

The pet food guessing game

Once you get past the marketing and product claims, what are you *really* feeding your pet?

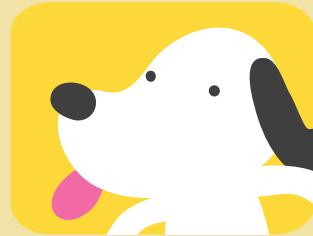
When it comes to the best nutrition for your dog or cat, always start at your veterinary clinic. There isn't one right food for every pet, but your veterinary team can guide you to what's best for you and your pet. Then use this quick guide to help decipher the vast array of marketing claims that often overwhelm the pet food aisle so you can make an informed decision about your pet's nutrition.



THE NAME GAME

What's in a name?

- > If an ingredient is used in the name of the pet food, such as "Salmon Dog Food," at least 95 percent of the product must be that ingredient. It should be the first ingredient that appears on the label's ingredient list.
- > If the name includes a combination of ingredients, such as "Chicken n' Liver Dog Food," the two ingredients must total 95 percent of the product, and there is always a higher percentage of the first ingredient included than the second.
- > If it's not an ingredient of animal origin, it doesn't count. Products such as "Lamb and Rice Dog Food" must still contain at least 95 percent lamb.



Ring the dinner bell!

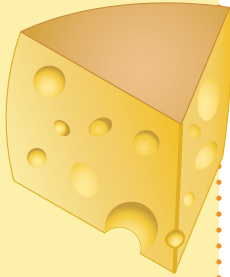
- > When a pet food name reads "Beef Dinner for Dogs" or any fancy-sounding title that includes "dinner," "platter," "entrée," "nuggets" or "formula," the named ingredients must comprise at least 25 percent of the product.
- > A combination of ingredients, such as "Chicken n' Fish Dinner Cat Food," must equal a combined 25 percent. However, the second ingredient named only has to make up 3 percent of that total.
- > The "dinner rule" includes all ingredients, so if a pet food name is "Lamb and Rice Formula for Cats," lamb may be the predominant ingredient, but at least 25 percent is made up of both lamb and rice.
- > An ingredient named in pet food "dinners" may be the third or fourth ingredient on the product's ingredient list. Read the label to ensure the primary ingredients are ingredients you want to feed your pet.



With cheese!

> When a pet food name includes “with,” the ingredient that follows, such as “Beef Dinner for Dogs—with cheese,” only has to be 3 percent of the product.

> Buyer beware: A can of “Cat Food—with Tuna” means tuna may only be 3 percent of the product, whereas “Tuna Cat Food” must contain at least 95 percent tuna.



Super-ultra-premium

> Label claims including the words “premium,” “super-premium,” even “ultra-premium” or “gourmet” are not required to contain any different or higher quality ingredients.

> “Natural” is usually assumed to mean a lack of artificial flavors, colors or preservatives, but it too is not required to contain any different or higher quality ingredients.

> Currently, there are also no official rules governing the use of the word “organic” in pet food labels.



Packed with flavor

> The use of the word “flavored” in a pet food means very little. As in, a pet food named “Chicken Flavored Cat Food,” only must have chicken “detectable” in the product. No specific percentage of the named flavor is required.

> Digests (materials treated with heat, enzymes and/or acids to form concentrated natural flavors), stocks and broths and whey are often used to flavor pet foods.



When in doubt, ask

✓CALL YOUR VETERINARIAN

Talk to your veterinary team about your nutrition questions and how to appropriately transition your pet to a new food. If you think your pet is showing signs of illness related to his or her pet food, call your veterinarian.

✓CALL THE MANUFACTURER

The “manufactured by” label statement identifies the party responsible for the quality and safety of the product, along with contact information. Don’t hesitate to contact the company with questions or complaints about a product.