

Comparative Assessment of Dietary Practices and Breed in Relation to Digestive Disorders in Cats

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ABSTRACT

Diet plays an energetic role in maintaining the health of domestic cats. Feeding practices vary among cat owners, particularly in the use of commercial pet foods, homemade diets, or a combination of both. Considerate these dietary patterns are indispensable for veterinarians and pet owners to promote appropriate feeding practices and safeguard ideal health. The aim of this study was to judge and compare the proportions of commercial and homemade diets used for domestic cats in Abbottabad. A comparative study was conducted among cat owners using a structured questionnaire to collect data on owners' demographic characteristics, types of diets provided, feeding frequency, and explanations for dietary preferences. The findings indicated variations in feeding practices according to owners' preferences and cat management practices, with mixed feeding emerging as a common tactic. The study highlights the importance of growing awareness among cat owners regarding balanced nutrition and appropriate dietary management to support the health of cats.

Key words: Domestic Cats, Commercial food, Home-made diets, Abbottabad

INTRODUCTION

Cats are mammals, belonging to an order carnivorous or flesh eaters (Huidekoper, 1895). Cat belongs to the kingdom Animalia, Phylum Chordata, Subphylum vertebrata, Class Mammalia, Subclass Theria, Family Felidae, Subfamily Machairodontinae, Genus *Felis*, Species *Felis catus* (Siagian & Siregar, 2021). Cats are the most popular pets. Pet ownership is growing, especially among young individuals (18–24 years old) (Ali Khan *et al.*, 2025; Yang *et al.*, 2022). Animal feed is a major component of the food chain that has a primary influence on animal health and welfare. Feed means any substances, whether processed, semi processed, or raw, that are tended to end up being fed straight to animals (Escobar *et al.*, 2018). There are various types of homemade pet diets. It is possible to prepare the ratio specifically for the animal. The recipe can use raw or prepared animal feed ingredients and be either fixed or variable. It might even be a vegetarian or all-meat diet (Beynen, 2015). Table scraps and leftovers make up some portions. Although self-prepared food can make

up all the pets' nutrients. It frequently comprises a small amount of commercial pet food on a daily or periodic basis. A veterinarian's recommended therapeutic meal may be prepared at home by a sick animal's particular owner (Laflamme *et al.*, 2008). In Western countries, most pet owners who prefer homemade diets as a complete source of nutrition wish to have full control over the food they feed to their pets (Ali Khan *et al.*, 2025; Yang *et al.*, 2022). Commercially manufactured diets are widely preferred by pet owners because they are more convenient and have a better nutritional balance than homemade food. These meals undergo laboratory testing for quality and are regulated for safety and nutritional sufficiency (Villaverde & Chandler, 2022). Proper nutrition is essential for a cat's health at every stage of life, and feeding choices should be based on nutritional assessments that take age, life stage, and health status into account (Freeman *et al.*, 2011). Ten percent of pet owners in Pakistan buy locally produced food; while up to 90% rely on imported pet food due to the lack of quality standards and the unavailability of local feed products (Ali Khan *et al.*, 2025; Toland *et al.*, 2020). However, the industry faces challenges like weak laws pertaining to animal care, issues with stray animals, and cultural opposition to specific pets; additionally, 90% of pet owners visit a veterinarian at least twice a year, and the use of veterinary services is steadily increasing. Despite these challenges, the pet food industry is expanding, as evidenced by the competition for consumers' attention (Bellinguez & Menon, 2022). Diarrhea is an increase in frequency of evacuation and in water content of the stool. Diarrhea is considered acute if it lasts for less than 14 days, and chronic when it persists for more than 14 days (Jeejeebhoy, 1977). Veterinarians and managers of cat shelters and catteries frequently deal with diarrhea in kittens (Swihart, 1997). For cats with both acute and chronic diarrhea, low-fat diets have long been advised (Allen, 2010; Guilford & Matz, 2003). For cats exhibiting GI symptoms, limited-antigen diets are frequently advised since vomiting and diarrhea are frequently linked to food allergies or intolerances (Guilford *et al.*, 2001; Zoran, 2008). Constipation is defined as infrequent or difficult excretion of hard, dry, feces and is a common clinical complaint in cats. The clinical signs can result from a number of different disorders which includes dietary (ingestion of indigestible material), environmental disturbances (egg, hospitalization, change in routine, inactivity), colonic obstruction (strictures, neoplasia, foreign body, pelvic trauma), electrolyte imbalances (dehydration, chronic kidney disease, hypokalemia), iatrogenic (drug therapy) and neuromuscular disease (spinal cord disease, idiopathic megacolon) (Washabau & Holt, 2000).

