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## An Answer For Alex: Raw Food and Tight Regulation

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My story begins when we moved to Amsterdam from South Africa in 1995 and brought our three cats with us. Alex, short for Alexandria, and her brother Orlando had been rescued from the animal shelter in December 1994. Byron had been rescued as an abandoned feral kitten in December 1993. I got their

expensive scientific diet from the vet and ensured that was all that they ever ate. By 2005, Byron looked decidedly underweight and Alex was looking like she was eating all his food. Orlando had fur that made him look like a dandelion in a stiff breeze. We had real concerns about Byron and Alex, but we were told that 13 was old for Byron and that the Senior Light Version of the food we had been feeding him was what we actually needed for Alex. We thought that our blindly accepted veterinary advice would resolve Alex's weight. We tried to accept that the inevitable was just around the corner for Byron.

It was those Rubenesque proportions of Alex that got me to do a one-eighty degree turn in my approach to cat care. Her ever-expanding frame even after we got the Senior Light Version seemed to get addressed by August 2007. It appeared that the new diet was finally working. She started losing a lot of weight, about one kilogramme (2.2 pounds) in a few weeks. This was 20% of her body weight! That she was not using her litter box, however, was somewhat of a concern. Before she had made it to the vet I had guessed diabetes.



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I found an online forum for diabetic cat care, [diabeticcatcare.com](http://diabeticcatcare.com). The first advice I received was to ditch the [kibble](#), including the latest purchase, specially formulated dry kibble pellets for diabetics. I was advised to home test Alex's glucose before injecting the [PZI](#) or Lantus insulin, with a sliding scale to be injected pending the glucose levels. So I bought a human blood glucose meter and learned to home test.

I was quite fortunate in that obtaining blood the painful way was only a factor with the control tests I did with Orlando and Byron. They proved to me what a cat's blood glucose should really be. My vet had said 10 mmol/L (180 mg/dl) was a good target. Byron was 2,9mmol/L (53 mg/dl) and Orlando was 3,3mmol/L (59 mg/dl). According to my vet, those were hypoglycaemic levels. With the [Tight Regulation Protocol](#), I was told to aim for nadirs of about 4-6 mmol/L (my metric interpretation of 80-100 mg/dl). Doing this was a breeze. I am sure that I lucked out, as Alex was very calm with me. She never scratched me once. In fact her worst crime was to shake her head just as the spot of blood appeared on her ear. It really is amazing how much blood can be sprayed over a designer shirt from just a pin head of blood on the ear. Tip: wear old clothes when starting out.

In time, I fired my vet because I could not reconcile what he was saying with what I was learning elsewhere. Furthermore, after my own research, I rejected his advice to feed dry kibble pellets. Never again! You may wonder why I was so head-strong. After all, the vet had studied the medical treatment of animals, something I had never done. The tipping point came when I also rejected his prediction that we had one to two years left with Alex, that she would slowly deteriorate and I would end up putting her to sleep because it was impossible to regulate a cat. I rejected this because there was online advice that included vets whose experiences presented a real alternative, and with the prospect of happier endings. Besides, the specially formulated commercial diet could not give better odds than that.

I really started questioning everything I knew about cats and considered that perhaps consulting an [holistic](#) vet would be less frustrating. I fell in love with her for a few reasons. She did not promote any expensive brands in her practice — by now I was fully hostile to them — and she was thrilled I was already home testing. She was prepared to get me the type of insulin I wanted; it was not available in Holland and we got it flown in from England. Then she suggested I consider switching to a raw diet.



Alex keeping warm.

Diet.

