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Foster Cat Journal: Down, Then Out.

Tue, 2011-02-22 18:00 — Robin Olson

Cara's spirit is as big as the world. Her green eyes glint with mischief. As I hold her, a deep purr kicks in, celebrating the simple joy of being alive. Her chest rises, quickly falls, then rises again. When her breath leaves her, I can see her ribs. When I pet her back, I can feel her spine. She is so small and underweight, yet her drive to live is so strong, so vital, how can we lose her?

If we can't find the answer to WHY Cara is not able to keep her food down, we WILL lose our little girl.



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Cara's ultrasound didn't give us anything to go on. Not a clue. Things seem to be normal. It's not perfect science. It can't detect everything, but so far x-rays and the ultrasound tell us nothing.

After a week at the Vet, I brought Cara home. That night she started to vomit. I tried to be extra careful, only giving her a small amount of food. Some times it would stay down, many times, not. I didn't know if it was because I was giving her too many tiny meals or the wrong food, or I was waiting too long between meals. I just couldn't figure it out.

What did seem to be clear, was that continuing to give her antibiotics was NOT a good idea. She's on a very heavy dose of them to stave off this damn URI she's had since she was barely a few weeks old. She seems clear of the URI and yesterday I stopped giving her some of her meds. With one antibiotic left, even that made her vomit after I gave it to her.

I called East Lake, one of the Vet's I work with in Georgia. They told me that in her records they noted that **Cara was having difficulty eating and that they thought she had something STUCK IN HER THROAT!** What?!!! And they didn't do more to find out what was going on? At the time, Cara was being syringe fed because she wouldn't eat on her own. Polly and Chester would not eat on their own, either. They were having a tough time being weaned. Maybe that was it? Or maybe not.



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I took Cara back to see Dr. Larry this afternoon. The one thing we haven't done is run a blood profile on Cara to see if there's anything going on there. Even if it shows nothing alarming, any future Vet care is probably going to need recent blood work as a prerequisite to treating her.

I told Dr. Larry about what I'd found out in Georiga. He called his partner, Dr. Andrew, to come into the exam room to talk about Cara since Dr. Andrew is also on her case. **What I didn't expect was what came next.**



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They wanted to talk about what to feed Cara and what else might work for her, since what I've been giving her has made her vomit sometimes. **They BOTH said to feed her DRY FOOD!** Here it comes, the big talk I've been trying to avoid. Feeding cats a raw diet or even just grain-free canned is like being part of a religion whose followers are persecuted for their beliefs. I felt my blood pressure tick upwards.



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I'm not the sort of person who does well with conflict. I never know the perfect thing to say to make my case. I tried to be respectful, but here they are, telling me they see cats do great on dry food and here I am, **knowing from their OWN LIPS they do NOT get more than a few hours (brought to you buy big industrial pet food manufacturers) nutritional training in Vet school.** So who are they to tell me to feed crap to my sick kitten?

They said that cats used to be obligate carnivores, but not so much now. That's bull-hit. They wouldn't even accept that feeding grain, an irritant that cats cannot digest, would be bad for a cat with stomach problems.

Then they said that why don't I just try it. Spend \$5 on some dry food instead of spending \$1000.00 to have Cara 'scoped.



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Really? Really? Do they think I'm as close minded as they are to feeding a wholesome diet to cats? I was so offended, I almost walked out. I would feed Cara spaghetti and meatballs if it would help her.

I kept going back to the fact that Cara's been on 8? 9? antibiotics over her 17 weeks of life. **She needs to be on NOTHING other than a bland diet.** I said to them, would you eat a bowl of cereal after you had a stomach ache or eat something bland? They went back to the dry food debate.

Cara had her blood drawn. I asked them to tell me how much food she needs to eat so I know what the target is. **Cara has lost 2 ounces. This is really scary. She now weighs 2.14. Her sister is TWICE her size and Chester is pushing 5 pounds. I just wanted to get OUT of there.** Just give me the info-let me leave.