Research Methodology

The study was conducted from September 2025 to April 2026 at Pet Care Clinic, Abbottabad. Data were collected from the veterinary hospital regarding cats' health check-ups, vaccination, and treatment. A total of 50 cat owners were interviewed using a pre-structured questionnaire to gather information about their cats' dietary patterns, including commercial, homemade, and mixed diets. The questionnaire also assessed feeding practices and the reasons influencing owners' dietary choices. The collected data were analysed and presented graphically to compare dietary preferences and feeding practices among cat owners. Following objective will be addressed.

Objective:

To evaluate the combined relationship of dietary practices and breed with digestive health disorders in the cats.

Literature Review:

Recent studies show a shift from exclusive commercial feeding to unconventional diets. O'Halloran *et al.* (2024) surveyed 1,172 cat owners (avg. 2 cats/household) and found 80.7% fed exclusively commercial diets, yet therapeutic diet use rose from 0.7% to 26.6% and raw feeding from 3.7% to 15.6% since 2013, driven by taste, health, and naturalness. Dodd *et al.* (2020) surveyed 3,673 owners in English-speaking countries and found commercial diets were offered to 79% of dogs and 90% of cats, but exclusive conventional feeding was only 13% and 32%, with homemade (64% dogs, 46% cats) and raw diets (66% dogs, 53% cats) being highly prevalent. In contrast, Remillard (2008) reported $\geq 90\%$ of US pets relied on commercial diets, but post-recall concerns have increased homemade feeding, raising issues of nutritional adequacy, food safety, and limited veterinary expertise. German *et al.* (2017) assessed the prevalence and risk factors for diarrhea and constipation in cats during summer and winter across 25 UK rehoming centers using a 6-point fecal scoring system. Kittens were more prone to diarrhea, while older age increased the risk of constipation and severe diarrhea in seniors. Perea *et al.* (2017) conducted a prospective multi-centered study to evaluate dietary management for feline chronic gastroenteropathy. Of 28 cats with chronic vomiting and diarrhea. (25 with vomiting as the main sign), cats were randomly assigned to two commercially available veterinary therapeutic dry diets (Diet A and Diet B) for four weeks. Both diets reduced vomiting frequency, but Diet A showed statistically significant improvement, with a 73.3% reduction by the third week. The study concluded that a gastrointestinal therapeutic diet is an effective first-line treatment for chronic vomiting in cats.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Comparison between Food Type and Occurrence of Diseases

Food type plays an important role in the occurrence of diseases and overall health of cats. Cats that were fed a balanced commercial diet frequently receive essential nutrients in proper proportions, which help in reducing the risk of nutritional shortages and related diseases. On the other hand, cats relying only on homemade food may sometimes lack specific vitamins and minerals if the diet is not properly managed, which can lead to health issues. However, a combination of commercial and homemade food can provide both balanced nutrition and natural variety, supporting better immunity and overall health. Therefore, proper diet management is essential in preventing diseases and maintaining the well-being of cats.

In this study individuals consuming both foods (commercial and homemade food) had the highest diarrhea cases 18, 2 constipation and 2 having both the cases. Homemade food showed 9 diarrhea cases and the highest constipation cases, which was 7 among all food types. Commercial food had the lowest cases of diarrhea 3, constipation 1, and no combined cases (Fig-1). The data suggested that mixed food consumption is linked with a greater occurrence of health issues, while commercial food showed the least reported problem in this dataset.

