

ABOUT YOUR PET'S FOOD

Nutrition is the foundation of good health for people and the same is true for our animal companions. Diet is the most important component of your pet's health care. The best diet for your dog or cat is not dissimilar to the best diet for you — it consists of a variety of whole foods enhanced with vitamins and minerals, enzymes and supplements, when necessary, to promote optimal health, prevent disease or to address health issues.

Our animal companions are natural hunters and carnivores; just look at their ancestry. The dog at your feet (or on your sofa) has evolved from the wolf, and its digestive system is virtually the same despite thousands of years of domestication. They have very short intestinal tracts geared to the consumption and digestion of raw foods. The cat on your lap is a true or "obligate" carnivore (meat only diet) and is specially designed by nature to hunt small rodents and birds. Her digestive tract, as well, is intended to assimilate raw meat best.

Commercially prepared kibble has become the standard diet for most pets in our culture. It is relatively cheap and quite convenient. Knowledgeable guardians and many veterinarians, however, are becoming increasingly aware of the true nutritional needs of companion animals and are taking a proactive approach to nutrition by choosing the highest quality ingredients and carefully controlled preparation over cost and convenience. For most dogs and cats, a home-prepared raw food diet is best. This is not always feasible, however, so at Only Natural Pet Store we do our best to offer the healthiest options available for all lifestyles and feeding choices. Whatever food you choose to offer your pet, putting some thought into your decision now can produce big rewards over his or her lifetime and very probably help him/her avoid serious and costly illnesses caused by poor nutrition and feeding practices.

Freshness

When trying to determine the best diet for your companion, there are two things to keep in mind: The fresher, the better, and rotation is optimal. First let's discuss freshness.

Fresh food is teeming with life. It contains natural enzymes, probiotics, antioxidants and vitamins and minerals in their most natural state making them more digestible and more easily assimilated. Heat is the number one enemy of nutrients in food. The fresher the food, the more bioavailable the nutrients in that food will be. This means that the antioxidants in the fruits and vegetables listed in the ingredients will be far more likely to be intact and digestible in raw food than dry kibble or canned food, (which are processed at high temperatures). This holds true for natural enzymes, probiotics, amino acids and vitamins and minerals as well.

The less heat processed the food, the more likely the nutrients are preserved in their natural state by the time you feed it to your companion, and the more digestible those nutrients will be. So, even if dry kibble is a part of your companion's diet, adding fresher foods like fresh or frozen raw food & bones or fresh cooked meat, healthy table scraps, freeze dried or dehydrated diets, and even canned food can enhance the quality of his or her overall diet.

The freshness scale:

1. Home prepared raw food diet
2. Frozen raw food diets
3. Freeze dried & dehydrated foods
4. Canned foods
5. Dry kibble

Rotation

In addition to freshness, variety is important in your companion's diet. A more diverse diet is far more likely to provide complete nutrition than a "formulated" diet fed over and over again. While all pet foods on the market meet the AAFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials) standards for "nutrition" for dogs and cats, that does not mean that any one

of them are the ideal food for the life of your companion.

A good meal is a pleasurable experience for you, and the same should be true for your companion. However, even a good meal served over and over can become tiresome. You wouldn't eat Corn Flakes at every meal for years at a time, why ask your companion to eat cereal, the SAME cereal every meal, every day for months or years at a time? It is detrimental to both your health and your companion's to eat the same thing for months or years at every meal. Consuming the same food repeatedly over long periods of time can contribute to the development of food sensitivities and allergies.

More recently, some veterinarians specializing in feline medicine have stated that inflammatory bowel disease may develop, in part, because of food sensitivities caused by feeding one diet for over a year or two at a time. Feeding cats, who are obligate carnivores, a grain based diet has also been shown to contribute to the incidence of Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease (FLUT), (Also known as Feline Urological Syndrome or FUS). The resulting dehydration over a long period of time contributes stress on the kidneys and lining of the urinary tract.

