

How to Choose the Right Food for Your Pet

At PETCO, we believe every pet deserves better nutrition and a long, healthy life. One of the most important factors in a pet's overall well-being is the quality of the food they eat. The best way to ensure your pet gets the highest-quality nutrition is by learning to effectively evaluate pet food labels and select the food that's right for you and your pet.

We've developed the following are three easy steps to walk you through the basics of pet nutrition how to choose better nutrition for your pet. If you have questions, you can always check with a Certified Nutrition Expert at your local PETCO store or ask your veterinarian.



Step One: Recognize that humans, cats and dogs have very different nutritional needs

Don't select your pet's food based on your nutrition needs. Dogs, cats and humans have very different body processes, which create different nutritional needs. For instance, while we're trained to eat a low-fat diet, dogs and cats get most of their energy from fat, which should account for at least 20 percent of their overall diet.

Pets eat to live, they don't live to eat. Humans have an emotional connection to our food and make full use of our 9,000 taste buds to savor our meals. Pets, on the other hand, have far fewer taste buds and a much stronger sense of smell than we do. In fact, dogs' sense of smell is 100 times stronger than humans. Select your pet's food based on what's truly good for them, rather than what you think you might choose (based on taste and smell) if you were a dog or cat.

Don't share food among species. Even with the best of intentions, many people make the mistake of feeding their pets food from their own dinner table, making their own pet food, or allowing multiple household pets to share the same food. Ideal nutrition provides the right balance of nutrients for each species' unique needs. Cat foods are formulated to meet the protein needs of a carnivore, while dog foods provide the mix of meats and plants required by omnivores. Because dogs and cats both digest food quickly, they can have trouble digesting more complex human foods, and may have different needs based on breed and life stage.

Step Two: Understand Your Pet's Unique Needs

Start with your pet's age, breed, activity level and any special needs. There is always more than one food that may be right for your pet. To narrow your options, understand the basic needs of your pet's breed (size, species), life stage (puppy, adult or senior), activity level and any special health needs (overweight, food allergies, joint issues, etc.). For instance, cats may require a food formula that helps with hair balls, puppies and highly active adult dogs need extra fat for energy and an older dog may need a high-fiber food to help with digestion and to feel satisfied with fewer overall calories.

Different food categories are designed for specific lifestyles and nutritional needs. Premium foods typically exceed minimum standards to provide complete nutrition and are based on extensive research into the unique nutritional needs of dogs and cats. You know a food is premium when it contains a balanced mix of easy-to-identify, high-quality proteins, fats and carbohydrates without any added sugars or artificial colors. The premium food category includes natural, organic and holistic foods.

- **Natural foods** most often feature meat-based proteins as the first ingredient, and do not include any synthetic chemicals or preservatives, artificial flavors or dyes. Many consumers choose natural foods because they can read the ingredient list and understand exactly what they are feeding their pet.
- **Organic foods** are created with strictly regulated ingredients that can be traced to organic farms as defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. These foods don't contain synthetic chemicals, fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, antibiotics or growth hormones. Consumers who follow organic diets often want the same for their pets.
- **Holistic foods** concentrate on the pet's overall well-being and include super foods such as cranberries, blueberries or flaxseed, and antioxidants that promote physical, mental and emotional health. Holistic foods are great for consumers who value the benefits of food beyond nutrition.

Premium foods aren't necessarily more expensive. While premium formulas sometimes cost more for the same size bag or can of basic food, they are made with higher-quality ingredients and they are more nutrient-dense, which allows pets to absorb more of the nutrients they need with less food. When comparing cost, make sure to read the suggested serving sizes and review the ingredients on the package label.



Step Three: Learn How to Evaluate a Pet Food Label

Don't judge a food's quality by how the package looks. Just because a package is covered with wholesome-looking ingredients doesn't mean the food inside is nutritious. Read the small print on the ingredient list and nutrition label, instead of depending on illustrations or advertising on the package.

Look for high-quality proteins. Read the full ingredient list to evaluate all the proteins provided, and don't assume a meal or

by-product meal is less nutritious. As long as the origin is specifically named (for instance, chicken meal or salmon by-product, rather than meat meal or poultry by-product) the ingredient is a high-quality protein source. In the case of vegetarian formulas, look for other high-quality, recognizable proteins, such as potato or pea, fortified with vitamins and minerals to compensate for nutrients usually found in meat or fish.

<p>Ordered by Weight</p>	<p>Combinations of Ingredients</p> <p>The combination of ingredients is more important than any single ingredient.</p> <p>Foods can contain different forms of the same ingredient. If these ingredients are high quality, you probably don't need to worry about the different forms.</p>	
<p>Combinations of Ingredients</p>	<p>Example 1</p> <p>Ingredients: Chicken, brewers rice, corn gluten meal, whole grain corn, poultry by-product meal...</p> <p>Although this formula starts with chicken, it includes a non-specific meat by-product meal that suggests this may be a basic formula.</p>	<p>Example 2</p> <p>Ingredients: Chicken, Turkey, Chicken Meal, Brewers Rice, Ground Whole Grain Barley, Oats Groats...</p> <p>This formula also starts with chicken and another whole meat, turkey, but these are followed by chicken meal, a highly concentrated protein. These three animal proteins combine to form a high-quality protein and suggest a premium or natural formula.</p>
<p>Preservatives</p>		

Use the Guaranteed Analysis. Similar to human food nutrition facts, the guaranteed analysis, a panel included on every pet food package label, will tell you the food's overall protein, carbohydrate, fat, fiber and moisture content. With premium foods, this content will be the same from bag to bag, ensuring your pet a consistent, high-quality food source with every bag, can or pouch.

Determine the primary ingredients and protein sources. Ingredients on pet food labels are listed by weight, but whole meats contain a lot of water so they weigh more than other ingredients so it's important to look beyond the first two or three ingredients listed. Look at the first 5-8 ingredients and ensure there is a healthy combination of correctly processed, high-quality protein sources.

Example 1

Ingredients: **Chicken, Cracked Pearled Barley, Maize Gluten Meal, Whole Grain Oats, Brown Rice, Dried Egg Product...**

In this example, chicken meat is a great source of **protein**, but once the water is removed, it might weigh less than the second and third ingredients in this **formula**.

Example 2

Ingredients: **Lamb Meal, Brewers Rice, Rice Flour, Ground Whole Grain Wheat, Ground Whole Grain Sorghum, Corn Gluten Meal...**

In this example, lamb **meal** is a highly concentrated form of protein. Because the water has already been removed lamb meal is truly the primary ingredient.

The combination of ingredients is more important than any single ingredient. Food can contain more than one form of the same ingredient, so read the whole label for a healthy balance of protein, fat and carbohydrate sources with natural names you recognize.