



## Interesting Case from our web site [www.fairfield-vets.co.uk](http://www.fairfield-vets.co.uk)



### "Smokey Joe" - Older Cat with Taurine Deficiency.



We are frequently being told how important it is to have a balanced diet. Exactly the same applies to animals. However, in the case of our feline patients, we don't recommend 5 portions of fruit and veg daily, but 5 portions of meat, instead! Cats are "obligate carnivores" - in other words, they HAVE to eat meat - they simply cannot survive as vegetarians.

One of the reasons for this is that cats have a very high requirement for protein. Amino acids are the building blocks of protein, and certain amino acids are essential for good health.

In most species, if you are lacking a certain amino acid, you can use other ones to synthesise the deficient one. Cats, however, are unable to synthesise certain amino acids (in particular taurine and arginine), so if their diet is lacking in these, they can quickly run into problems.

Smokey Joe - a 15 year old cat belonging to our Head Nurse, Erain - recently experienced this first hand. He was orphaned and hand reared from 2 days old and has refused point blank to eat commercial cat foods all his life. His staple diet has been chicken.

In order to try and keep a balance, Erain has given him supplements containing additional vitamins and amino acids. Although the supplements contained taurine, they did not contain enough, and when Smokey was recently examined for his regular health check, I noticed areas on his retinas (the back of the eye) that were damaged. These were classic for taurine deficiency.

This condition causes degeneration of the retina and also heart disease, as taurine is essential for the normal function of heart muscle. A specific weakening of the heart muscle called dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM) is seen. This condition is rare nowadays, as commercial cat foods are routinely supplemented with taurine.

Before we were aware of the problem, many cat food brands contained inadequate taurine levels, but manufacturers are now very aware of taurine's importance. The condition is generally now just seen in cats such as Smokey, who do not eat a commercial balanced diet or in cats fed on dog food.

The good news for Smokey is that his problems were not advanced. He had not yet lost his sight (an irreversible problem if it reaches this stage), and any weakening of his heart will reverse now he is receiving adequate supplementation with taurine.

The moral of this tale is "why make things complicated when they are simple?" - ie: don't go to the trouble of home cooking a diet for your cat when balanced, convenient and tasty preparations are readily available.

Oh - and whatever your views on meat eating and vegetarianism - don't expect your cat to agree with them! Nothing beats a good old high protein mouse!

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This article is available on the Fairfield Veterinary Centre web site at [www.fairfield-vets.co.uk](http://www.fairfield-vets.co.uk)

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