



Choosing a Healthy Diet for your Pet!

Choosing a food for your pet can be a tough decision.
This booklet contains some valuable information to assist you in making an
educated choice for your furry friend.

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Key items to locate on your pet food bag...

Remember a pet food label is considered a legal document. As such, it should contain the following:

- the name of the product
- a nutritional adequacy statement (AAFCO statement)
- a list of ingredients
- a guaranteed analysis
- feeding instructions



1. The Product Name

This is the name of the food. Names will vary depending on the company manufacturing the food.

For example: Hill's Science Diet Adult.

Hill's Science Diet is the Company
Adult is the product name.

2. The "AAFCO" Statement

The Association of American Feed Control Officials, enforces policies that ensure your pet's foods are manufactured and handled safely.

Located on the bag, this statement should ideally contain that the food was used in "animal feeding tests according to AAFCO procedures" and that it provides "balanced nutrition" for a specific age group of animals.

For example: "Animal feeding tests using AAFCO procedures substantiate that XYZ Diet provides complete and balanced nutrition for the maintenance of adult dogs."

*Keep an eye out for foods that say "balanced nutrition for all life stages." A puppy or kitten requires different amounts of

nutrients than an adult or senior dog or cat. Nutrient requirements change with age and health conditions, therefore their food should change as well.

3. The Ingredient List

The ingredient list located on the bag will contain all of the ingredients in that particular food. Ingredients are listed by weight. Keep in mind that the ingredient listed first is not necessarily the most abundant in the food. Each ingredient is weighed before moisture is removed.

*A portion of raw beef weighs more than a portion of rice.

4. The Guaranteed Analysis

The guaranteed analysis gives you information regarding the nutritional content of the food. It uses a percentage to relay the amounts of protein, fat, fiber, moisture, and in some cases, ash.

Next to each item in parentheses you will see one of two things:

- (min) which means there is at least that percent
- (max) which means there is no more than that percent

*Do note that the “min” and “max” are not exact amounts and there can be more than the “min” and less than the “max.”

The best way to find out what the nutrient levels are in your food is to call the manufacturer and request a nutrient profile. The percentages will be a fairly exact amount on a dry- matter basis (this means after the moisture is removed). Pages 9 and 10 contain suggested nutrient recommendations for a given life stage.

5. Feeding Instructions

The feeding instructions will help you determine what amount of food to feed your pet. BUT remember, the instructions should be taken as a loose guide only.

Just like human beings, one animal's caloric needs differ from another.

"Fluffy" the dog -Weight: 40lbs

-Exercise: out in yard 3-4 times daily

-Feed: 0.5 cup twice daily

"Buttons" the dog -Weight: 40lbs

-Exercise: 5 mile run everyday

-Feed: 1.5 cups twice daily

This is all based upon the amount of calories they will need, on a given day, during a given point in their lives. Feed amounts will increase or decrease many times throughout their lives as their caloric needs change.

The best way to determine the proper amount of food for your pet is to speak to your veterinarian.

Does that word really mean anything??

Certain words in the pet food industry have legal definitions. These words cannot be printed on a food bag unless the food fulfills the proper definition.



1. Light, Lite, or Low Calorie

This is the only terminology used that legally means a diet is low calorie.

-A “Lite” diet for a dog contains 3100 kcal/kg.

-A “Lite” diet for a cat contains 3250 kcal/kg.

*kcal/kg is an abbreviation for kilocalories per kilogram.

A kilocalorie is a measurement of energy, while a kilogram is a measurement of weight. Therefore 3100 kcal/kg can be interpreted as 3100 kilocalories in every kilogram of food.

2. Natural

The use of the word “natural” indicates the food contains no chemically synthesized ingredients. The only exceptions to this rule are the vitamins and minerals that cannot be obtained through natural means.

3. Organic

A food claiming to be organic **MUST** have the USDA seal located on the bag. If the seal is not on the bag it is not guaranteed to be organic.

If there is a seal on the bag, be sure it is indeed the USDA organic seal. A larger image of the seal can be found on the USDA website. www.usda.gov



4. Human Grade

There is no such thing as “human grade” ingredients! Due to the immense variety of the foods consumed around the world there is no way to define “human grade.” Legally, companies are not allowed to print this on a bag, but you will occasionally see it.

*Terms that commonly mislead consumers:

- Low Fat
- Reduced Fat
- Healthy Weight
- Organic (unless the USDA seal is on bag)
- Ideal Weight
- Weight Management
- Holistic (no legal definition)

The Guaranteed Analysis

*What is Protein?

Proteins are the building blocks of muscle and connective tissue. The diet provides some of these proteins, others are produced by the body.

Some examples of where protein is used:

- Muscles, cartilage, tendons, and ligaments
- Skin, hair, and nails

*What is Fat?

Fat is a major source of energy and helps with the absorption of certain vitamins. It is also a source of essential fatty acids. Essential fatty acids play an important role in maintaining healthy skin and coat.

*What is Fiber?

Fiber is a complex carbohydrate that comes from plant material. It is digested by microbes that live in the colon.

Fiber is important to the digestion process. It keeps the colon healthy and helps maintain normal bowel function.

*What is Ash?

