

# ASK OUR VETERINARIANS

## What Should I Look For When Purchasing Pet Food?

Our own food labels are often difficult to interpret, so, when it comes to buying food for our furry companions, what should we really be looking for to make sure we are feeding good quality food to our pets?

One of the most important things to look for on a pet food label are the letters "AAFCO," (Association of American Feed Control Officials). AAFCO tests pet foods and performs food trials to ensure ingredients are of good quality and provide proper nutrition.

Second, look for an adequacy statement which states something like, "This food is complete and balanced for all life stages," or "for adult maintenance." Choose foods according to the age and needs of your pet as nutritional needs can change throughout the stages of your pet's life.

Many food companies and advertisers would have people believe that grain-free pet foods are better than those containing gluten and grains. This is simply not true. Highly digestible carbohydrates such as wheat or oats are necessary for a balanced diet. Also, grain-free does not necessarily mean carbohydrate-free. Many grain-free diets use potatoes or vegetables to add carbohydrates. While food allergies are an area of concern for some, most pets are not allergic to grains but rather to proteins like chicken and beef.

Cats are obligate carnivores meaning that they eat only meat, so a high protein, low-carb diet may be a better option for a cat. Make sure that your cat is eating at least one type of animal protein in her food. One or two proteins should be in the top three ingredients of any pet food label. Similar to grains, by-products have gained a bad reputation, but they are really just organ meats which can provide a lot of nutrition and do not contain feathers, hooves, hair or inedible products.

The best advice is to buy the best quality food you can afford for your pet, and, typically, the higher the food quality, the less you need to feed, as your pet will gain more nutritional value from a smaller portion. Most high quality foods are quite affordable when calculating cost per day. As always, talk to your veterinarian about the best diet and proper amount to feed to your pet.

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