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## **Tiger Tales: The Challenges of Managing a Kidney Cat**

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### **Introduction**

Proper nutritional management is one of the most important factors in the health and disease management of pets. As pet owners become more aware of the importance of nutrition in their own health, they will expect a higher standard of nutritional care for their pets. The nutritional counselor should be the preferred, expert source of the best nutritional information for pets. Nutritional counselors that understand and embrace clinical nutrition and demonstrate in-clinic behaviors consistent with that conviction will benefit their patients, their clients, their practice and the profession.

### **What is a Nutritional Counselor?**

Nutritional counselors work with the veterinarian to reinforce, implement and follow up the food recommended for the pet. They accomplish this by working with the pet owner, explaining what and why the food is being recommended and to answer any questions the pet owner may have. A nutritional counselor follows up with the pet owner to assure compliance, but more importantly to be the cheerleader for the owner and the pet. Pet owners need to know someone is there for them to help with questions or concerns even after the initial visit.

### **Nutritional Counselors Reinforce the Veterinarian's Recommendation.**

The consultation will start after the veterinarian (or technician) has made a food recommendation for the pet. If the veterinarian gave the recommendation he/ she will advise you what the food is and if the pet can have dry, canned or both. The veterinarian should mention if only specific treats can be fed. If the pet needs to lose weight, the veterinarian will also advise what the goal weight should be.

To begin the consultation, ask two very important questions: what are you currently feeding and why? When asking what they are currently feeding, this includes everything they are feeding, including pet food, treats, table food, and supplements. Have pet owners tell you everything that passes their pet's lips, be it solid or liquid food (it is common for cat owners to give milk). This will give you a lot of important information and will help guide you in your discussion to make sure transitioning to the new food is successful.

After gaining an understanding of what they are feeding and why, you will know what you need to discuss to make the transition to the new food successful. Discuss with the pet owner what the new food is, and why the veterinarian is recommending it. For example, the veterinarian is recommending a renal food for your cat; it has controlled protein, phosphorous and sodium, to take the work load of your cat's kidneys and will improve and extend the quality and length of your cat's life.

## **Nutritional Counselors Implement the Recommendation**

The second part of the consultation is very important. This is where you will help the owner accept the recommendation by communicating everything they need to know about the new food: how much to feed, how to transition and answer questions they may have. This insures they accept the recommendation. The technician plays a pivotal role in helping the pet owner. Switching to a new food can be a stressful time for the pet owner, especially if the pet is switching to a therapeutic food. We are there to be the pet owners' cheerleader and let them know we are there for support.

### **How Much to Feed?**

It is important to discuss how much to feed. It is best if you calculate exactly what the dog or cat should be getting; do not leave it up to the pet owner to decide how much to feed. This is especially important when a pet needs to lose weight. Based on your initial questions and what the veterinarian has recommended, you will know if the pet will be getting canned, dry or both.

To calculate feeding amounts first calculate resting energy requirement. There are a few calculations recommended, such as  $RER = (70 \times \text{kg BW}^{0.75})$  or  $RER = 70 + (30 \times \text{kg BW})$ . Daily requirements are then multiplied by a factor that takes into account the age, activity, or physiological condition of the animal.<sup>1</sup>

When calculating for weight loss, use the goal weight given to you by the veterinarian to calculate the feeding amount.<sup>2</sup> Make sure you advise the owner that the amount you are recommending is a starting point. The amount may need to be adjusted based on how the pet responds to the feeding amount. This is especially important for weight loss.

If available, use a brochure that discusses the new food. If the pet food company does not provide brochures, make your own with basic information about how the food will benefit the pet. Many pet owners are stressed and not completely taking in what you tell them at the clinic, so it is important to give them something to read at home. The pet owner can share the information with family members that were not present at the veterinary clinic during the exam and recommendation. It is important to give the pet owner full instructions on how much to feed and any additional instructions, such as how many treats, along with information on how to transition, and a measuring cup (if the pet food companies supply them), or instruction to purchase the correct 8 oz. (250 g) measuring cup.

