

Advice sheet on Pet Nutrition and Feeding your pet.

For a food to be balanced and complete it must contain Protein, fat, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals and water.

There are a huge range of foods available in the UK and EU – dry kibble, tinned, pouches, raw feeding etc etc and of course it is your choice what to feed your pet. There is no right or wrong choice in the type of food or the mix of types of food you personally decide on. However, it is helpful to be able to understand and read the labelling on foods and to be aware that some types of food and treats are not that good for the health of your pet.

I am not going into brands here but will explain a few details about what to look for in the composition section on the bags or tins etc and what it is best to avoid. This is most obvious in dry foods as moisture is always the main ingredient in wet foods and varies from 70-82% depending on the brand. Ingredients are listed in order of weight so the ingredient in the greatest quantity is always listed first. With wet foods be aware that the % of the first ingredient listed is not exactly what it seems- If the moisture content is listed as 80% then the dry matter is 20%. Therefore if the first ingredient listed is chicken 40% as an example that means 40% of the dry matter, actually only 8% of the pack. Next time you are in the pet shop or supermarket take a look at the contents listed on some of the wet foods available.

With dry foods there are two types- Fixed Formula foods which will have each item individually listed- for example Chicken, Rice, Maize – This guarantees that the same quantity of each ingredient is used in every batch produced. Your pet is far less likely to develop intermittent upset tummies if fed on Fixed Formula food as the ingredients do not vary from batch to batch.

Open Formula foods tend to have cereals and meat and animal derivatives listed as the main ingredients. Each cereal type is not specified so there may be different amounts of unspecified grains in each batch. The term meat and animal derivatives covers any meat or animal by-product, without stating what it is or even what species it comes from. It can include things like skin, cartilage, hair and hooves. These ingredients are still classed as protein sources but they are less digestible, less palatable and will vary in quantity from batch to batch. Often food additives are added to make this food more palatable- like giving sweets with the food. Brightly coloured kibble is often a sign of this. Reading this you can see why some pets develop intermittent tummy problems when the owner cannot think of an obvious reason.

As a rule of thumb when you are looking at the composition of the food look for a protein source with a high biological value like Fish or Chicken listed first on the ingredients and avoid protein listed as animal derivatives or meat and chicken derivatives.

Understanding the quality of Meat protein.

If a meat is listed as , for example, lamb that means it is fresh lamb. It is highly digestible and highly palatable and is easily broken down. It is only cooked once during the formulation of the kibble. Having fresh meat as the main ingredient keeps a pet fuller for longer AND importantly you have to feed less kibble because it takes longer to break down as it has a high biological value. The biological value of meat is about 74%.

Meat, Fish or Chicken meal is also a good source of protein but it is slightly less digestible and less palatable than fresh meat and is usually cooked twice in the cooking process.

Chicken meat meal is also still a good source of protein but even slightly less palatable and less digestible than meat meal. The meat has been cooked three to four times during the cooking process.

Understanding the Quality of vegetable protein

Rice, Maize and Wheat are all protein sources too but have a lower biological value than meat protein. Having a combination of these in foods offers different levels of energy release and this helps create a balanced diet. They will all give short term satisfaction but they cannot be utilised by the body as well as a meat protein so they get passed through the digestive system more quickly. They have a vital role to play in the digestive system and help with gut health and absorption of nutrients.

Products such as beet pulp and chicory, also known as inulin, are natural pre-biotics which helps to balance the good and bad bacteria in the gut.

If the food you offer your pet has a cereal listed first as the main ingredient, it won't be satisfied for as long as it would be if meat or fish were the main ingredient. As cereals cannot be broken down as well as meats more will come out the back end as faeces. This basically means that the more you spend on food based on a quality meat or fish protein source as the main ingredient the less faeces you are paying for and will have to pick up !! Also you will need to feed less food to satisfy your pet's appetite which saves money. The more digestible the ingredients, the firmer the faeces will be- an unpleasant fact but an important one.

