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**Integrative Animal Care**

**Pottenger's Cats – A Study in Nutrition**

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Between the years of 1932 and 1942, Dr. Francis M. Pottenger, Jr. conducted a feeding experiment to determine the effects of heat-processed food on cats. His ten-year cat study was prompted by the high rate of mortality he was experiencing among his laboratory cats undergoing adrenalectomies for the use in standardizing the hormone content of the adrenal extract he was making. Because there was no existent chemical procedure for standardizing biological extracts, manufacturers of such extracts necessarily had to use animals to determine their potency. As cats die without their adrenal glands, the dose of extract required to support their lives calibrated the level of the extract's potency.

In his effort to maximize the preoperative health of his laboratory animals, Pottenger fed them a diet of market grade raw milk, cod liver oil, and cooked meat scraps. These scraps included the liver, tripe, entrails, brains, heart and muscles. This diet was considered to be rich in all the important nutritive substances by the experts of the day, and the surgical technique used for the adrenalectomies was the most exacting known. Therefore, Pottenger was perplexed as to why his cats were poor operative risks. In seeking an explanation, he began noticing that the cats showed signs of deficiency. All showed a decrease in their reproductive capacity and many of the kittens born in the laboratory had skeletal deformities and organ malfunctions.

As his neighbors kept donating an increasing number of cats to his laboratory, the demand for cooked meat scraps exceeded supply and he placed an order at the local meat packing plant for raw meat scraps, again including the viscera, muscle and bone. These raw meat scraps were fed to a segregated group of cats each day and within a few months this group appeared in better health than the animals being fed cooked meat scraps. Their kittens appeared more vigorous, and most interestingly, their operative mortality decreased markedly. The contrast in the apparent health of the cats fed raw meat and those fed cooked meat was so startling, it prompted Francis to undertake a controlled experiment. What he had observed by chance, he wanted to repeat by design. He wanted to find answers to such questions as: Why did the cats eating raw meat survive their operations more readily than those eating cooked meat? Why did the kittens of the raw meat fed cats appear more vigorous? Why did a diet based on cooked meat scraps apparently fail to provide the necessary nutritional elements for good health? He felt the findings of a controlled feeding experiment might illuminate new facts about optimal human nutrition.

The Cat Study of Francis M. Pottenger, Jr., MD is unique. There is no similar experiment in the medical literature. The pathological and chemical findings were supervised by Pottenger in consultation with Alvin G. Foord, MD, professor of pathology at the University of Southern California and pathologist at the Huntington Memorial Hospital in Pasadena. Accordingly, the studies met the most rigorous scientific standards of the day and their protocol was observed consistently. Since the Cat Study is unique, its findings are frequently quoted and misquoted in order to justify the ideas of others. For example, one author states that the 200 cats dies of arthritis; this did not happen. Another author states that the cats were fed sprouts and survived in full health for four continuous generations. Again, no such experiment took place, and yet this misinformation has been traced over a dozen or more articles and books.

A frequent criticism of The Pottenger Cat Study is that it was not properly controlled. Here it is necessary to ask "By what standards?" Every one of the studies followed strictly defined protocol. All variables in the stock of the animals were reported and explained. Because some of the test procedures may seem crude forty years later, this in no way invalidates the facts that the procedures were meticulously controlled and that the results of the experiments were reported as observed.

For more information about The Pottenger Cat Study as well as a clearinghouse of information on healthful lifestyles, ecology, sound nutrition, alternative medicine, humane farming and organic gardening go to:  
[www.pricepottenger.org](http://www.pricepottenger.org)

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