

Optimal Nutrition for Your Pet

By Dr. Laura Hady

The number of dog food brands increased 71 percent from 2011-2018 (most recent data available), totaling at least 630, according to GfK, the largest German market research company that provides data and intelligence to the consumer goods industry. So, it's understandable that I receive a lot of questions about which brand of food is best. My answer depends upon the animal's activity level and any underlying medical conditions. Purina, Iams and Royal Canin are brands that make special diets for medical needs and are backed by research, but not every pet will require these special diets. The following is a simple guide for the nutrients required by dogs and cats.

1) Carbohydrates are the backbone of most dog diets and can comprise 20 percent to 50 percent of your dog's diet by weight. Sources of carbohydrates include grains like barley, corn, oats, sweet potatoes and rice. Simple carbohydrates found in starches and sugars are very digestible and a readily available source of energy. Complex carbohydrates such as fiber are a great resource for the health of the bacteria in your dog's intestine. Fiber helps maintain a healthy weight, is important in managing sugar balance, and can help keep stool a regular consistency. Examples of natural fiber sources include beet pulp, pumpkin, wheat germ, and dark, leafy greens. Please avoid grain-free diets in large breed dogs as this can lead to a heart condition called dilated cardiomyopathy.

2) Protein is required in a dog's diet because it contains 10 specific amino acids that are the necessary building blocks for essential compounds in the body. Protein plays a role in muscle development, immune function and hair coat quality. Dogs prefer the taste of foods that have the proper amino acids. A young dog should have a diet containing 20 percent protein, a pregnant dog needs 29 percent protein, and an adult dog needs about 18 percent quality protein by weight. Sources of protein include beef, chicken, lamb, turkey, pork, eggs, beans and fish. Whole meat sources are higher quality, while animal meal or by-products are lower

quality and may not contain all of the essential amino acids. If an animal has an allergy to a protein source, your veterinarian may recommend switching the protein source for a period of time or feeding a specialty hydrolyzed protein dog food. Hydrolyzed foods have proteins that are broken down into tiny pieces that make the proteins invisible to a dog's immune system. The amount of protein needed in a pet's diet will decrease with age.

3) Fats and fatty acids should make up about 5.5 percent of your dog's diet. Dietary fats can be derived from animal fats and the seed oils of various plants. Fats provide the most concentrated form of energy for the body. Fats supply the essential fatty acids that can't be synthesized by the body. Essential fatty acids (EFAs) work as carriers for fat-soluble vitamins, are important in cell function, and enhance the taste of food. EFAs are also important for hair coat, skin health, immune function, vision and learning ability.

4) Additives include preservatives for extending shelf-life and providing flavoring, color, taste enhancement and nutritional supplements such as vitamins and minerals. Natural food additives include rosemary, vitamin E, and vitamin C (ascorbic acid). These additives are antioxidants that preserve fats, stop contamination by bacteria, and help to maintain food color. Natural preservatives are sometimes less effective than artificial ones, such as ethoxyquin, propylene glycol, and butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT). However, they have fewer side effects on the cells in the body.

5) Cats require more protein (26 percent) and fat (20 percent to 24 percent) but need a much lower percentage of carbohydrates by weight (10 percent to 15 percent). Common sources of protein for cats include meat and fish proteins. Cats can easily digest egg whites, muscle meat, or organ meats, and require the amino acid taurine for proper heart health. While cats tend to prefer chicken fat for taste, the omega-3 fatty acids in fish can help your cat's coat and boost immune function. The average 10-pound cat should eat about 1/3 to 1/2 of a cup of dry food per



day. However, it is easier for cats to digest a wet food versus a dry food. Three of the major reasons for this is that dry food contains too little water content, a higher than desired carbohydrate load, and too much plant protein versus animal protein.

When in doubt, consult your family veterinarian about the best diet that fits your pet's lifestyle.

If you want to create a healthy, homemade diet for your pet, consider contacting the nutrition service (nssvetmed@ucdavis.edu) at the University of California, Davis School of Veterinary Medicine. Most of all, let your pet's diet be food for both the body and soul.



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7/6: Christine Fawson's Old School Jazz Quintet: Roll Call: A Tribute to Hank Mobley
7/13: Swing Magique / Rowan McJimsey Solo Piano Opens
7/20: Songs Without Purpose
7/27: Carla Van Blake: Roberta Flack Tribute
8/3: Arnold Bodmer's WARP
8/10: Benevento Sings Bacharach
8/17: Dan Dowling & Pat Rhoads: The Sonic Boomers
8/24: Flambeaux Celebrates Bob Gusch

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