

Choosing A Good Dog Food



1.) Meat Comes 1st

Dogs are classified as domesticated wolves and wolves are classified as opportunistic carnivores not omnivores. Meat should be the 1st ingredient.

Meat ingredients should be from named meat sources such as chicken, salmon, beef, etc. Labeling regulations vary by country so not all meat ingredients may be specifically named. For example, a New Zealand produced food may list “fish” as an ingredient. There is nothing wrong with this since they are following labeling laws. If you have any questions, contact the company. A reputable company will be happy answer your question.

2.) The More Meat The Better

The more meat a food contains in the 1st 5 or 6 ingredients or before the 1st added fat, whichever comes 1st, the better.

If it is a kibble, look for a mixture of fresh named meat and named meat meal. Fresh meat will lose up to 70% of its weight during processing so the amount of that meat in the finished product will be quite a bit less. Meat meal already has most of the water removed so the amount of that meat meal doesn't change much.

Some dog foods list the percentage of meat in their foods which makes it very easy to know just how meaty it really is.

3.) Whole Grains

If you choose to feed a food with grains, choose foods with whole grains. Whole grains contain all of the nutrients found in grain. Grain fractions have the most nutritious parts removed for human use.

Beware of the practice of splitting ingredients to make it appear there is less grain in a food. This can be in the form of starch, bran, fiber, etc. Once you add all those parts of grains together, the grain content increases by quite a bit.

A Caution About Carbohydrates, Health Problems And Weight Management Foods

Carbohydrates stimulate additional insulin which signals the body to store unused calories as fat. If your dog needs to lose a few pounds, look at its diet. If the food is high in carbohydrates, switch to a high-quality, low-carbohydrate diet. Do not feed an overweight dog a reduced calorie or “diet” food. These tend to be loaded with carbohydrates and fillers and many overweight dogs gain weight on these foods.

There is evidence from cancer research studies that show a diet high in carbohydrates feeds cancer cells.

Carbohydrates can increase inflammation in arthritic animals.

Diabetic dogs can have problems on diets high in carbohydrates due to the additional insulin production.

4.) Grain Free

If you choose to feed a grain free food, choose foods with fresh, whole, unprocessed ingredients like sweet potatoes, whole peas, tapioca, potatoes, etc. Avoid “products”, flours, “fines,” meals, etc.

Beware of the practice of splitting ingredients to make it appear there is less starch in a food. This can be in the form of starch, fiber, etc. Once you add all those parts of starches together, the starch content increases by quite a bit.

Grain free foods can be just as high in carbohydrates as grain inclusive foods. See the caution above about carbohydrates in the above section.

5.) Byproducts

Do not buy a food that contains byproducts, even those from named animal sources.

6.) Other Ingredients

Become familiar with the ingredients that are commonly included in dog foods and learn if they are good or bad.

-- **Additives: Can be something added to make food look better, improve texture, inhibit discoloration, add flavor, prevent drying out, etc.**

☹Bad

- Glyceryl Monostearate
- Phosphoric Acid
- Propylene Glycol

-- **Binders: Binds the food ingredients together. Carbohydrates are included in this category.**

☹Bad

- Corn Gluten
- Wheat Gluten

-- **Carbohydrates: Dogs don't need carbohydrates so less is better.**

☺Good:

- Whole Grains
- Whole, Unprocessed Fruits and Vegetables

☹Bad:

- Avocado (Guatemalan): Persin may cause vomiting and diarrhea in dogs
- Brewers Rice
- Citrus Pulp
- Ground Brewers Rice
- Cereal Food Fines

- Feeding Oat Meal
- Grain Fermentation Solubles
- Pomace
- Potato Product
- Soy Flour

-- **Colorings: Added to make the color of cheap food look more appealing to humans.**

☹Bad

- Blue 2 (artificial color): In a large study caused brain tumors in mice
- Red 40 (artificial color): Used mainly in junk foods
- Titanium Dioxide: A harmless but unnecessary ingredient
- Yellow 5 (artificial color): Allergen in aspirin-sensitive people
- Yellow 6 (artificial color): Contains small amounts of several carcinogens

-- **Fats and Oils: Needed for a dog to be healthy, mostly for skin and coat health, but also for proper brain development and other critical processes in the body.**

If a good quality dog food is lacking in Omega-3 Essential Fatty Acids, it is better to buy it and supplement than to buy a lower quality dog food with higher amounts of Omega3 EFAs.

As with meat ingredients, labeling regulations vary by country so animal fat/oil ingredients may not be specifically named.

☺Good:

Specifically Named Fats and Oils: Chicken Fat, Herring Oil, Canola Oil, Sunflower Oil, Salmon Oil, Anchovy Oil, etc.

