

Selecting a Food

One of the most important decisions you will make is choosing the appropriate food for your pet. Some good questions to ask when selecting a food for your pet are:

What is your pet's age – young, middle-aged or senior?

What is your pet's condition – overweight, underweight, ideal? Is your pet active or idle?

What is your pet's health history – medical conditions (allergies, cancer, digestive difficulties, etc.)?

What is your budget – can you afford the most expensive foods? How many pets do you have to feed?

When selecting a pet food, be sure to start with the food the breeder or shelter was feeding in order to avoid stress during transition to a new household. Ask your veterinarian or other pet food professionals for recommendations about the right food for your animal. There is also an abundance of information available online about different types of food and ingredient sources.

As your pet grows, he or she will need an adult food that meets his or her dietary needs.

Remember, variety is important to our pets – mixing flavors helps reduce the risk of allergy development or food sensitivities. Feeding the same formula for years can cause boredom as well. Just remember to use the proper dry food transition guidelines when changing your pet's food.

Food Switching Guidelines

Combining the old and new foods together slowly during a transition will lessen the negative impact on your pet's digestive system.

Day 1-3: 75% old food, 25% new food

Day 4-6: 50% old food, 50% new food

Day 7-9: 25% old food, 75% new food

Day 10: 100% new food

Be sure to also accommodate for different caloric values in food – you may have to increase or decrease the amount you feed your pet based on the recommendations on the back of the new bag. Using a measuring cup will help ensure your pet is receiving the recommended amount.

You may have to increase or decrease the amount of food you feed your pet based on the feeding guidelines provided on the can or bag. Based on our experience, we recommend reducing the daily amount to feed by 25%. This is especially important when you are feeding premium or super premium formulas, since they are calorically dense.

Feeding your pet table food is acceptable in small doses, so long as the table food is of high quality. Feeding too much table food can upset the balanced formula of his or her pet food and can add calories that contribute to obesity. If you are feeding table scraps, please remember to decrease the amount of pet food you are feeding accordingly so that your pet does not

consume excess calories. Feeding table scraps can cause your pet to become a fussy eater (see pg. 9 for Bad Human Foods).

Look for foods that contain whole meats (such as turkey, chicken or fish), or a specific meal source (such as chicken meal or herring meal). A whole-meat or meal source should be listed as one of the first two ingredients (even better if there are two meat sources among the top three ingredients). Whole meat sources are defined as the clean flesh of mammals or the clean flesh and skin from poultry (no feathers, bones, etc.). Whole meats, since they contain mostly water, are less concentrated than meals and the quantity contributed to pet food is often limited in the manufacturing process. Meat meal is defined as the rendered product from mammal tissues or the skin and flesh from poultry or fish. Meals contain only about 10% moisture which contributes to a higher concentrated amount of animal protein. Meals are, however, more processed than fresh meat.

Fats in a diet are concentrated forms of energy. Fat plays a major role in the palatability and texture of pet foods. It supplies essential fatty acids Omega 6 and 3, which benefit the skin and coat. Fat also carries fat-soluble vitamins.

Dietary fiber is primarily non-digestible, but is important in an animal's diet to help food residue move through the digestive tract. It contributes to the consistency of stool. Fiber is used in elevated amounts in "diet" foods to help create a fuller feeling for the animal.

Vitamins and minerals are important ingredients and contribute to bone and tissue development, aid in cell formation and assist the immune system.

Water is one of the most important nutrients and is required for all bodily functions. Fresh water should always be available for your pet. Cats are desert creatures. Their instinct is to hunt for a water source, so running water from a sink, shower, or fountain may increase your cat's water intake. Moving your cat's water bowl around the house is another option to mimic their natural instinct. In addition to providing fresh water, a canned or raw food can provide ample moisture to your cat's diet.

Whole, unprocessed grains, vegetables and other foods are also very important. A previously unprocessed food has the best chance of surviving the manufacturing process with its nutrients intact. Grain fragments (lower cost by-products of other food manufacturing processes), such as brewer's rice or wheat bran, should be minimal. Be wary of meat by-products and generic fats or proteins (like "animal protein"). Artificial preservatives and artificial colors are signs of low-quality food. Propylene glycol is a chemical (traditionally added to keep foods moist or "chewy") that your pet does not need to be exposed to. Added sweeteners, such as corn syrup, are sometimes added to low-quality foods to increase their appeal.

When reading food labels look for a few key items: brand name, purpose statement (dog or cat food), guaranteed analysis, list of ingredients, directions for use, manufacturer name and contact information, claim that food meets the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) nutritional standards.

On the ingredient list, it is important to remember that ingredients are listed in descending order by weight. Generally speaking, the first few (4-5) ingredients contain the bulk of the weight of the product. Sometimes manufacturers use a technique called "splitting" where multiple forms of an ingredient are listed in order to lower its proximity to an ingredient listing.

For example, if a product contains *Chicken Meal, Rice Flour, Brewers Rice and Rice Bran*, the product actually contains mostly rice, even though chicken meal is listed first. All pet foods will be formulated with some form of grain or starch (typically at least 50%) as they are necessary for binding the product together (it would be impossible to create dry kibble only from meat).

The AAFCO guaranteed analysis states the minimum or maximum nutrient values contained within a product on the packaging. For dogs and cats the following values are required: Crude Protein – Minimum; Crude Fat – Minimum, Crude Fiber – Maximum; Moisture – Maximum. Often, manufacturers will list other guaranteed nutrient values to provide the consumer with additional information.