



Yulu would not allow anyone in the room to hold him, except Dr Wan. The Silver Tabby was the star of the interview, the epitome of a healthy, happy cat. — Photos: EVELYN LEN/The Star

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CATS are known to bring home their prized hunt – lizards, cockroaches, small birds and frogs, among them – to their horrified owners.

That's because cats still have that innate wild streak in them, no matter how domesticated they may be.

Consider the cats (such as the Asiatic Wild Cat) that hunt for food in the wild. For instance, a 4kg cat needs to consume four to eight mice a day.

Once they have caught their prey, they pick the parts that they require the most for their sustenance – the meat and the liver. Inevitably, they also ingest the prey's fur.

Being obligate carnivores, house cats must get protein from meat rather than vegetables.

Since house cats no longer have to hunt for survival, their diet must cater to this.

A healthy cat is a happy one

In a recent interview with Dr Susan Wan of Mars Food Malaysia at her office in Petaling Jaya, Selangor, she said that the signs of a healthy cat are bright eyes and a shiny fur coat, plus being lively and energetic.

Before joining Mars about 13 years ago, Dr Wan served as a locum veterinarian as well as an in-house veterinarian with a chain pet store. She graduated with a degree in Veterinary Medicine from Universiti Putra Malaysia in 2001.

At home, Dr Wan keeps a menagerie of pets: five dogs (including a two-legged one), a cat, a rabbit, a guinea pig, a tortoise and a pair of budgies.

Her office is a pet-friendly place. I caught a glimpse of Dr Wan's large orange cat named Bam Bam having a nibble on one of the tables. And in the interview room itself was the mascot of the Whiskas brand of cat food, a Silver Tabby. This particular one, Yulu, is just seven months old.

He has a beautiful silver coat, with dark streaks running across the length of his body, and his eyes are mesmerising, like gems.

Yulu was very active during the interview, and a few times tried to make his escape when the room door was opened. Once, he

(Cat) food for thought

To help our cats live the best in all their nine lives, we have to pay close attention to their diet.

succeeded, and then the staff had to go look for him.

Back in the room, he didn't keep still, either. If he wasn't playing with the kitty toy in the room, he was reaching for some wires. And he was curious about the new faces (new smells!) in the room. But he wasn't about to let anyone except Dr Wan carry him.

Tell-tale signs

Cats, like people, are susceptible to diseases and injury (due to their activities); ageing also can take its toll on the felines. They could suffer from tiredness; loss of appetite and unusual weight loss; skin or bone problems; fur discoloration or excessive shedding; bladder and kidney stones; urinary tract disease; and immune system, digestion or reproduction issues.

"As a pet owner, it is your responsibility to look out for signs of illnesses and injuries. This can be done by observing your cat's behaviour and also by checking their bodies for tell-tale signs. Knowing when your cat is healthy helps you determine when your cat is not. So pay close attention to your cat, since they can't talk and tell you what might be wrong," says Dr Wan. "Physical appearance is an indication of health."

"Eyes are the window to the soul", as the saying goes. That applies to cats, too. A cat that's healthy has clear, bright eyes that are free from discharge or a cloudy film.

Most owners look for cats with a glossy

coat, says Dr Wan. A smooth, sleek coat is the result of a balanced diet.

Such a diet is packed with essential nutrients that give cats the energy to be active and ready to play. "An active, playful cat is a healthy cat," says Dr Wan.

In contrast, if a cat is unwell, he will be very quiet, she adds.

Which food type is better?

So pet owners are the "gatekeepers" who ensure their cats are fed properly, with the right food. If the diet is 100% balanced for their requirements, then there is no need for any other food, according to Dr Wan.

Prepared cat food is recommended over home-prepared food as the latter might lack the essential nutrients.

Cats need high-quality protein, essential Omega-3 and Omega-6 fatty acids, beta carotene, multivitamins and antioxidants. The Whiskas range of pet food, formulated according to the Whiskas Vital System (glossy coat, clear eyes, active and energetic), includes dry/dehydrated food – for easy storage – as well as wet food, which contains more

moisture. Whether dry or wet, the foods contain the same nutrients, says Dr Wan. Your cat may enjoy dry or wet food or a mixture of both. Bear in mind that one cup of dry food is equivalent to four

cups of wet food.

How much to feed your cat is another factor to consider. You do not want to underfeed or overfeed your feline. According to Dr Wan, a cat that weighs 2kg to 3kg requires 35g to 40g of food a day, while a larger cat of 2.5kg to 4kg needs 50g of food per day.

Food portion also depends on the pet's age. Adult cats from one to seven years old can take one or two meals daily but a kitten – from birth to 12 months – has to be fed three times a day. Pregnant or lactating cats need extra nutrition, so it is fine to revert to a kitten diet – which is more dense and contains more protein – during this period.

When it's a bad thing to share

Certain foods that are fine for humans are strictly off-limits for cats. Your cat may be curious (that's their nature, after all) about what you are eating, so you may be tempted to share. But beware, these could lead to toxicity, and may even be lethal: chocolates, especially dark (they cause irregular heart-beat); raisins and oranges (kidney problems); onions and garlic (too much of it, and your cat's red blood cells will self-destruct and turn your fukid anaemic); and the sweetener known as xylitol that is found in chewing gum, sweets and mints (low blood sugar and liver failure).

If your cat is unwell and you are tempted to give it some paracetamol, do bear in mind that this substance could kill your cat; paracetamol toxicity is akin to carbon monoxide poisoning for humans.

Of all the flowers to watch out for if you have a cat at home, it is the lily. Though it is beautiful and fragrant, it is most harmful to cats. If ingested, its pollen can lead to blindness, and even paralyse or kill the cat. All parts of the lily plant pose a hazard to felines.

So, be aware of your cat's surroundings, keep him safe, give him nutritious food, plenty of fresh water and adequate exercise, and groom him regularly. Then watch your cat bloom.

