

CATS' EATING ENJOYMENT INFORMS PREFERENCE FOR FOOD COMPONENTS

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT, AFB INTERNATIONAL

Many pet parents observe that when their pet is offered a meal with multiple shapes or textures, some components are left behind, and those components are perceived as less enjoyable. Cat pet parents, for example, note their cats are inclined to lick the gravy and refuse the chunks in chunks and gravy meals, which suggests to pet parents the chunks are less enjoyable.

Research at AFB International includes creative methods to measure palatability preference in cats and dogs for various food types, including those with multiple shapes and textures. Eating enjoyment is a dimension of palatability and can be interpreted by the pet's interaction with the food, and/or by what pet parents perceive as they watch their pet eat.

In a recent study, we measured multiple responses during cats' interactions with food and summarized them as **Initial Attraction** (First Approached, First Tasted, Duration of First Eating Bout) and **Sustained Interest** (Consumption, Uptake, Food Focus) to evaluate how individual food components of a chunks and gravy meal influence eating enjoyment. We found that cats indeed preferred gravy to other components of the meal, which supports many pet parent perceptions. Additionally, chunks were avoided in favor of anything with gravy, and when chunks alone were offered versus the whole chunks and gravy meal cats primarily licked the gravy from the chunks and gravy meal.

STUDY 1

Hypotheses: a) gravy alone would be preferred over chunks and gravy and over chunks alone, and b) chunks and gravy would be preferred over chunks alone. **Supported.**

Figure 1. Components of a highly palatable commercial wet food presented in two-bowl trials.



Table 1. Results for the most enjoyed food component by cats in 2-bowl trials.*

Interaction	Gravy vs Whole	Chunks vs Whole	Chunks vs Gravy
INITIAL ATTRACTION	gravy	whole	gravy
SUSTAINED INTEREST	gravy	Whole	gravy

*Anything with gravy was preferred by cats.

Based on the outcome of this study, we again measured cats' interactions with foods (i.e., **Initial Attraction** and **Sustained Interest**) evaluating whether they prefer to lick rather than chew their meals. To do this we blended chunks and gravy meals in a food processor to achieve a homogenous, lick-able whole meal and offered it versus the original form of food. Specific responses within **Sustained Interest** indicated that the blended form of the meal was consumed more than the original form, likely because it was more efficient to consume. However, collectively, the additional measures suggested that cats enjoyed the original forms more than the blended forms.

STUDY 2

Hypothesis: Cats prefer to lick rather than chew their chunks and gravy meals. **Not supported.**

Figure 2. Blended and original (unblended) forms of four commercial products presented in two-bowl trials.



Table 2.
Results for the most enjoyed form, blended or original, of wet food in two-bowl trials.*

Interaction	Morsels	Shreds	Minced	Gravies
INITIAL ATTRACTION	original	blended	original	blended
SUSTAINED INTEREST	original	original	original	original

*In general, original forms were enjoyed more than blended forms.

Measures of eating enjoyment offer additional insight to the feeding experience of cats and dogs by describing how they are eating not just how *much* they eat. Here, **Initial Attraction** and **Sustained Interest** demonstrated that cats enjoy a specific component of a whole meal over other components. Unexpectedly these enjoyment measures also revealed more about cats' eating experiences: licking, although efficient, is not the primary driver of enjoyment of a wet meal.

AFB International continuously seeks to gain a better understanding of eating enjoyment as a dimension of palatability that helps to guide product improvements that ultimately provide a more satisfying eating experience for cats and their people. These methods can be applied to investigate palatability of many food matrices, such as heterogenous wet and dry foods, as well as their corresponding size, form, and texture.



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