Diet Foods and Weight management

You will find that often diet foods for pets tend to be cereal based meaning the main ingredient is rice, maize or wheat. These will make them feel fuller initially but they will not offer a sustained sense of fullness. They may also lose healthy muscle as well as body fat.

If the main ingredient of the diet food is fresh meat and has lower levels of fat than a normal maintenance food, your pet will maintain its muscle mass and lose its body fat more quickly. They will feel fuller for longer as the meat is more digestible and more palatable.

Senior pet foods

Senior pets still require good quality, digestible meat or fish protein in their diets to help them maintain good muscle mass to support an aging frame. Senior foods should have lower levels of fat to reduce weight gain. Senior shouldn't mean low protein. An animal only needs a low protein diet if it has kidney disease.

Hypoallergenic

This has become used as a marketing term in the pet food trade. To be hypoallergenic, a food must be low in allergens. True food allergies are very rare. Sensitivities are common. The most common ingredients to cause true allergies are chicken, beef or wheat. For a food to be genuinely hypoallergenic, the part that causes the reaction, the protein, must either be removed or hydrolysed, which means it would be cut up into tiny pieces so the body is less likely to recognise it as a protein for example hydrolysed soya. There are very very few truly hypoallergenic foods on the market. Other ingredients used in a hypoallergenic food must have their protein removed so maize has to have the husk removed and would be listed as maize starch.

A food for sensitive stomachs should have limited protein sources that are not commonly used in pet food. Take a look and see what foods are available for Sensitive stomachs.

Useful website

allaboutdogfood.co.uk

Note on feeding your dog a vegetarian diet-

This is not something I personally would do but I believe it would be possible if you are very careful about the main ingredient being a highly digestible and palatable protein source. Meat is around 74%. Eggs are very high at 98%. I am no expert in this field but these days I think there must be alternative sources of high biological value vegetarian proteins available.

Comparison of the ingredients of a Fixed Formula Kibble and an Open Formula Kibble- source the allaboutdogfood.co.uk website.

Fixed Formula

Fresh chicken 22%, Rice, dried poultry meal 14% f, Maize, Fresh poultry liver 7%
Fresh salmon and Trout 6% Beet pulp, Oats, Poultry fat 2.8%, Linseed, Brewers Yeast, DI
Methionine, Dried Egg 1% Dried Fish meat 1% Minerals, Poultry Gravy 1.4% Pork Gravy,
Vitamins, Yucca extract, Mannan oligosaccharides Fructosaccharides, L-Carnitine, Glucosamine,
Chondroitin Sulphate, Methylsulfonylmethane, Beta Carotene.

12kg £39.99 Grammes per day large dog 175g Price per day 58p
K9 Optimum Adult Dog website rating 72%.

Open Formula

Cereals, Meat and Animal Derivatives (Including 4% chicken in the brown kibbles) , oils and Fats,
(including 0.5% Sunflower oil) derivatives of vegetable origin (including 2% dried beet pulp)
Minerals (1.8% including 0.7% Sodium Tripolyphosphate an active ingredient on the brown
kibbles) , Vegetable protein extracts Vegetables (4% carrots in the orange kibbles) 4% peas in the
green kibbles, Antioxidants BHA and BHT, Colourants.

2.7 kg bag £6.40 small breed dog 123g per day Price per day 29p
Pedigree Adult Small Breed Chicken and Vegetables Website rating 4%

Adding fresh fruit or veg to your dogs food is a great way to supplement their diet. I often feed either raw or steamed carrots, broccoli, apple (no pips) , cauliflower, sweet potato..Do not give grapes or raisins, currants or sultanas as these are poisonous as are garlic bulbs and raw onion. I also cook minced turkey and rice for mine twice a week to add to their kibble.

I hope this has been informative and you have found it useful when coming to a decision on what to feed your dog or cat.