We recommend varying your companion's diet regularly. If feeding a raw diet, you do not need to "transition" from one type of food to the next. Animals eating kibble, however, should be transitioned gradually over a week or two from one to the other. Cats should not eat dry kibble as a main portion of their diet.

Optimizing Freshness and Rotation

While the ideal diet would be a continual rotation of fresh, raw foods, most guardians do not have the time and resources to carefully formulate and make their pet's food. So if you can't meet the ideal, just get as close as you can with what you can afford. The next best thing would be to feed raw food as at least 50% of the diet. You can feed one meal a day raw or mix raw in

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with processed foods. Here are some ways to get raw food into your pet's diet:

1. Frozen raw foods generally come either in a formula of raw meat, grains, and fresh vegetables designed to provide complete nutrition, or as pure raw meat designed to be added as a supplement to other types of food.
2. Only Natural Pet Store offers vegetable and/or grain based mixes by Sojos and Honest Kitchen — Preference that are designed to be added to raw or cooked meat. You simply re-hydrate the mixture and add the meat. The Honest Kitchen Verve Formula can be used this way as well.
3. Adding freeze dried or dehydrated foods is another way to enhance the freshness and variety in your companion's diet. The Honest Kitchen Dehydrated Diets for dogs and cats and the Nature's Variety Prairie Freeze Dried Diets are convenient and easy to feed. Again, this can be for one meal a day or every other day. Alternatively, top dressing dry kibble with freeze dried food adds more bioavailable nutrients, amino acids and enzymes that kibble lacks.
4. If you include dry kibble in the diet, rotate the kibble you use every month or every other month (gradually transition over a week or more). Mix a variety of different high quality canned foods into the diet as a meal or mixed with kibble. If possible, mix raw meat and, for dogs, lightly steamed vegetables and fresh fruits into their food. And YES — you CAN feed your dog or cat healthy people food. If you are cooking a nice meal of pot roast and vegetables for the family, save a portion for your companion — it's a great way to add variety and fresher food into his or her diet. Always remember, however, that to prevent weight gain you must use proportionately less of the kibble when adding canned, freeze dried, dehydrated food, raw meat, or people food.

Keep in mind, the less complicated you make your pet's diet plan, the more likely you are to do it. If it is easiest for you to just reach into the freezer and take out an already prepared and balanced meal, consider stocking up on a frozen raw food formula. If using a premix like Sojos with raw meat sounds doable, by all means try it. Or try feeding your dog raw turkey necks or chicken necks, backs or wings for breakfast 2-3 times per week. You can buy them at the grocery store or from our raw food section. If you can't manage the raw food, but cooking a little extra at each meal is easy for you, then add a bit of your breakfast or dinner to your pet's diet. Make it easy and your companion will reap the benefits through a healthier and more interesting diet.

Here is an overview of the different types of foods available to feed your pet:

Frozen Raw Foods

More and more guardians and veterinarians alike are discovering the health benefits of a raw food diet. Many health issues such as chronic allergies and inflammatory bowel disease can completely clear up on a raw food diet. Many other chronic and degenerative diseases may be reduced or prevented by feeding a biologically appropriate raw diet. As interest grows, so does the availability of a wider variety of pre-formulated, frozen diets for dogs and cats. Only Natural Pet Store offers some excellent Frozen Raw Diets.

Freeze Dried Diets

Another new trend in pet foods is the availability of freeze dried or "cold processed" diets. Since heat is the number one enemy of nutrients in food, freeze drying is a far superior way to preserve the nutrition and biological nature of fresh foods. The natural enzymes, amino acids, and probiotics remain intact. The addition of grains is unnecessary in the processing of the food, so those looking for a grain free diet can include freeze dried foods in their companion's rotation.

