

# Choosing a Pet Food

There are many pet food manufacturers and a bewildering array of pet foods that vary widely in nutrient composition, ingredients, processing and amount of testing to ensure nutritional adequacy. Selecting an appropriate maintenance diet for a healthy pet should be done by following a few basic guidelines.

## AAFCO Guidelines

There should be a nutritional adequacy claim somewhere on the label that reads either that the pet food 'is formulated to meet or exceed the nutritional levels established by the [AAFCO](#) nutritional profiles' or that 'Animal feeding tests using [AAFCO](#) procedures substantiate that the pet food provides complete and balanced nutrition' for the life stage of your animal. An extra layer of protection may be found in foods which say they have been through [AAFCO](#) feeding trials. A food with a label that says the food is for intermittent or supplemental feedings should only be used long-term when directed by a veterinarian.

## Puppy/kitten versus adult, large breed versus small breed, all life stages foods

Talk with your veterinarian as to whether a particular life stage food is appropriate for your pet. The main concern with large breed dogs is their rate of growth. It is important to feed a puppy diet and restrict access to food. Large breed dog foods tend to be less energy dense which can sometimes help restrict calorie intake.

## Natural, Holistic, and Organic Foods

There has been a growing demand by the public for foods labeled as natural, holistic, or organic, but some of these terms are undefined and there are no studies that have shown any benefit to animals fed such diets. Natural diets indicate only that there are no chemically synthesized ingredients. The term 'holistic' has not been defined by [AAFCO](#) and so manufacturers can apply this label whenever they desire, irrespective of the ingredients. Organic ingredients can be labeled as such but some organic foods contain ingredients that are not organic.

## Companies with recalls

Pet foods are recalled when bacterial and other types of contamination are suspected. Recalls are designed to err on the side of caution and should not exclude a particular company from consideration. All foods, including those for humans, have the potential to contain harmful bacteria unless they are cooked. Most commercial foods are cooked and have a much reduced risk of bacterial contamination compared to raw food. Contamination is still possible, however, after the cooking step. Many of the large companies

analyze food for potential contamination. Smaller companies often have fewer resources for testing, and fewer people are affected if such a food is recalled. The contamination often occurs not because of malice or inadequacies in the preparation, but from the supply chain itself. Even with the recent recalls, the rate of adverse effects from pet food consumption is lower than that of products intended for human consumption. For details of any recalls, visit the [FDA Recalls Enforcement Reports](#) site.

## Switching pet foods

When switching a pet food, a slow transition is recommended over the course of a week to give your pet's intestine and the bacteria it contains a chance to adapt to new ingredients. Based on the current research and [AAFCO](#) standards, it is not necessary to switch diets, as unlike human processed foods, these diets are designed to best meet pets' nutritional requirements. It is recommended that you do not use exotic ingredients (rabbit, bison, etc.) as some animals may require a novel protein diet trial later in life, meaning being fed a protein which they have never had. This is difficult in animals that have consumed many foods throughout their lives.

## Storing foods

Dry and soft moist foods should be stored in a cool dry place off the floor for no more than 3 months after opening. If you empty the bag into a storage container remember to empty the container completely before adding more food so that old food does not remain at the bottom and keep the label product code in case you have issues later. Canned foods should be kept in the fridge after opening and then for no more than 24 hrs.