Ash is the inorganic material that is left after the incineration process. The ash is included in the food because it is a source of minerals.

Some examples of how minerals are used:

- Calcium maintains healthy bones and teeth
- Iron transports Oxygen in the blood
- Iodine is important to thyroid function



Just a Few Tasty Tidbits



1. Corn is a highly palatable, easily digestible, nutritionally well balanced grain.

Corn provides:

- Complex Carbohydrates
- Linolenic Acid- an essential fatty acid
- Essential Amino Acids
- Fiber

*Corn is NOT a “filler.” By definition, a filler offers no nutritional value.

2. By-Products are products obtained after the processing of the principal product.

Did you know...

Vitamin E, Gelatin, Molasses, and Sausage

...Are all BY-PRODUCTS!

By-Products, contrary to popular belief, are an excellent source of nutrients and are superior in palatability.

Do not be deterred from a product that contains a “by-product,” or a “meal,” these ingredients add great nutrients to your pet’s diet.

3. Gluten is the protein found in cereal grains such as wheat, barley, or oats.
4. Omega Fatty Acids are great anti-inflammatorys. They have been shown to slow arthritic changes in dogs and help control skin inflammation in dogs with allergies. They have even been shown to control inflammation in things such as cancer, trauma, burns, colitis, and inflammatory bowel disease. The best source are Omega-3 fatty acids found in cold-water marine fish.

5. Artificial colors are a completely unnecessary additive in pet foods. It is simply used as an eye catcher for the owner. It looks yummier than that plain brown kibble. In reality, no dog cares about the color of their food. If a food can be purchased that does not use artificial colors, all the better. It is just an additional additive that serves no nutritional value.
6. Artificial preservatives are synthetic antioxidants used to preserve food. The most commonly used are BHT and BHA. These preservatives are used in both human and pet foods and are considered safe by the FDA when used in approved amounts. However most commercially available pet foods are now preserved naturally with mixed tocopherols.
7. Contrary to popular belief large and giant breed puppies (those that are meant to weigh over 55lbs as adults) DO NOT need higher amounts of nutrients than smaller breeds. In fact high calcium and fat levels have been shown to be detrimental to their health. Experts believe that a large breed puppy food should contain no more than 1.2% calcium, and 12% fat on a dry matter basis. This information can be obtained by requesting the nutrient profile from the manufacturer.

REMEMBER: 

The quality of a food is determined by the nutrients it provides to your pet, not the individual ingredients. The food you feed your dog may not be the best choice for your neighbor's dog and vice versa. When in doubt contact you veterinarian's office.

Nutritional *Recommendations* *Canine*

(as printed in Small Animal Clinical Nutrition 4th Edition pg 223)

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Recommended Food Levels*</i>		
	Young to middle aged	Obese Prone	Older
Energy Density (kcal ME/g)	3.5-4.5	3.0-3.5	3.0-4.0
Energy Density (kJ ME/g)	14.6-18.8	12.5-14.6	12.5-16.7
Protein (%)	15-30	15-30	15-23
Fat (%)	10-20	7-12	7-15
Crude Fiber (%)	≤5	≥5	≥2.0
Calcium (%)	0.5-1.0	0.5-1.0	0.5-1.0
Phosphorus (%)	0.4-0.9	0.4-0.9	0.25-0.75
Ca/P Ratio	1:1-2:1	1:1-2:1	1:1-2:1
Sodium (%)	0.2-0.4	0.2-0.4	0.15-0.35
Chloride (%)	0.3-0.6	0.3-0.6	0.3-0.5

* Dry matter basis. (To find this information about a dog food, contact the company and request the nutrient profile.)

Feline

(as printed in Small Animal Clinical Nutrition 4th Edition pg 309)

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Recommended Food Levels*</i>		
	Young to middle aged	Obese Prone	Older
Energy Density (kcal ME/g)	4.0-5.0	3.3-3.8	3.5-4.5
Energy Density (kJ ME/g)	16.7-20.9	13.8-15.9	14.6-18.8
Protein (%)	30-45	30-45	30-45
Fat (%)	10-30	8-17	10-25
Crude Fiber (%)	<5	5-15	<10
Calcium (%)	0.5-1.0	0.5-1.0	0.6-1.0
Phosphorus (%)	0.5-0.8	0.5-0.9	0.5-0.7
Ca/P Ratio	0.9:1-1.5:1	0.9:1-1.5:1	0.9:1-1.5:1
Sodium (%)	0.2-0.6	0.2-0.6	0.2-0.5
Potassium (%)	0.6-1.0	0.6-1.0	0.6-1.0
Magnesium (%)	0.04-0.1	0.04-0.1	0.05-0.1
Chloride (%)	>0.3	>0.3	>0.3

* Dry matter basis. (To find this information about a cat food, contact the company and request the nutrient profile.)

Sources

Berst, Heather, VMD. "Understanding Pet Food Labels." Power Point presentation. Doylestown Animal Medical Clinic, Doylestown, PA. 3 Feb 2009.

Hand, Michael, Craig Thatcher, Rebecca Remillard, Philip Roudebush. Small Animal Clinical Nutrition. 4th Edition. Missouri: Walsworth Publishing Company, 2000.