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## Top 10 Myths About Pet Food and Nutrition

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Whether it's weeding through the "prescription" diets offered or just understanding the difference between raw food and dry food, separating the fact from the fiction will go a long way in letting your pet enjoy a happy, healthy life. Here are the top 10 food myths that we hear and the truth behind them:

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### 1. The best foods are those by veterinarians

While large brands sold in veterinarian's offices may be marketed as premium, top of the line foods, one look at the ingredients tells a different story. These formulas, made by large conglomerate food manufacturers, derive far more protein from grains or grain by-product sources such as corn gluten meal, brewer's rice, and wheat, than from healthy meat sources.

These brands, and so many like them found in grocery stores, also contain poultry by-product, which consists of the leftovers unfit for human consumption, like feet, beaks, undeveloped eggs, and intestines; everything BUT clean meat. It's a cheap, low quality source of protein that is far less digestible than clean chicken meal. These ingredients are a tell-tale sign of poor quality food and are no different than discount brands at the grocery store. Although the formulas may contain a few specialized ingredients to position them as a special diet for health conditions such as joint

support, urinary tract health, etc., a better way to treat these conditions is with a truly healthy food and one or more daily supplements.

When looking for the best food, meat and a named meat meal, like chicken meal or lamb meal, should be listed before any grains. Our dogs and cats are designed by nature to eat protein from meat sources, not grains. The high grain content of many pet foods is a primary contributor to the growing obesity and allergy problems in pets (this does not mean that all grains are bad for dogs and cats; see myth #7). For more information on selecting a truly premium food for your companion, see our articles, "[Quick Guide to Natural Pet Foods](#)," and "[What You Need to Know About Your Pet's Food](#)."

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## 2. Dry food cleans your dog's and cat's teeth

This one is very common, even among some veterinarians, but it is most definitely not true. Dogs and cats have very pointed teeth; even their molars are sharp edged, not flat. These teeth are designed to bite, tear, and chew raw meat, so when a dog or cat eats kibble, they either swallow it whole or shatter it. Kibble does not scrape down onto the lower parts of the teeth or near the gums, which is where dental problems start. In fact, kibble can contribute to dental problems when the shattered bits lodge between the teeth, promoting bacterial growth. Just like with your diet, carbohydrate food debris breaks down into sugar, which dental bacteria feeds upon.

*"Dental care for dogs and cats is vitally important because poor dental health can lead to chronic disease conditions."*

However, kibble isn't going to help. Healthy teeth start with a natural diet, healthy chews, and regular brushing. Please see our article, "[Dental Healthcare for Your Companion](#)," for detailed information on caring for your four-legged friend's teeth.

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## 3. Pets need life stage appropriate diets, like puppy, kitten, and senior formulas

Life stage diets were created as a marketing tool: the more formulas manufacturers develop, the more shelf space they command. While it is true that puppies and kittens need more food for their size than adults, they don't need a specially formulated puppy or kitten diet. A high-quality, varied diet is the best option for your young pets. For puppies this can include [dry food](#), [canned](#), [freeze-dried](#), [dehydrated](#), and [raw](#) food.

For kittens, kibble is not recommended to be a large portion of the diet as it can contribute to dehydration, urinary tract issues and less than optimal health over time. Cats are obligate carnivores, meaning they eat mostly meat and very little carbohydrates. High meat, **grain-free foods** are a good option if you're supplementing with kibble, but **canned**, **freeze-dried**, **dehydrated** and **raw** are the best choices.

**#Feeding younger animals more frequent meals**, like 3 times per day, is helpful while they are in their biggest growth phase. After three or four months of age, two meals per day is sufficient for most animals. Puppies and kittens should be kept slim, just like adult animals; keep an eye on your little companion's waistline and don't let them get round.

**#Senior animals** tend to slow down as they age, so while their calorie requirements may shrink, their need for the healthiest food you can provide is never greater. As animals age, they require excellent nutrition to keep their immune system as strong as possible and their joints in good working order. Continuing to feed a high quality, varied diet is the best thing you can do, just feed a little less of it; older dogs and cats are the most susceptible to the many health issues that obesity can contribute to, including diabetes, arthritis, and urinary tract problems.

