

10 Tips to Help You Decide on the Right Pet Food

By: Dr. Clayton Greenway, B.Sc., DVM | Oct 22, 2016



Grain free, organic, all-natural, balanced, holistic, biologically appropriate...with so many different types of pet foods making so many claims, it's no wonder that myths and misinformation about pet food abound. We all want to pick the best possible food for our pets, but how do we decide?

<https://www.healthcareforpets.com/video/vet-advice-kind-food-feed-cat-dog/>

1. Not all pet foods are meant for every pet.

While we're busy researching manufacturers and the cat or dog food ingredients to avoid find the single best diet for our pet, we might not stop to question whether such a thing exists in the first place. Different pets do better on different foods. The best cat food and dog food depends on its breed, age, activity level, weight, existing health conditions, and of course, whether or not it will actually eat the food in question! Your pet's needs will change over its lifetime and the "best" diet for your pet will change. Your veterinarian can help guide the selection process and determine the right portions for each meal.

<https://www.healthcareforpets.com/video/vet-guide-preventing-obesity-pets/>

<https://www.healthcareforpets.com/article/indulge-leads-bulge/>

2. Expensive dog food and cat food is not necessarily the best.

While pet food sold in Canada is not required to meet AAFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials) standards, most AAFCO cat food and dog food on the market in Canada are sold by manufacturers that choose to meet these nutritional standards. Any pet food is more likely to be nutritionally complete, regardless of the price. Cheaper products may actually be better for your pet than the expensive alternatives if the company that produces them uses more rigorous scientific testing, or has more stringent quality controls. Generally, larger manufacturers are more likely to have years of testing behind their products. If in doubt, call up the company and ask questions about their practices.

<http://www.wsava.org/sites/default/files/Recommendations%20on%20Selecting%20Pet%20Foods.pdf>

3. Don't necessarily pick a dog food or cat food based on the ingredient list.

While checking the ingredient list is an important part of evaluating a pet food, ultimately, the nutrients in a food are what matters, not the ingredients. Some expensive foods try to justify their cost by highlighting the fact that they exclude "bad" ingredients or include special ingredients to justify its cost. These additional ingredients sound good, but they may have no proven benefits or be present in minuscule amounts.

4. Don't always go by the first ingredient listed.

The first ingredient listed is often intended to deceive you because of the difference in weight of wet protein and dried protein-meal. For instance: chicken meal actually has more nutritive value than whole chicken because it contains less water. The order of ingredients can also be misleading as different forms of the same ingredient may be listed separately, to make them appear lower in the ingredient list.

5. The more protein a diet contains doesn't mean it's better for your pet.

<http://www.peteducation.com/article.cfm?c=1+1399&aid=701>

While pets need protein, they need the right amount of quality protein. A balanced diet of protein, carbohydrates, and fat is much better than a diet that is simply high in protein. Ask your vet for advice on what balance is appropriate based on your pet's lifestyle, age, and size. Protein is high in calories and too much can lead to weight gain. A diet that is too high in protein is also taxing on your pet's kidneys.

6. Grains and corn in pet food is not an indicator of quality or healthfulness.

Is corn in dog food bad and is this the same for cats? What about grains? Grains, especially corn, have gotten a bad rap as a cheap source of "filler" calories in low

quality pet foods. It's true, these ingredients are cheap. But a balanced diet includes carbohydrates. Grain-free foods simply substitute a different source of carbohydrates, such as potato. For pets that are allergic to grains, they are the obvious choice. But otherwise, whether or not a food contains grains is not a useful indicator of quality or healthfulness.

7. Byproducts are not all bad.

Plenty of safe and nutritious ingredients are byproducts. A by-product is simply something that was created during the process of making something else. Organ meats suitable for pets are a byproduct of the meat industry. By weight, these are more nutritious than muscle meats.

8. Organic pet food or all-natural products are not necessarily healthier.

Terms such as all natural, holistic, and even organic are unregulated in the pet food industry. Manufacturers can slap on the label "natural pet food" on any product they like.

Human grade dog food and cat food often make claims and use other marketing tactics such as emphasizing that they use "human grade" ingredients, or highlighting that they contain no artificial preservatives. These sound great, but they don't mean much. Quality pet food ingredients don't need to be human grade: chicken viscera, for instance, is not human grade but highly nutritious for pets.

<https://www.healthcareforpets.com/video/holistic-vet-feeding-pet-non-traditional-diet/>

9. A raw meat diet doesn't always mean it's the healthiest option.

A raw meat diet may seem like the most "natural" choice and the best meat for dogs and cats. Having complete control and knowledge of exactly what your pet is eating also sounds great. Unfortunately, there is no scientific evidence that these diets are healthier. Pet food formulations seem complex for a reason: providing the right nutritional balance is a science. Many raw food diets/home recipes are not nutritionally balanced, which can lead directly to illness. Raw meat also creates an unnecessary risk of exposure to bacteria and parasites every time you feed your pet. If used properly, and introduced slowly, raw foods can be of benefit but you should consult your veterinarian before changing your pet's diet and meet with them regularly to monitor your pet's health.

<https://www.healthcareforpets.com/video/vet-guide-general-info-tips-feeding-raw-food-diet-cats-dogs/>

10. Vet recommended dog food and cat food is promoted because of kickbacks from manufacturers.

While you're sitting in the waiting area, the displays of a limited selection of prescription pet food in a veterinary clinic can seem a bit suspicious. Especially when you compare the cost of these products to the cheapest grocery store pet foods, it may seem as though your vet's recommendation of a particular brand isn't entirely objective.

There's no conspiracy at work here. Vets feel safe recommending particular brands simply because they trust the research and quality control that established manufacturers can provide. Having a suitable product on hand is convenient for both the veterinarian and the people whose pets need a prescription diet. Are there other diets out there that could work just as well for your pet's particular needs? It's certainly possible. Veterinarians often carry medical diets that will address certain needs for your pet, but in the end, every food is a trial. You have to find the right diet that your pet responds to.