### **Transition**

It is important to recommend a transition. There are two reasons to do a transition: 1) occasionally a pet will have a GI upset when switched to a new diet, 2) a pet will accept a new food better when a transition is done to allow the pet to get use to the new texture and flavor. There is more of a chance with a hydrolyzed protein or different (high or low) fiber level food to cause a GI upset.

Transition recommendation- 1) Recommend  $\frac{3}{4}$  old diet –  $\frac{1}{4}$  new diet, 2) Do this for a few days; if no GI upset, go to the next step, 3)  $\frac{1}{2}$  old diet-  $\frac{1}{2}$  new diet, 4) Do this for a few days; if no GI upset, go

to the next step, 5) ¼ old diet- ¾ new diet, 6) Do this for a few days; if no GI upset, go to the next step, 7) End with 100% of the new food.

Sometimes a transition should be longer, especially for cats. Use the same recommendation, but instead of a few days, recommend doing each step for a week or more.

### **Nutritional Counselors Follow up**

After the consultation is finished and the owner has gone home, it is important to follow up with the pet owner to make sure everything is going well. The nutritional counselor should call in 2 -3 days, 2 weeks, and 2 months to see how the pet is doing. The first follow up is the most important; call in 2-3 days. This will be during the transition and this is when most people will give up on the new food. It is an opportunity to be the owner's support and cheerleader and help with any issues that have come up. It is also an opportunity for the pet owner to ask any questions that have come up since they went home, especially from family members.

Check in at 2 weeks to see how the pet is doing; by now the pet may be on the new food or still transitioning, so it is a good time to check in and see how everything is going.

At 2 months, check to see how the pet is doing. By now the pet should be on the new food, and you are calling to offer any support they may need. Call as you think necessary after the 2 month check in. If pet needs to lose weight, call monthly until the pet reaches its goal weight. Encourage weighing every 2-4 weeks until the pet reaches its goal weight, then every 6 months.

### ***Let's do a consultation***

#### **Tiger**

Our case is Tiger, she is a DSH, 11 year old, female (spayed) cat, she currently weighs 6 pounds (2.7 kg). The owner has reported she is not eating as well, has vomited a few times and appears to have lost weight. The veterinarian did a physical exam and ordered some lab work. The veterinarian found she has lost 2 pounds from her ideal weight of 8 pounds (3.6kg); she now weighs 6 pounds (2.7 kg). The lab work showed mild kidney disease, the decision was made to try diet as the sole therapy for now. The veterinarian recommends a food change to a renal therapeutic food; he recommends canned and dry.

The nutritional counselor comes in to speak to the pet owner. She asks what the owner is currently feeding Tiger and why. Tiger currently eats an over the counter dry and canned food. She feed the food because the pet owner read on the internet that the brand is good food for her cats and has the best ingredients. She does not feed any treats, people food or give supplements. She free feeds, so is not sure how much Tiger is eating.

The nutritional counselor explains why the veterinarian is recommending the k/d for Tiger: "The veterinarian is recommending renal food for your cat; it has controlled protein, phosphorous and sodium to reduce the work load of your cat's kidneys, and to extend your cat's quality and length of life. The veterinarian is recommending canned and dry. Kidney patients can benefit from the water content in the canned food, because cats with kidney disease may not drink enough free water. We want to know if and how much Tiger is eating, so an exact feeding amount will be recommended."

### **Feeding amount**

The nutritional counselor calculates the feeding amounts for Tiger. She weighs 6 pounds (2.7 kg), but should weigh 8 pounds (3.6kg). The food amount is calculated for her ideal weight of 8 pounds (3.6 kg). Using the chart (table 1), take the RER (resting energy requirement) x life stage= kcals needed per day: 8 pounds (3.6 kg) = 183 kcals x 1.2 = 220 total kilocalories per day. The renal food, canned 2.9oz can contains 77 kcals per can; she wanted to feed 1 can and leave the rest of the calories for dry. The renal food has dry 8 oz. cup contains 444 kcals, so she would need 143 kcals or 1/3 cup a day, for a total of 220 kilocalories per day. She recommends dividing the amount into two meals.