Both Vets tried to be respectful and kind, but they also kept reminding me that they had many years of being in Vet practice-which again, great for diagnosing ailments, not so great at understanding feline nutrition! It left me feeling like I'm just a person who *"takes great care of their cats and is the best and they love me and I'm great, BUT...they have all these years on me."* (hey, don't placate me, ok?!). How many years have I been studying and learning about feeding grain-free? FIVE?! **I know that counts for nothing even though I've cured a diabetic, fixed life-long breathing problems, unblocked a blocked up cat, reduced obesity in an overweight cat, greatly improved blood test results in just my cats-not to mention the other cats I've helped with IBD and other chronic conditions. They don't see that. I'm just a lay person on a rant.**

I think I need to start looking for a new Vet. Even writing this makes me feel sick. It's akin to me breaking up with Sam after almost two decades of life together. I don't take this feeling lightly, at all, but I can't go somewhere where we part company so seriously. Proper nutrition is the basis for good, lifelong health. Why Vets don't start from this basic point when they do an

exam is beyond my comprehension. **"What are you feeding your cat?" should be one of the FIRST questions a Vet asks about their patients-not something that's not even considered.**

Then, the final straw. Super-Deb, who I trust as if she were my own beloved sister, told me to feed Cara the dry food. Just do it. For her (*Super-Deb not Cara*). See how it goes.

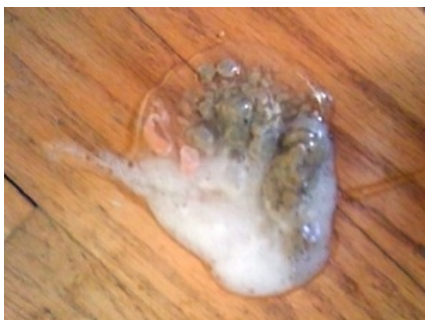
I left the Vet feeling like I was going to scream and burst into tears (*which I did after I left*). I drove over to the pet food store and bought Cara some more grain-free canned food and I bought a tiny bag of premium dry cat food. I felt like a Judas.



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When we got home, I gave Cara the dry food. She seemed interested in it, but really only picked at it and left half of the tiny portion on her plate. I don't think she understood it was food. After a few minutes, I let her out of the cat carrier (*I lock her in it when she eats so the others don't bother her*). She seemed fine. I started to fear she was going to do great on dry food and maybe I was wrong, but I just couldn't face it.

A moment later, Cara jumped off the bed and found a plate that had, literally, a pea-sized, if even that big, bit of raw food on it. A meager leftover part of a full dish that I had just given to her sister. She licked it up. Seemed fine. Then...all of a sudden...the straining, neck twisting and stretching started. The horrible gurgling sound..the vomit. All the dry food, the tiny dot of raw amid mucus and foam came out.



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Was it the dry food that made her sick or the bit of raw? I offered more dry food to her, but she wouldn't eat it. That's my girl. Chester was playing with it. New toy, not nutrition!



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An hour later I gave Cara chicken baby food. She ate it up, purred and laid in the sunshine. No vomiting. I have to trust my gut and my experience. I'm going to give Cara time. I'm not going to do anything else to her for the rest of the week, other than give her baby food, then after a few days, some canned grain-free mixed in and a bit of pro biotic to help her flora balanced...see if she keeps it down.



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For Cara, I will slay dragons, but right now I need a moment for myself. The hours and hours of watching her, cleaning up her vomit, measuring food, worrying, have taken a toll. I thought I was to a place where I could handle these ups and downs, but I think it's cumulative. Between my own cat battling cancer, the sickly kittens and Cara's tender tummy, I hit a wall. I'll get us through this somehow, but I'm not sure what scars will be left behind as a painful souvenir of these difficult days.

