SULPHITE PRESERVATIVES IN PET MEATS

Randolph Baral
BVSc MACVSc (feline)
Paddington Cat Hospital
www.catvet.com.au
210 Oxford St, Paddington NSW 2021
T. (02) 9380 6111
VIN Feline Medicine Consultant (www.vin.com)
E. rbaral@catvet.com.au

Sulphite preservatives (e.g. sodium metabisulphite) in pet meats and pet food rolls causing thiamine deficiency and resultant brainstem haemorrhage has been characterised for at least 20 years.

When we first see a cat at Paddington Cat Hospital (and at every annual visit), we ask the simple question: ‘What does your cat eat?’ and we are amazed to find a significant number of cats still being fed pet meats. We explain the problem and recommend that these owners feed alternatives to their cats.

The pet food industry in Australia is self-regulated via the Pet Food Industry Association of Australia (PFIAA) which sets its own standards using a voluntary code of practice. A major deficiency of this system is the lack of any legal requirement for full and accurate labelling of the ingredients in pet food, i.e. listing ingredients (including preservatives) is optional.

One very clever client of ours was shocked that pet meats that specifically claim on the label ‘no preservatives’ may indeed contain such a dangerous ingredient.

She obtained a sulphite test from http://fedup.com.au/information/support/sulphite-tests (2 test strips came with each card) and obtained a reading of approximately 60-200 ppm. See the picture: in real life, the colour on the strip was somewhat between the two panels, whereas in the photo it seems to be closer to the second one.

These results were from: http://www.caninecountry.com.au/ feline roo meat. Their website prominently displays the words: ‘Preservative Free’.

Low levels like this may not necessarily result in clinical signs, particularly if owners are feeding other foods also which may explain why we don’t see more cases with neurological signs as a result of these preservatives. However, the levels should be zero (as labeled); extrapolating from the human experience, many individuals may experience adverse effects – skin rashes, gastrointestinal issues and so forth (e.g. many people who get headaches from drinking red wine get them because of the high sulphite content in the wine) and we can ensure NO clinical cases if we ensure our clients don’t feed these foods to their cats or dogs.

References

Canine Country Pet Food
(Images sourced from www.caninecountry.com.au)