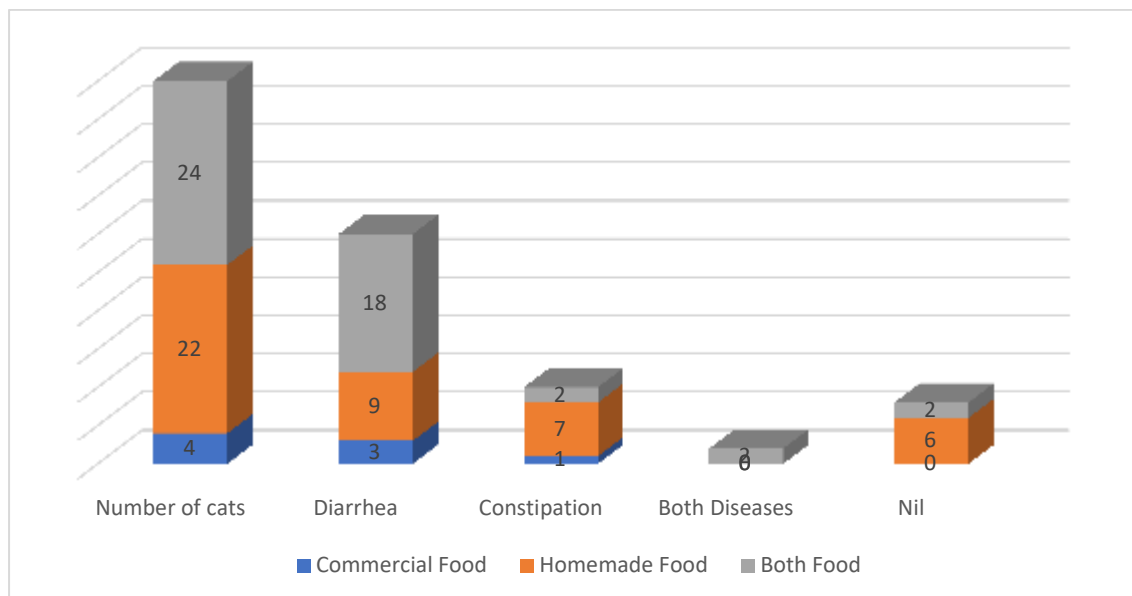


Fig: 1: Showing comparison of food versus diseases

Diarrhea was the most common disease for all food types, with cats eating both types of food (commercial and homemade) having the highest ratio. In the case of constipation, homemade food has the highest percentage, followed by commercial food. For both diseases occurring together, only cats consuming both types of food showed a noticeable percentage. Inclusive, diarrhea was more frequent across all diets, especially in mixed feeding, while constipation is comparatively higher in cats fed homemade food.

Breed Wise Association with Disease in Cats

Different cat breeds showed variation in susceptibility to diseases due to differences in genetics, immunity, and living conditions. Persian cats were often more prone to certain health issues because of their specific breed characteristics and relatively less active lifestyle. Stray cats, although more active, may face a higher risk of infections and diseases due to exposure to harsh environmental conditions and lack of proper care. Crossbreed cats generally showed better resistance to diseases as they inherit diverse genetic traits, which may enhance their immunity.

Persian breed cats have the highest number of disease cases, with 20 cases of diarrhea and 8 cases of constipation, suggesting that they were more susceptible to these health issues. In comparison, both stray and crossbreed cats have much lower cases, each with 5 cases of diarrhea and only 1 case of constipation. Only stray cats showed a case of both diseases, which is 1, while Persian and crossbreed cats have none (Fig-2). It showed that Persian cats appear to be more affected by digestive problems, while stray and crossbreed cats showed relatively better health.

