm her. If she fills up too much on your dog's food, she simply won't have room in her tummy for her own food, which is beneficial to her health.

## Feeding Time

Living in a household with both a cat and a dog, you need to ensure that each animal only eats her own food. While free access to a large bowl of food is an easy solution to feeding your pooch, it may not be practical if your kitty is constantly snacking on his food. Feed your dog two meals during the day, following the daily calorie intake recommended by the pet food manufacturer. Monitor your dog during his feedings to ensure that your cat doesn't come over and steal some of the food. Because cats tend to eat as many as 12 to 20 times per day, free-feeding may work better for your kitty only, according to the National Research Council of the National Academies. Place your cat's bowl of food on a counter top, shelf or table that your dog can't reach so your dog won't eat it. After all, it's just as bad to give your dog cat food as it is to give your cat dog food.