

Is raw meat and seafood a source of gastrointestinal disease in Australian cats?



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Background

Trends in human nutrition are influencing pet feeding practices¹, driven by growing awareness of the role of diet in health². Consumer preferences have shifted, with more owners opting for homemade and raw pet foods³. Raw diets are often perceived as 'natural' alternatives to commercial pet foods as they are free from additives and resemble the diets of wild felids⁴. However, the rising popularity of raw food diets may increase the risk of gastrointestinal parasitosis in pet cats⁵.

Aims

1. To identify any correlation between signs of gastrointestinal disease in cats and their diet, through analysis of the [VetCompass Australia](#) database.
2. To assess whether a raw diet increases the risk of gastrointestinal parasitosis in cats, by [surveying Australian cat owners](#).
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of antiparasitic treatments for cats in preventing gastrointestinal parasitoses, by [examining the faeces of cats](#) on different diets.



Results

VetCompass Australia

| Z-test Output | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Statistic | Value |
| Sample proportion (raw diet) | 0.23 |
| 95% CI (Asymptotic) | 0.2278 - 0.2322 |
| Z-value | 171 |
| P-value | 0 |
| n by π | $n * \pi > 5$, test OK |

Tab. 1. Consuming a single type of food increases the likelihood of a cat showing signs of gastrointestinal disease ($Z = 171$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, the **null hypothesis** that the population proportion is equal to 50% is **rejected**. This suggests that cats fed an exclusively **commercial diet** have a **higher risk** of developing gastrointestinal signs of disease.

Survey

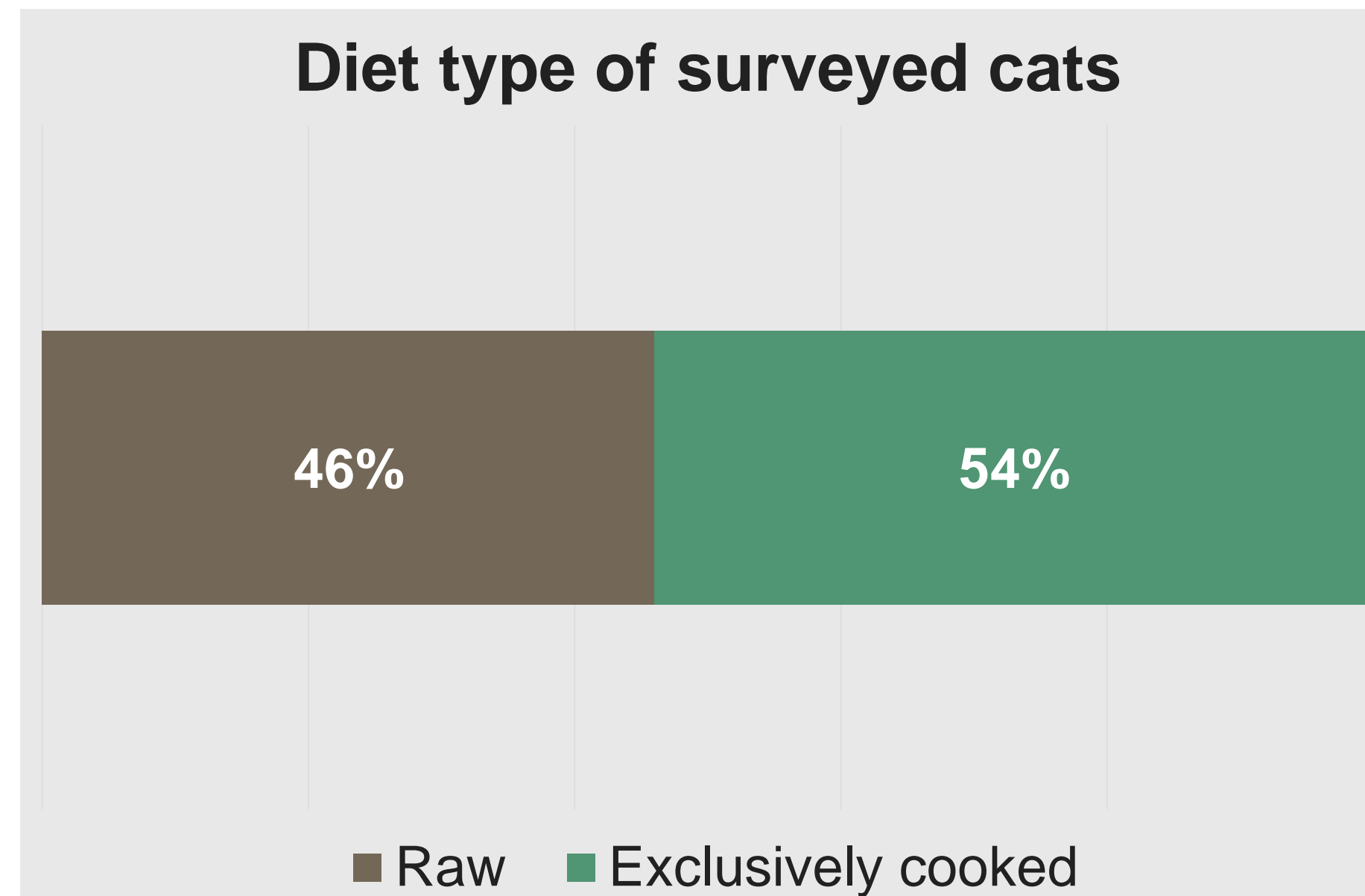


Fig. 1. The most popular raw foods provided to the surveyed cats included **chicken, beef, kangaroo, lamb, pork, venison, fish and seafood**. These foods pose a significant **zoonotic risk** to both cats and their owners, particularly from the protozoan parasites *Toxoplasma gondii* and *Sarcocystis* spp.

Cat faecal examinations



Fig. 2. Of the 23 faecal samples examined, one contained **nematode larvae**. The cat is fed a variety of **raw foods** and receives a **spot-on antiparasitic** treatment. Owners should consult their veterinarian to ensure the chosen parasite prevention method is suitable for their cat.

Take-home Messages

- Raw cat food diets are popular among Australian owners, but there are significant gaps in our scientific knowledge of the parasites that may be transmitted to cats. **Further research** is needed to assess the parasitic risks associated with raw meat for cats.
- Australia is one of the few developed nations with a self-regulated pet food industry, which likely contributes to the prevalence of gastrointestinal disease in cats fed commercial diets. **Mandatory regulations** are necessary to ensure the safety and nutritional quality of pet food.
- **Increasing awareness** of zoonotic and food-borne parasites in cats, coupled with shifts in pet feeding habits, is crucial for veterinarians to educate and work with owners in safeguarding both feline and human health.

References

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