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#### 4. Table scraps and other "people foods" are bad for your dog and cat

Most holistically trained veterinarians encourage the practice of feeding "people food" to our pets. Healthy leftovers are an excellent supplement to your companion's regular fare. "There are only two rules with people food for pets:

- 1) It must be healthy for them: meat, steamed and finely chopped veggies & fruits, baked sweet potato, rice, oatmeal; no junk food; and
- 2) If you give them some of what you are eating, remember to feed less of their own food so that they don't put on extra pounds."

It's important to note that not all healthy foods for us are healthy for our pets: onions, grapes and raisins can all be toxic to dogs and cats. If you're not positive it's safe, don't feed it.

*"Even beyond leftovers, home-cooking is becoming popular among dog and cat lovers.*

*Homemade food has never been easier to create."*

There are a number of **homemade pre-mixes** available to which all you need to add is meat and an appropriate oil for healthy fat content. Pre-mixes contain vegetables, vitamins and minerals, and sometimes grains to make the meal complete. **Sojos** has varieties with and without grains. Honest Kitchen offers **Honest Kitchen Preference**, a grain-free blend. **Dr. Harvey's** makes pre-mixes for home cooked food that contains organic grains with an amazing blend of herbs, and also

a grain-free pre-mix. You don't have to cook every meal for your companion to benefit from fresher food: even the occasional homemade dinner is a wonderful healthy treat!

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## **5. Your dog and cat should only eat food labeled as "complete and balanced."**

Pet food companies have a pretty big interest in perpetuating this myth. Is every meal you eat complete and balanced? Even the most health-conscious among us don't worry about meeting the proper balance of nutrients at every meal. We know that over the course of the day or week our diet will be fairly complete, so we don't have to worry about eating exactly what the food pyramid recommends on a daily basis. Many of us take vitamins and supplements to fill in any gaps because even eating a very healthy diet of whole foods may not provide all the vitamins and minerals our body needs to stay healthy.

Variety is the key to a healthy diet for dogs and cats as well. If you're feeding at least 50-60% commercially prepared foods that are designed to be "complete," then you are well on your way to providing a majority of the balance of nutrients. Adding canned, raw or cooked meats, people food, fresh vegetables or other non-formulated foods to your companion's meals will boost the overall nutrition of the diet as long as it is not overdone. Providing a **daily multi-vitamin** adds extra insurance. One caveat here: meat is higher in phosphorus and lower in calcium, so when adding more than 15 - 20% extra meat to your companion's diet on a regular basis, keep the calcium and phosphorus ratio balanced over time by including **raw bones** or adding a **calcium supplement**.

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## **6. Feeding raw food is dangerous due to the risk of Salmonella and E. Coli**

The digestive tracts of dogs and cats are very different than those of humans. The human digestive tract is approximately 25 to 28 feet long with a stomach acidity between 1.5 and 2.5, whereas dogs and cats have a much shorter digestive system at an average of 10 to 13 feet for dogs (shorter for cats) with an acidity of less than 1. This means that raw food moves through your pet's system in less than half the time it would through a human's system, and the high acidity kills most bacteria. Even if the food was contaminated, it is likely that the microbes would not enter the animal's bloodstream. Commercially prepared raw food manufacturers take measures to control against the presence of unwanted organisms such as salmonella and e. coli, so if you're concerned about contamination, **frozen raw diets** are a good option.

If you eat meat, then you are aware of the precautions to take when handling raw meat. The same precautions apply to raw pet food: wash bowls, utensils and your hands after feeding and

handling the meat. Keep the meat frozen until two to four days before feeding, and thaw in the refrigerator. Don't leave the food down for your pet for more than 30-40 minutes, and throw any leftovers away after this time. If you use common sense, feeding raw food is no more difficult or dangerous than any other pet food, and the health benefits are unparalleled.

For more information see "[\*\*All About Raw Food\*\*](#)" in our article archives.

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## 7. High protein diets are hard on your pet's kidneys, especially as they age

This myth is a result of poor quality food manufacturers. The truth is that high *plant* protein diets are hard on your pet's organs; high animal protein diets aren't only healthy for your aging pets, but essential. Poor quality, mass produced pet foods are packed with protein from soy and corn. Unfortunately, your dog and cat are unable to properly digest and assimilate these sources of protein. It lets the food manufacturer boost the protein content of the food without actually offering your pet any substantial protein they can use. High plant protein diets can put added strain on your pets because their bodies aren't designed to process those ingredients. As they try to assimilate protein from these sources, their organs need to start working overtime.