☹Bad:

- Flax Oil: Not necessarily bad but can be an allergen
- Animal Fat
- Beef Tallow/Fat
- Lard
- Mineral Oil
- Poultry Fat
- Vegetable Oil

-- **Fiber: Necessary to make a highly processed kibble “work” since a dog’s digestive tract is not designed to effectively digest and utilize such highly processed foods.**

☺Good

- Pumpkin
- Coconut
- Vegetables (Whole, unprocessed)
- Fruits (Whole, unprocessed)
- Beet Pulp: Controversial but has less sugar than the same serving size of carrots

☹Bad

- Cellulose
- Corn Bran
- Oat Hulls
- Peanut Hulls
- Rice Hulls
- Soybean Mill Run
- Wheat Mill Run or Wheat Middlings

-- Flavorings: High quality foods do not need but natural ones are harmless.

☺Good

- Named-meat stocks or broths
- Liver of named animals

☹Bad

- Digest and/or Animal Digest (may also appear as dried or spray dried)
- Flavor: Most manufacturers refuse to specify if the flavor is animal, vegetable, spice, broth, etc.
- Glandular Meal

-- Preservatives: The higher the quality and freshness of the ingredients used, the less effort must be made to delay nutrition loss of the food.

☺Good

- Mixed Tocopherols/Alpha Tocopherols/Vitamin E – Most are soy-derived and soy can be an allergen.
- Rosemary Extract – May be a seizure trigger.
- Sage Extract
- Clove Extract
- Ascorbyl Palmitate
- All forms of Vitamin C

☹Bad

- BHA (Butylated Hydroxyanisole): Banned from human use in many countries but still permitted in the US; possible carcinogen
- BHT (Butylated Hydroxytoluene): Banned from human use in many countries but still permitted in the US; possible carcinogen
- Ethoxyquin: Has been linked to thyroid, kidney, reproductive and immune related illnesses as well as cancer. Required to be used for any fish not intended for human consumption unless the processor has a special license.
- Propyl Gallate (Gallic Acid or Propyl Ester): Suspected of causing liver disease and cancer
- Sodium Metabisulphite
- TBHQ (Tertiary Butylhydroquinone): Prolonged exposure may induce carcinogenicity

-- **Protein: Protein should come from meat and not from sources such as corn and soy.**
Labeling regulations vary by country so meat ingredients may not be specifically named.

☺**Good**

Specifically named meats and meat meals such as: Duck, Duck Meal, Turkey, Turkey Meal, Chicken, Chicken Meal, Lamb, Lamb Meal, Beef, Beef Meal, Salmon, Salmon Meal, Trout, Trout Meal, Bison, Bison Meal, Whitefish, Whitefish Meal, Rabbit, Rabbit Meal, Kangaroo, Kangaroo Meal, Venison, Venison Meal, Herring, Herring Meal, etc.

☹**Bad**

- Beef and Bone Meal
- Blood Meal
- Chicken Byproduct Meal
- Corn Distillers Dried Grains With Solubles
- Corn Germ Meal
- Corn Gluten Meal
- Fish Meal
- Liver Meal
- Meat and Bone Meal
- Meat Meal
- Pork and Bone Meal
- Poultry Byproduct Meal
- Poultry Meal
- Soybean Meal

-- **Supplemental Vitamins and Minerals: Can vary in quality and in how well the body can absorb them.**

☺**Good**

- Glucosamine, Chondroitin and Probiotics: Generally not included in large enough doses to actually provide a therapeutic effect. A stand-alone supplement product is preferable.
- Chelated or sequestered minerals (also labeled as chelates, proteinates, amino acid chelates or complexes, polysaccharide complexes)
- Nonacidic, time released versions of Vitamin C (labeled as Ester C, Calcium Ascorbate, Stabilized Vitamin C or L-Ascorbyl-2-Polyphosphate)
- Natural Vitamin E (Tocopherol, Natural Tocopherol) – **Most are soy-derived and can be an allergen.**
- Natural sources of Vitamin K (egg yolk, liver, oats, kelp, alfalfa)

☹**Bad**

- Bone Phosphate
- DL-Alpha Tocopherol Acetate (Artificial Vitamin E)
- Mineral Oil

- Salt: Will be added in small quantities in high-quality dry foods to encourage the water consumption needed to compensate for lack of moisture in kibble.
- Synthetic Vitamin K: Has not been specifically approved for long term use, such as in pet food. It has been linked to many serious health issues.

Also Called:

- Menadione Sodium Bisulfate
- Vitamin K3
- Menadione Dimethyl-Pyrimidinol Bisulfate
- Menadione Dimethyl-Pyrimidinol Bisulfite
- Menadione Sodium Bisulfate Complex
- Yeast Culture: A potential allergen for some dogs
- Yeast Fermentation Solubles: A potential allergen for some dogs

-- **Sweeteners: Have no place in foods that are consumed daily.**

☺Good

- Blackstrap Molasses: A source of many trace minerals. Trace amounts are okay.
- Honey, Molasses and Other Unrefined Sugars: Small amounts are okay in dog treats.