<http://t.co/f8J77NTFV>

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Answer: Raw

With the right insulin and a grain-free tinned food diet, Alex was tightly regulated within two days and achieved remission within six weeks. The only question was the food. The good quality tinned food cost €2 (\$2.40) for a 200g (6 2/3 oz) tin and the cats were getting bored with it. I was sick and tired of keeping a magnifying glass with me when I went shopping so I could read the ingredients list of the other tinned foods I could consider. The [carbohydrate](#) levels were never listed and I had to "guesstimate" from the guaranteed levels what they might be. Mental arithmetic is not my strong point and I am not in the habit of taking a laptop with the Excel formula with me when shopping. Plus, ingredients like animal by-products and plant by-products had me wondering about the quality that I was paying for. Even though the [melamine](#) scares did not affect me directly, I was determined to keep it that way. So I took my new vet's advice and started the research to feed a raw diet to my cats.

I learned that there was a range of raw food suppliers in the Netherlands and a great raw food shop [zoo-natuurlijk.com](#) within a five minute cycle from my home. It is at this point that I must highlight that this is Amsterdam. We cycle. Everywhere. With everything. Including a very unhappy cat in a travel basket. The lack of a free hand makes this a problem for holding an umbrella when it rains. Which is often. So yes, it was often that I arrived at my vet dripping wet because my raincoat had been draped over the basket.

Now we had our priorities straight. My new vet was not only an advocate of raw feeding, but also had written a book in Dutch called [Voer voor Carnivoren](#) (Food for Carnivores). I had a copy of *Your Cat* by Elizabeth Hodgkins and was a member of a Dutch raw feeding forum, [barfplaats.nl](#). And the advice that I was getting from some people on the [diabeticcatcare.com](#) forum was to give raw feeding a chance.



Byron trying out a selection of the flavours I make for them.

However, none of the pre-made raw products we tried appealed to the cats, even when I mixed them with tinned food. So I tried small cubes of meat. I sliced a few pieces of raw chicken fillet and presented it to them. I had jokingly presented it on a silver platter and yet they still rejected it. I refused to give up my experiment, so the next time I tried a few slices of organic

chicken. We had a success, albeit a very slow one. It took a while and soon they were eating the pieces of chicken meat before they were eating the tinned food. Chicken expanded to duck, turkey, kangaroo, rabbit and ostrich. Heart was also gobbled up. But

## Food and Tight Regulation

Mangiare Crudo in Italia

Melamine to Frankenprey: A Journey

Could Everything We Know Be Wrong?

A Brief History of Commercial Pet Food

When a Vegetarian Feeds A Raw Diet

Recommended Reading in Cat Nutrition

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bones and liver remained a problem. These are essential for a balanced diet. I needed another plan.



I buy only organic chickens. I do not want my cats eating growth hormones and anti-biotics.

I considered that the pre-made food was made with non-organic chicken. The only suitable organic pre-made food, from [banditvoeding.nl](http://banditvoeding.nl), was too expensive for me and not really liked by their highnesses. I decided to take matters into my own hands. I read up on two great websites: [catinfo.org](http://catinfo.org) and [catnutrition.org](http://catnutrition.org) and bought myself an early birthday

present: a food grinder. The strongest motor for food grinders I could find was the KitchenAid®, which is still really weak compared to the options available in the US. But I also got a huge meat cleaver as I knew I would need to really smash the bones so the processor would not burn out on me. At this point I must also add that the second time I made food, my naïveté had evaporated and I had acquired an apron too. However, even now, after two years, the organic chicken still needs to be mixed with something for them to eat it. Homemade aspic of gelatine and organic chicken stock sometimes does the trick. Other times a mix with tinned food is required. This is really frustrating as all my friends whose older cats tried raw literally inhaled the stuff!

I thought that they did not like ground chicken bones, so I tried Instincts TC™, a bone substitute that I could import from [tatzenladen.de](http://tatzenladen.de) in Germany. After a few months of success, Orlando suddenly took a dislike to it. Cats! Go figure. Then I thought I would try rabbit, which it turns out, was the big winner! I have a good supplier at the famous Albert Cuyp street market, a three minute cycle away. Yes, even in the rain, though never with the cat in tow, so it is a lot drier. Sometimes we forget the umbrellas and the rain turns to wet snow. "How much do we love our cats," I hear myself ask? A heck of a lot is the unanimous reply! The butcher will do most of the chopping for me and is surprised when I ask to keep the hearts and livers. "For the gravy?" he asked me once. My reply surprised him, but he did confirm someone else bought ostrich steaks for their cats. I am obviously not the only one. I now get occasional little presents each time I buy from him, such as a lamb steak, which my cats really appreciate! But the reason that I do this is that I now have control over the quality of the ingredients as well as the meat chunk size. I prefer to cube a lot of the muscle meat.