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Comments

Tue, 2011-02-22 18:31 — Victoria Howard (not verified)

Cara ^[17]

WHY wan't blood work the VERY FIRST THING DONE???? My vet often does that before any scoping, as it's cost prohibitive. Poor Cara, keep on the baby food, thats what we do...hope she makes it!

Tue, 2011-02-22 18:38 — Rebecca (not verified)

Give yourself a break ^[18]

You have really been going through it. It's great that you have this blog and your fb page to talk about what's going on, but you then also leave yourself open to all kinds of advice from well-meaning people who may or may not be all that experienced on the subject. People just want to help, I 100% believe that's the case - with your vets and everybody else who has been chiming in. You are in the midst of this vortex dealing with the sick kitties and all your emotions. I'd recommend some quiet time to yourself, and follow your gut. Now here comes the advice... Talk to another vet. Ask on the phone first what their stance is on raw feeding. And if you show up at the office and see those big bags of Hills, cancel. We know what the truth is on this issue.

Tue, 2011-02-22 18:39 — Catnonymouse (not verified)

im in RI ^[19]

If you need help id gladly come down on a Sunday...cara is beautiful and id love to spend time with her and you

~Anne

Tue, 2011-02-22 19:14 — Phillip Velasquez (not verified)

Cara - Baby food ^[20]

I think you are onto something with the chicken baby food, since its already chewed up so to speak, goes down much smoother and probably easier on the stomach.

Phil V

Tue, 2011-02-22 19:45 — Catnonymouse (not verified)

Cara ^[21]

Hi Robin,

I so feel your frustration. So many vets are clueless about nutrition. By recommending dry food it sounds as if they were just throwing their hands up and giving up. Have you thought about taking Cara to a holistic vet? There are a few in your neck of the woods. Were you able to try the Slippery Elm? or maybe a bit of yogurt? The baby food sounds like a good option as well as the probiotics. I'm sure all the abx really screwed up the flora in her belly.

She does look like a sweet little girl!

Paws crossed for her good health!

Sally

Tue, 2011-02-22 19:47 — Nancy Battaglia (not verified)

Cara and her Caregiver... ^[22]

"I have to trust my gut and my experience. I'm going to give Cara time."

Robin, I'm with you. Your 5 years spent studying feline nutrition certainly DO count for something. It means something to Cara! Good luck, Robin. Good luck Cara... you're in good hands, sweetie.

I've had as many as 12 kits of my own... barn cats and strays... plus two horses and have dealt with my share of situations, emergencies, and sickness. It's never easy, but those of us who love animals will do everything we can to help when they are in need. I understand the emotional turmoil and why you do it. You're a good person, Robin. Without you, Cara would have no chance at all. At least with you, she has managed to find someone to love her and care for her.

Yeah I'd say that you could use some quality down time. Take care and be well, K?

Tue, 2011-02-22 20:32 — [isilwath](#) ^[23]

You do what ^[24]

Works. If she keeps down the baby food but not the cat food (even the stuff you make), you're on to something. There might

be something in the cat food that she can't handle. Play with the recipe. See if you can figure out if there is a trigger. Also (and I dunno how u feel about this) maybe supplement with some KMR or DYNE liquid diet (<http://www.amazon.com/Dyne-Liquid-Diet-32-oz/dp/B003Z99L6M> ^[25]) just for the calories?

We all know you would move mountains for this baby. We know you are doing everything you can. Take a bit of "me time" and pick up the battle in the morning.

At least now you can tell Super Deb & Doc Larry she spewed up the dry food too.