☹Bad

- Cane Molasses
- Corn Syrup
- Fructose
- Sorbitol
- Sugar
- Xylitol: Toxic

7.) Always Check The Ingredients

Dog food formulas change, sometimes to a better formula and sometimes to a worse formula, so always compare the ingredients every time you buy a bag. An easy way to keep track of changes is to remove or copy the ingredients list from your current bag and take it with you.

When a dog food formula changes the company does not have to use new bags that reflect those changes for 6 months so also look for changes in kibble size, texture, color and smell.

If you notice that your dog isn't doing as well on a new bag of food or the kibble is different or your dog doesn't seem to like the food as well, the formula may have changed.

If you notice a difference contact the company to find out if they have made any changes. A reputable company will be eager to answer your questions.

8.) Keep Some "Novel" Proteins

A novel protein is one your dog has never eaten in a food or treat. It may be something common like bison or rabbit or it may be something uncommon like kangaroo, emu or beaver.

When you look for new dog foods remember to leave some proteins novel. That way if your dog does develop a suspected or confirmed intolerance or allergy to a protein you have something you can still feed your dog.

When deciding what proteins to keep novel, consider your location and food costs. It is much easier and less expensive to keep a fairly common protein novel than to have to resort to sourcing an uncommon one.

9.) Recalls

Dog food recalls happen fairly regularly anymore and can affect an entire brand, multiple brands or a single formula within a brand.

One very important thing you should do when feeding your dog any commercial food is to keep the manufacturing information and formula name for each can and bag of food you feed in case of a recall.

This information should include the “best by” or “use by” date, production/lot code, UPC code and bag or can size.

To find information on recalls visit: <http://www.fda.gov/Safety/Recalls/default.htm>

10.) Price Does Not Always Equal Quality

Some lower quality dog foods can be fairly expensive when you factor in how much your dog has to eat of it per day.

Some dog food companies have developed “breed specific” dog foods in an attempt to convince dog owners that different breeds need different nutrition. Dogs are dogs and do not have different nutritional requirements based on breed though some breeds, such as Dalmations, do have specific health problems that require some foods not be fed.

Some higher quality dog food can be fairly cheap.

Nature’s Domain, a grain-free food made by the company that makes Taste of the Wild and that is very similar to TOTW, is sold at Costco and costs about the same or less than a bag of grain-inclusive Iams dog food.

Many expensive prescription diets are nothing more than scientifically formulated bags of corn and grain fractions. For many of these conditions there are higher quality, cheaper alternatives you can research and discuss with your veterinarian.

11.) A More Expensive Food May Save You Money

While the higher quality dog foods can be more expensive you may actually end up saving money in the long run.

The higher the quality of the food fed, the less your dog needs to eat of it. This is because the higher quality ingredients are easier to digest and your dog needs to eat less to get the nutrition it needs.

In fact, **overfeeding** can result in loose stool or diarrhea, leading owners to think their dogs cannot “handle” these foods or the foods are “too rich.” Cutting back slightly on the food fed or splitting the same amount of food into an additional feeding may take care of the problem.

Higher quality foods can also save you money on veterinary care. The better the food the better the odds that your dog will be healthier which may lead to less non-routine veterinary visits, less medications needed, etc.

There are ways to save money on higher quality dog foods.

Some companies offer coupons or special offers to customers who like their social networking websites or sign up for online newsletters. Some companies and stores offer frequent buyer clubs.

Where you buy your food affects the price as well. Check prices at a variety of businesses, including feed stores, and don't rule out buying food online.

12.) How Will You Know You Have Found “The” Food?

Some signs you have found a good food for your dog may include:

- A healthy coat: shiny, full, free from dandruff and other problems.
- Stool: firm, smaller sized, less frequent, less smelly.
- Increased energy.
- Decreased hyperactivity.
- Overall health improvement.

You may have to try many brands of dog food before finding one that works best for your dog.

13.) Rotating Foods

When you find a high-quality dog food try to find another high-quality food or two that produces the same results. Ideally this food should be from a different company altogether.

The reason for rotating food brands is due to the possibility of vitamin or mineral excesses or deficiencies.

In 2010, Blue Buffalo recalled 3 formulas of dry dog food after some dogs developed signs of Vitamin D toxicity. It was concluded that a Blue Buffalo ingredient supplier made an error in their manufacturing schedule and produced a Vitamin D supplement just prior to preparing dog food ingredients. Blue Buffalo believes some of that Vitamin D supplement ended up in the ingredients resulting in an excess of Vitamin D in certain batches of dog food.

Dog foods are not truly complete and balanced.

Manufacturers must add excess amounts of supplemental nutrients to compensate for what is lost during the manufacturing process and also to compensate for the loss of these nutrients as the food sits first in the warehouse then in the pet store and then in the consumer's home.

Sometimes the rate of nutrient loss is less than what was anticipated so there is an excess.

Sometimes the loss is greater and there is a deficiency.

If you can't find another high-quality food brand that works well for your dog, do not stress out and be worried about vitamin and mineral deficiencies or excesses. You can rotate between formulas within a brand.