

How to Choose a **PET FOOD**



One of the most common questions we are asked is "What should I feed my pet?" Since the most important contribution you can make to your pet's health and well being is his or her daily diet, it's a question that deserves a good answer.

Think quality!

First of all, with pet foods, as with most things, you get what you pay for. Cheap dog and cat foods use cheap ingredients, have poor quality control, are not well digested and may have excesses or deficiencies in vital nutrients, which can harm your pet. When analyzed in a laboratory many generic and store brand foods do not actually contain the level of nutrition stated on the label. So, to get the nutrition you are paying for, choose a well known name brand.

Pet store clerks usually have no nutritional training. Please check with us about what's best to feed your pet, not the pet store. Your pet will do best if you pick one complete food that is appropriate for his or her age and activity level, and stick with it. For a puppy or kitten this means a puppy or kitten food. Young, rapidly growing animals need more nutrition than adult food can provide.

Don't switch foods

Animals do not need variety in their diets. Dogs are prone to digestive upsets such as diarrhea on varied diets or table scraps. These problems usually appear in middle aged dogs, who may by then be difficult to accustom to a more healthy diet. Both dogs and cats are prone to becoming finicky eaters when fed a varied diet, causing problems for their owners later on. So don't switch foods every other week. If you do need to change from one product to another, do so gradually by mixing the two diets together for a few days. This will help prevent diarrhea from a too sudden change in food.

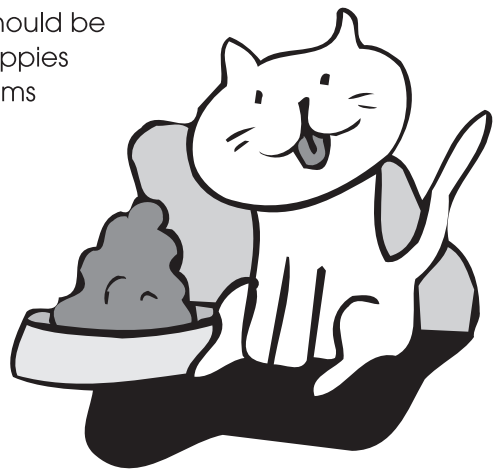


The only exception to this is in kittens. Kittens learn to choose a food based on a "mouth feel" - the size, shape and texture of the food. Studies show that feeding a kitten only one brand of food is one of the factors that can cause an adult cat to be finicky. Switch from one high quality brand to another several times during kittenhood, so your kitten learns to eat more than one size and shape pellet.



Large breed puppies, who will be over 50 lbs. at maturity, should be fed a puppy food formulated especially for them. These puppies tend to grow too fast, which leads to bone and joint problems later on. Large breed puppy food is lower in fat to slow growth down a little.

Don't base your food choices on what you would like to eat, as many pet food manufacturers would like you to do. Dogs and cats are color blind, so they don't care whether their food is red or brown. They also don't care if it looks like beef stew or little pork chops! The fancier the food looks, the more you are paying for unnecessary artificial coloring, flavoring and preservatives.



A dry food is best for your pet's teeth and gums, so the majority of your dog or cat's nutritional needs should be met with a chow type food. Canned foods are much more expensive to feed, as you are paying for a lot of water and extra packaging. Many people like to supplement their pet's diet with some canned food, and this is fine as long as you pick a good one, and don't overdo it. Canned foods are more likely to have excesses of protein which can cause or contribute to kidney disease as your pet ages, as well as being worse for your pet's teeth.

Recommendation:

We usually recommend the Eukanuba™ or Hill's Science Diet™ foods that we sell here because of their consistent high quality. Premium foods like these contain superior nutrition over grocery store brands. They are extensively tested and meet rigid standards with no ingredient substitutions. The finest pet foods are formulated with controlled levels of key nutrients like fat, protein, phosphorus and magnesium to help reduce the risk of such problems as obesity and kidney disease.

That is why, even though grocery store brands provide adequate nutrition for many pets, we still recommend that you feed your pet the best you can buy. Not only are you getting better nutrition for your pet, but the daily cost to you is often not any greater than if you were feeding a cheaper brand. Better foods may cost more per bag, but the superior nutrition and better digestibility of these foods means you feed less per day, you clean up less stool later, and your veterinary bills for nutritionally related diseases will be less as well.



What about treats?

Most dog owners, and an increasing number of cat owners, feed treats to their pets, along with their regular food. Treats are rarely "complete and balanced", and are often loaded with salt, fat, artificial colorings and preservatives, all of which comprise "junk food" for animals. A daily vitamin and some biscuits every day will not harm your pet unless it has a diet





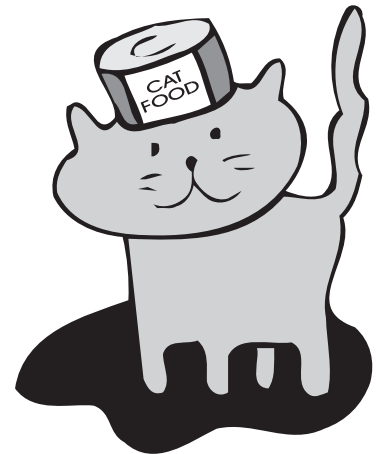
related disease, but it's best to give these items in moderation. Stick with a crunchy biscuit type of treat for your dog. Some of them, such as Hill's® line of life stage biscuits, are better than others. Read labels before you buy. Also, these biscuits help slow the build up of dental tarter, but they cannot remove tarter once it is present. Your pet will still need dental care even if you feed him this type of snack. Check rawhide treat labels, and stay away from brands not made in the USA. Foreign manufacturers are allowed to use formalin as a preservative in these chews, which is harmful to pets.

Supplements & Calories

Do not give any vitamin or mineral supplements to your dog or cat without your veterinarian's advice. These types of supplements can easily cause harmful nutrient excesses. Puppies and kittens need lots of calories to grow on, and plenty of fresh water. Until they are 4 months old, feed at least three meals a day, giving as much as the animal will consume in a ten to fifteen minute feeding. Kitten food may be left out all the time, but it's much easier to housebreak a puppy if you feed him or her at set times every day. Puppies will then have regular, predictable potty times as well.

Frequency

Once your young dog is 4 months old, you can cut back to two meals per day, and at 6 months you can reduce that to one meal per day if desired. We recommend delaying a little longer in large breeds of dogs, which may still be growing rapidly at 6 months of age. Cats are nibblers and need at least 2 meals a day throughout their lives. Continue to feed a diet made for puppies or kittens until your dog or cat is 1 year old - again, go longer for large dogs, who won't be mature until 15-18 months of age.



The most important daily contribution you will make to your pet's health is his or her diet. So choose wisely, and feel free to consult with us about any nutritional questions you may have.

Caring People Helping Pets



2082 Cheyenne Court, Grafton, WI 53024 • phone: 262-375-0130 • fax: 262-375-4196 • www.bestfriendsvet.com