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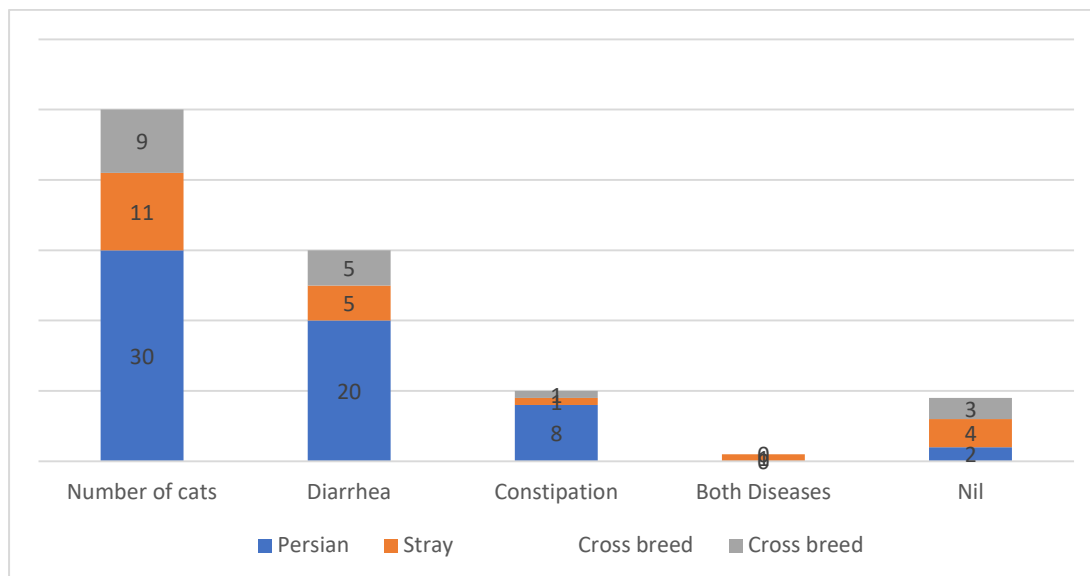
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Fig: 2: Showing comparison of breed versus diseases

Diarrhea was the most common disease among all three cat breeds. Persian cats have the highest percentage, followed by cross-breeds and stray cats. Constipation occurs frequently, where Persian cats again have a higher proportion. For both diseases occurring together, only stray cats show a small percentage. Inclusive, Persian cats were more susceptible to digestive problems, especially diarrhea and constipation, compared to stray and cross-breed cats.

Conclusion:

The findings of this study show that the type of food consumed by cats may be associated with the existence of digestive health problems, particularly diarrhea and constipation. Among the three feeding groups, cats consuming both commercial and homemade food showed the highest percentage of diarrhea. In contrast, cats fed commercial food had the lowest recorded number of diarrhea and constipation cases, with 3 and 1 cases, respectively, and no combined cases. Homemade-fed cats showed the highest number of constipation cases (7) and the highest constipation percentage. Diarrhea was the most often reported digestive problem across all feeding groups, suggesting that dietary management may play an important role in maintaining feline digestive health. The results also revealed differences in digestive health problems among cat breeds. Persian cats had the highest number of diarrhea cases (20) and constipation cases (8), indicating a greater burden of reported digestive problems in this group. In comparison, stray and crossbreed cats had fewer recorded cases, with each group showing 5 cases of diarrhea and only 1 case of constipation. A combined occurrence of diarrhea and constipation was observed only in stray cats, accounting for 1 case. These differences may be associated with factors such as breed characteristics, activity levels, nutritional status, and access to veterinary care. However, further investigation is required to establish the reasons behind these patterns. The study highlights that both feeding practices and breed may be associated with the occurrence of digestive disorders in cats. Mixed feeding was associated with a higher percentage of diarrhea and the presence of combined digestive problems,

whereas homemade feeding was associated with more constipation cases. Persian cats appeared to more digestive health problems than stray and crossbreed cats in the studied population. However, these findings demonstrate associations rather than direct causal relationships and differences in sample size or other influencing factors may affect the results. Therefore, providing balanced and appropriate diets, maintaining proper feeding practices, ensuring suitable living conditions and arranging regular veterinary check-ups are recommended to support relaxed health. Further studies involving larger populations and additional factors would help clarify the relationship between diet, breed, and digestive health in cats.

Recommendation

Pet feeds should be assessed through detailed nutritional analysis like protein, fat, vitamins, and minerals.

Successive research should be focusing on areas such as Pakistan or Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to evaluate pet feeding practices.

There should be increased awareness of balanced nutrition among pet owners. Improperly formulated homemade diets often lack critical nutrients, whereas certain commercial feeds may include synthetic preservatives.

It is recommended that future research prioritize to determine the long-term effects of commercial and home-made diets on pet health.

It is further recommended that standardized feeding guidelines for home-prepared diets be established to enable pet owners to provide nutritionally adequate meals.

Pet owners must assure that all homemade formulations require careful balancing of macronutrients and micronutrients, with veterinary guidance.

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