## Related Articles You May Be Interested In:

- [Feline Diabetes: The Influence of Diet](#)
- [Mangiare Crudo in Italia \(Raw Fed in Italy\)](#)
- [What is an Appropriate Diet for a Diabetic Cat?](#)

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- A Veterinarian's View: Andrea Tasi, VMD
- Feline Nutrition 07 - Speaking in Tongues
- Answers: Which Insulin to Treat Diabetes?
- The Carnivore Connection to Nutrition in Cats
- Diabetes and Obesity: Preventable Epidemics

The reason I like to cube is because I am a fan of the idea that we should be giving our cats food that they can chew. Tinned and ground food is really just licked up. The experiment continues to this day, though after two years I begin to realise that I may only have total success with the next generation. I fail with day old chicks and get mixed successes with pieces of chicken wing, neck and rib. It seems my cats prefer rodents to birds, as whole mice were an instant success with Orlando. He absolutely loves them and I am thrilled to hear the gentle undulation in his purring as turns his head sideways while chewing through them. He *is* a carnivore and this *is* what he should be eating. And he really loves it more than any other food he has ever been fed. I get the mice and heart frozen in packs of 25 at [zoo-natuurlijk.com](http://zoo-natuurlijk.com); they have loads of other stuff too.



Orlando relishing a mouse.

I can confirm that it takes more effort to feed my cats the way I do, but there is no other way I would consider it. Diabetic remission is one motivation. The other reasons are identified as follows:

- In the space of a few weeks, Byron went from being an old, underweight thirteen year old to a strong, muscular and playful retro-kitten with a new lease on life. He stopped his daily vomiting routine the day after I stopped the kibble. He also reversed the slow landslide-like movement his muscles had made as they gradually eroded away from his spine. His pointy ridge of backbones is no longer exposed. Instead, firm toned muscles cover his spine and his weight is back to normal. He really looks good, not for his age, but in general.
- Orlando had always been quite healthy looking but has stopped shedding hair like a Canadian maple in an autumn gale. The wild salmon oil supplements help with this too.



- Alex remains in remission, although I never take it for granted. She is still a little overweight, but her muscles are stronger and she is able to jump again as she no longer has [diabetic neuropathy](#).

The raw diet has made them more active, playful and as a result more affectionate — the exact opposite of what I had been warned about by those woeful Sybils and Cassandras whose dire predictions of my cats turning wild and stealing raw food from the kitchen counter never came to be!



Glenn with Alex and Orlando.

Unfortunately, my new vet only consults in Amsterdam one day a week; she does not operate here. When I took my animals for a dental to another vet whose practice was a shameless commercial for a "scientific" diet, she saw Byron and thought he was twelve. He had just turned sixteen. She said she had never seen such a lovely coat on a cat his age before and

that his condition was extremely good. Remember his description as a thirteen year old?

At the end of this story that began with Alex's illness, the routine blood-work on Byron and Orlando had indicated that the two boys had borderline [renal insufficiency](#). The blood tests six and twelve months later returned marginally healthier reports, indicating that they were stable. I cannot but conclude that the diabetes inspired diet change not only saved Alex, but also saved the boys. And it has given them more healthy years with me than I had originally thought possible. How could I have not written this article?

*Glenn Lewis is an independent management consultant based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. When he and his partner accepted a transfer from South Africa to the Netherlands in 1995, their three cats went too. Glenn came to raw feeding in 2007 when he was confronted with [feline diabetes](#) and has been an advocate of it ever since. Be sure to visit [DiabeticCareCare.com Forum](#).*

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