Tue, 2011-02-22 22:21 — Catnynouse (not verified)

Cara's Eating ^[26]

I would certainly try to feed her only the plain chicken baby food-perhaps the organic chicken baby food brand. That is the "O" brand here in TX. I fed my new sick kitten chicken organic baby food about the first whole month that I had him. He loved the taste. He is now 5 months and doing great. I sure would try the baby food as it has to be easier to digest than dry or raw. I don't know what else you have tried. My kitten when he was so sick wouldn't even attempt to take a bite of any other kind of food I offered, but he licked all the chicken baby food off his saucer. I fed two baby feeding spoons of it at one time to him. That is not much at a time. Perhaps this would work for Cara also. Hope the precious Cara can keep it down. She is such a little doll

Wed, 2011-02-23 00:27 — Debby (not verified)

Stick to your instincts ^[27]

I have one spouse and two IBD cats' worth of experience when I agree with you strongly that nutrition matters. Hugely. Why some vets wait until a cat has IBD symptoms to recommend grain-free, quality canned food is beyond me. If we start by feeding them food that is suited to their digestion, chances are other problems won't be an issue. Cats never eat corn in the wild...

It is possible that Cara has IBD, even as young as she is. We recently had a nine month old kitten at our shelter who stopped eating, and was down to 2 lbs. Her foster mom was doing baby food too until the doctor could diagnose the problem. I believe that with prednisone and good food she is doing well now.

I will keep you and Cara in my prayers. We are all behind you Robin as you work so hard to take care of her and Bob and your other cats. Don't forget to take care of yourself too.

Wed, 2011-02-23 05:17 — Margaret (not verified)

Cara ^[28]

Hi Robyn,

I haven't exactly been following Cara's story since we have so many problems of our own (please don't feel lonely!) but I was amazed that she's had all those antibiotics. So, since I was amazed, I immediately thought, can't keep food down, needs probiotic and then at the end you mentioned it.

Baby food is light and easily digested I think, or hope! and it might work mightn't it? After all isn't baby food almost a liquid? We have a cat who had four teeth out recently and his test was FIV positive. He is being very precious about eating and I'm trying everything! but the one thing he willingly has is cat milk with a hospital grade supplemental powder added (for people) with many vitamins and minerals. We've been doing that for a week in the hope it will start him off again. At least he loves that and has stopped losing weight.

It just might be that little Cara needs to get the antibiotics out of her system and get balanced again. Good luck Robyn!

Wed, 2011-02-23 12:27 — Kalli (not verified)

Taurine? ^[29]

I've done the baby food thing (and yes, the chicken seems to be highest in fat/calories, so a good choice) with a VERY sick and abused kitten (touch and go whether she'd live through the first few days - she's 2 now and a robust beastie!). Can I suggest that you add a bit of taurine to it for her? Just because kittens, especially sick kittens need taurine quite a lot and they can get by on the baby food alone for longer if there's taurine added to it.

Best of luck with the little puzzle of a cat!

Wed, 2011-02-23 17:53 — [Larsen \(not verified\)](#) ^[30]

Baby food ^[31]

I have a kitten, Oliver, about 6 months who throws up daily. In his case I think it's because he wolfs his food. Another household kitty, who is elderly and has dental problems, is transitioning to a baby food diet. I've been letting Oliver have some of the baby food and so far he's holding it down. I hope that works out for your little one also.

Thu, 2011-02-24 16:53 — [Danielle \(not verified\)](#) ^[32]

Taurine ^[33]

I agree with Kalli. The baby food is great because it's pure protein & easily digestible, but it doesn't contain any of the taurine that cats require. I'd add the same nutrients to the baby food that you add to your raw food so that Cara is getting everything she needs.

Other than that, I completely agree with you! Go with your gut, what you know to be true.

Fri, 2011-11-25 19:01 — [Karen \(not verified\)](#) ^[34]

Cara ^[35]

I have been looking for some ideas for my kitty. Cara is precious. I read about her and her eating and vomiting problems.

Did she ever get a diagnosis? My kitty is 13+ yrs old and lost 4 lbs and was like Cara. She was literally bones and so shaggy looking. She was vomiting. We have been to the vet 4 times and the "think" it is stomach cancer. I have x rays and a mass is in her stomach. I am feeding her anything she wants. She is weak but happy and has gained most of her weight back. She is on steroids. A shot a month so far. Now she is drinking alot and peeing alot. Her vomiting is gone as long as the shot is working.

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