



Pet Food Choices: What's Right for Your Pet?

Choosing what to feed your pets is one of the biggest decisions we make as pet parents. There is an amazing variety of food out there, and the choices quickly become overwhelming! Each pet is different, and not every pet thrives on the same brand of food. Some pets prefer canned food, some prefer dry food, and some won't touch anything but pate style food. Remember, it's important to work with your veterinarian to determine the right food for your pet.

Cats are obligate carnivores, while dogs are omnivores. In other words, cats NEED to eat meat, while dogs have evolved to be able to eat a varied diet of both plant and animal origin. Cats require higher amounts of the amino acid taurine, the fatty acid arachidonic acid, vitamin A, and niacin – if they don't get enough from their diet, they could suffer serious health consequences.

Cat food is higher in fat and protein than dog food, which makes it very tempting for your dog. However, this higher fat and protein content can come at the price of causing stomach upset and pancreatitis, which can be deadly.

If you have a multi-species household with both dogs and cats, remember to feed them food that is formulated for their species. You don't want your dog to develop pancreatitis (or become obese), and you want to make sure that you are fulfilling all of your cat's nutritional needs.

In general, any commercially available kitten or puppy food is appropriate for most kittens and puppies – there is not a lot of differences between brand formulation. When your pet reaches adulthood, you do have some tougher choices to make. First, you must decide if you are going to cook for your pet (called a home-cooked diet, or HCD) or feed them a commercially available diet. Commercially available diets are easier to use and may be less expensive. They are also already balanced to provide for your pet's nutritional needs. HCD is more time consuming and may be more expensive. You can make the food ahead and freeze it, but it still requires a lot more prep time than opening a bag or can of pet food! However, a home cooked diet allows you to tailor the diet to your pet's specific needs and tastes. Remember, pets (both dogs and cats) have different nutrition requirements than people – it's not enough to simply feed them the same dinner we eat. If you choose to use a home-cooked diet, make sure that you work with a veterinary nutritionist to come up with a well-balanced diet for your pet.



If you decide that you are going to feed your pet a commercially available diet, you need to choose the type and brand. If you choose to feed a commercial pet food, choose a brand that is known to have high quality ingredients and monitoring. Organizations that publish nutritional guidelines for cat food include: AAFCO (USA), FEDIAF (Europe), and NRC (National Research Council). Try to choose a food that is formulated according to these guidelines. Dry food has more of a crunch and helps keep the teeth clean, but it doesn't have as much moisture as canned food. Canned food is easier to chew and has more moisture (which helps prevent dehydration) but is not as helpful to prevent dental disease. Canned food, in general, is lower in carbohydrates than dry food (which is important for diabetic cats). Feeding your pet, a mixture of canned and dry food would be a good way to get the best of both worlds.