Choosing a Pet Food

What do you consider?

1. Quality

In the pet food industry you get what you pay for. Cheap foods are made with cheap ingredients, have poorer quality control at the factory, may not be well digested, and may have excesses or deficiencies in vital nutrients, which may harm your pet.

1. Commercially Prepared Foods

The higher quality diets are well balanced by nutritionists, safer than homemade or raw diets, easier to find, and are simple to use. The top four pet food companies are Royal Canin, Hills, Eukanuba, and Purina. These companies have invested a significant amount of time and money in research to make sure these foods are proper for your pet. They have a veterinary nutritionist on staff available for questions should your pet have problems. They also allow veterinarians and their staff to tour their facilities.

1. Evaluating a commercial pet food
* First of all, remember pet store clerks, generally don’t have any nutritional training.
* Second, look for AAFCO on the label. This means they had to meet minimal standards for “growth”, “adult maintenance”, or “all life stages” to have AAFCO on their label.
* AAFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials) approves of foods, which doesn’t mean the food is great, but it is a minimum to look for.
* Third, look at the label itself. Just because something says it’s “natural”, “premium”, or “veterinary recommended” does not necessarily mean quality.

1. Homemade Diets

The advantages are you know the ingredients, you can make it, and if your pet has allergies or multiple health problems you have some control over their food intake. The disadvantages are nutrition inadequacies and food safety issues. Pets have very specific nutrient requirements for proper growth and health. Most human supplements don’t meet those needs alone. When those needs are not properly met, it can have severe effects on their overall health.

1. Raw Diets

 In general, for puppies and kittens, we do NOT recommend these diets. The biggest reason is food safety for both the pet and the human. According to an FDA report, 80%-100% of chicken in grocery stores is contaminated with Salmonella. Other contaminants are Campylobacter, E. coli, Clostridium, Tapeworms, and Toxoplasma. Ground meats have the highest risk. Contrary to popular belief, freezing does NOT kill bacteria; it only slows bacterial growth and dogs ARE NOT resistant to bacteria. Also, by handling these meats and not washing your hands properly, you can pick up these contaminants. Pets fed raw diets shed higher number of bacteria in their stool which can contaminate the environment.

1. Don’t Switch Foods Often

 Pets don’t require variety in their diet. **Boring is good!** Varied diets and table scraps tend to cause digestive upset (vomiting and diarrhea) and makes them finicky eaters. If you do need to switch diets, switch over seven to ten days, very slowly to avoid problems. The only exception to this is kittens. They choose food on “mouth feel”. Periodically, through kitten hood, you may need to switch to a different shape, texture, and size of kibble so they don’t mind changing later in life. AGAIN, CHANGE SLOWLY.

1. Recommendations

 We recommend Royal Canin. It meets all the standards we discussed earlier. The food is decided into different categories according to the requirements of the pet (small breed, large breed). The food is tested and meets rigid standards with no ingredient substitutions. Higher quality foods may cost more per bag, but the better nutrition, better digestibility of these foods means you feed less, clean up fewer stools, and have less veterinary bills for nutritional problems.

1. Treats

 These are the “junk food” of the animal world. They are loaded with salt, calories, fat, artificial colorings, and preservatives. Some biscuits won’t harm your pet, unless they are on a restricted diet, but it’s best when given in moderation. Don’t let the treats become the pet’s meal. We recommend Lean Treats. Watch labels on rawhides, only get ones made in the USA. Other countries allow formalin as a preservative, which is harmful to pets.

1. Supplements and Calories

 If you are feeding a premium pet food you should not need to supplement vitamins or minerals. If you do want to start supplementing your pet, ALWAYS check with the veterinarian first. Certain vitamins and minerals in excess can be harmful. Puppies/Kittens require lots of calories to grow and plenty of water. We recommend that until they are four months old to feed at least three times per day, giving them as much as they want in a 10-15 minute time period then take it away. There will be times when they will eat lots and not much the next time, this is normal.

1. Frequency

 We recommend once your pet is over four months old that you go to feeding two meals per day. Two meals a day is better than free-choice feeding because you can regulate how much they eat, when they eat, what they eat, you know if they are eating or not (this is very important for kittens and cats), and it maintains a more constant blood sugar level. Free-choice feeding often leads to obesity and may make housetraining much more difficult (as pups usually need to go out 20-30 minutes after a meal). Stay on a puppy/kitten food until they are at least one year old or 18 months for large breed dogs. Then you can switch to an adult maintenance type food.

Your pet’s diet has long-term effects on their overall health and longevity. Choose wisely. Please feel free to contact us with any nutritional questions you may have.

701-356-5600

Reference list:

VIN

FDA – regulations on raw diets: [www.FDA.gov](http://www.FDA.gov)

Hills – Nutritional Advisor Series

Prairie Winds Veterinary Center –Doctor and staff