### **Transition**

The nutritional counselor discusses transition; she uses a transition brochure that she received from the pet food company and a brochure about the new food to help with the discussion. Cats are known to have texture issues, so a long transition is recommended over 1 month to allow Tiger to get used to the new food. If she is accepting the canned food, the owner can speed up the transition. The pet owner is also given a measuring cup, so she can accurately measure the dry food.

### **Follow up**

The nutritional counselor tells Tiger's owner to expect a call in a few days to see how everything is going and to see if she or her family have any additional questions. The counselor gives her card and lets the owner know if she has questions at any time to feel free to call. She lets her know she will call in a few days, then in 2 weeks and then in 2 months to check in to see how Tiger is doing. She makes sure Tiger's owner knows she can call anytime with questions, and the counselor will call or see her at the clinic. Kidney disease is a lifelong disease, and it is good to give support to owners as they go through the stages of the disease.

### **Summary**

Every pet deserves and should receive a nutritional recommendation on every visit. Nutrition is one area of veterinary medicine that affects every pet that comes into the hospital. Working as a nutritional counselor is very rewarding and is an asset to the practice as well as the pet owner and most importantly the pet. You can be instrumental in guiding a pet owner answering questions and determining feeding amounts. Follow up is imperative for success of a new food. Technicians can play an integral role in helping pet owners successfully switch to a new food.

### **References/ Suggested Reading**

1. Ramsey JJ, Determining Energy Requirements. In: Fascetti AJ & Delaney SJ, Blackwell, West Sussex, UK, 2012: 23-45
2. Toll PW, Yamka RM et al. Obesity. In: Hand, Thatcher, Remillard, et al, Small Animal Clinical Nutrition, 5th edition, Mark Morris Institute, Topeka, Kansas, 2010: 525-526

**Table 1****Calculating Daily Energy Requirements (DER)**

1. Find weight on the chart
2. Determine RER
3. RER x lifestage energy requirement = DER kcal/daily requirements

Pounds	KG	RER (kcal per day)		
1	0.5	39		
2	0.9	65	<b>Canine Lifestage Daily Energy Requirements</b>	
3	1.4	88	<b>Lifestage</b>	<b>DER</b>
4	1.8	110	Puppy (up to 4 mos)	3 x RER
5	2.3	130	Puppy (4mos & older)	2 x RER
6	2.7	149	Intact adult	1.8 x RER
7	3.2	167	Neutered adult	1.6 x RER
8	3.6	184	Obese prone	1.4 x RER
9	4.1	201	Weight loss	1.0 x RER
10	4.5	218		
11	5.0	234		
12	5.5	250		
13	5.9	265	<b>Working Adult Canine Energy Requirements</b>	
14	6.4	280	<b>Workload</b>	<b>DER</b>
15	6.8	295	Light	2x RER
16	7.3	310	Moderate	3x RER
17	7.7	324	Heavy	4-8 x RER
18	8.2	339		
19	8.6	353		
20	9.1	366		
25	11.4	433	<b>Feline Lifestage Daily Energy Requirements</b>	
30	13.6	497	<b>Lifestage</b>	<b>DER</b>
35	15.9	558	Kitten	2.5 x RER
40	18.2	616	Intact Adult	1.4 x RER
45	20.5	673	Neutered adult	1.2 x RER
50	22.7	729	Obese prone	1.0 x RER
55	25.0	783	Weight loss	0.8 x RER
60	27.3	835		
65	29.5	887		
70	31.8	938		
75	34.1	988		
80	36.4	1037		
85	38.6	1085		
90	40.9	1132		
95	43.2	1179		
100	45.5	1225		