### The First **5** Ingredients...



*"Animal protein is hugely important to our pets throughout their entire lives. High quality protein from actual meat sources contains important amino acids that your pets need to thrive."*

When choosing a healthy, high protein diet for your pet, avoid any bags that feature corn or soy as a prominent ingredient (or better yet, avoid them all together). You want named meat meals (like chicken meal or lamb meal) or quality meat as the primary protein source. This is a sureproof way to make sure your pets are eating the diet nature intended.

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## 8. Ash Content is an important guideline in choosing your cat's food

Concern about ash content in pet foods came about as veterinarians and cat guardians were looking for the cause of Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease (FLUTD - formerly known as FUS). In the 70's & 80's, veterinarians thought ash was a factor in causing crystals in urine. There are, however, a variety of causes and ash is no longer considered a factor in causing FLUTD. The main problem was the formulation of commercial pet foods: most pet foods were creating a more alkaline urine (higher pH) which leads to an increase in struvite crystals. Most dry kibble diets are formulated with a high vegetable and grain content which creates a more alkaline urine. An all meat diet such as a cat would eat in nature creates a more acidic urine.

A high protein diet is the best way to maintain a low urinary pH naturally. Cats eating **canned diets** have fewer problems with FLUTD than those eating primarily dry kibble diets. This is due both to the higher meat content of canned diets as well as the higher moisture content; increased hydration also prevents crystal formation. A **frozen raw food diet** is ideal for maintaining a lower urinary pH and providing proper hydration. Focusing on low-ash foods will not solve FLUTD problems, but a healthier diet and proper hydration will.

A more effective means of preventing FLUTD than stressing about the amount of ash in your companion's food is focusing on stress *reduction* for your pet and you. Stress is an often overlooked contributing factor to FLUTD, along with lack of exercise. When our companions are stressed, their immune system are compromised. Furthermore, when you are stressed, your companion is far more likely to be stressed. **Flower Essences** are an excellent stress reduction and emotional support tool; cats are especially responsive to flower essences and can benefit greatly from their use. There are flower essences designed for every emotional state, so look through the large selection and choose the one or two remedies that best match your companion's issues. Dosing is as simple as adding a few drops to the water or massaging them onto your pet's ears or paws.

If you would like to learn more about handling your cat's FLUTD, please read our other articles:

**"Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease," "Ash, Magnesium and FLUTD," "Flower Essences and How They Work," and "Treating Mild Anxiety."**

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## **9. Changing formulas or brands of pet foods is hard on your dog's or cat's digestion**

A healthy dog or cat can eat a different food at each meal without issue as long as they are high-quality foods. Holistically minded guardians and veterinarians know that variety is important for several reasons, the most important being to avoid the development of sensitivities to any particular food or protein type. When the same food is fed for many months or years at a time, animals can develop allergies or sensitivities to specific ingredients in the food. Plus, many holistic

veterinarians believe that feeding the same food for many years is a contributing factor to inflammatory bowel disease.

Variety provides a wider range of nutrition for your companion as well. Even though a food may be formulated to meet AAFCO standards, that does not mean it meets the standards of every dog or cat. As a matter of fact, many foods that meet AAFCO standards cannot be tolerated by our pets due to the heavy use of grains and grain by-products. A diverse diet will meet the nutritional needs of your companion over time, and, besides that, would you want to eat the same meal everyday? Remember, every meal doesn't need to be perfectly balanced as long as the diet is balanced over the course of a week.

Whenever feeding any diet, it's important to remember to include supplements. **Digestive enzymes** are hugely important and will help your companion transition from one type of food to another with ease. They help animals maintain a healthy digestive tract and get the most nutrition from their food. **Essential fatty acids**, especially from fish oil, provide the omega 3 fatty acids missing from most processed pet foods that nourish the skin, coat and digestive tract. **Probiotics** are important for animals on medication or those experiencing digestive upsets. For animals in need of increased support due to chronic digestive issues, Only Natural Pet GI Support provides herbs and nutrients to soothe and heal the lining of the digestive tract.

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## **10. It's fine for dogs and cats to eat each other's food**

While there are a few canned formulas available that meet the needs of both species, most foods are designed specifically for cats or dogs. Cats require a higher percentage of protein and fat than most dogs and they have specific requirements for additional taurine. Dogs that eat too much cat food are at risk of weight gain and even pancreatitis. Cats that eat dog food are at risk of weight gain when the food is high in carbohydrates, as well as more likely to develop deficiencies in important amino acids like Taurine.

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