Freeze dried food can be fed alone or top dressed on raw or dry food. Freeze dried food is an excellent way to supplement a

dry, kibble diet or offer some variety in the rotation of your companion's diet. It can also be used as a highly nutritious treat, and is an excellent food for puppies and kittens as it can be well re-hydrated and even run through a blender to make it easy for them to eat. Because it is very light weight, it is excellent for camping and traveling. One pound of freeze dried food will typically re-hydrate to the equivalent of about 10-12 5.5 oz. cans of food.

Dehydrated Diets

Dehydrating is the oldest form of food preservation. The Honest Kitchen Dehydrated food is made from the highest quality human, table grade ingredients. The chicken is free range and fed a biologically appropriate diet (no meat meals or animal by-products). The salmon is wild caught from the north pacific.

Dehydration suspends the activity of enzymes in the food until the food is re-hydrated. Dehydrated food loses only 3 to 5% of the nutrients in the original ingredients as the temperatures used are much lower than those used for canning or for extruding kibble, where the loss can be 60 to 80%.

Canned Food & Meats

Canned food is a good option for those needing the convenience of processed foods but are trying to eliminate grains. It is especially important for cats to be on a meat protein based diet with minimal grains as discussed previously. In addition, too much carbohydrate content in the diet can contribute greatly to the problems of obesity, cardiovascular disease, acidosis, arthritis and immune problems.

Canned food is also a great way to supplement kibble for added variety and nutrition. It can also be used to increase the appeal of healthier diets and raw foods for those animals that are "addicted" to their dry kibble and are having a hard time accepting real food. Many kibbles and regular canned foods have flavor enhancers, sweeteners and sodium in them that dogs and cats become accustomed to, causing them

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to reject real food or healthier canned varieties. Give your companion plenty of time and repeat exposures to healthier foods and they will usually make the transition.

Use as much variety in your companion's canned food diet as they will accept. Cats especially, can be finicky. Sometimes crushing or sprinkling their favorite treat over the food can help lure them in for a taste, and they will then eat the food.

Do not feed your companion a food that contains ingredients you would not eat yourself. The canned foods sold at Only Natural Pet Store use human grade, whole food ingredients. Organic foods offer the best of the canned options as they do not contain pesticide residues and other toxins that your companion then has to eliminate through her liver and kidneys. This is especially important for animals with a compromised immune system.

Wysong's Only Meat canned foods are an excellent supplement to dry kibble and as an occasional meal. They include organ meats that provide essential amino acids and contain no fillers, no grains, no synthetic vitamins or minerals or artificial anything. Canine Caviar Canned Canine and Feline Diets are another all meat option, and Icelandic Pet Pate contains pure fish.

Know your Kibble

If you choose to feed kibble as part of your companion's diet, we hope you will consider the source carefully. Become a label reader: the ingredients are not always what you might think. Many consumers are not aware that the pet food industry is an extension of the human food and agriculture industries. Pet food provides a market for slaughterhouse offal, grains considered "unfit for human consumption," and similar waste products to be turned into profit. This waste can include intestines, udders, esophagi, and possibly diseased and cancerous animal parts.

In evaluating a dog or cat food there are a variety of points we look for including the

quality of the protein source, amount of grain by-products, and any artificial ingredients such as preservatives, colors, or flavors among other things. The ingredient listings are regulated by the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO). The ingredients listed on dog and cat food labels must be listed in order of predominance by weight. When determining the main ingredients in a food it is helpful to look for the source of fat or oil in the food — the ingredients listed before the fat or oil source make up the majority of the food (including the fat or oil), those ingredients listed after the fat or oil are present in much smaller amounts. Generally, a good quality food will list at least one specified whole-meat and/or meat meal such as chicken meal, turkey meal, beef meal, etc — but avoid any products containing meat meal of an unspecified source or any meals containing by-products. In addition a high quality kibble will list one or more sources of WHOLE, unprocessed grains in the main ingredients.

The term "meal" means that the meat or other animal materials are not used fresh, but have been heated at extremely high temperatures. The fat rises to the top and is skimmed off. The remaining solids are then pressed to remove the residual liquid to create either chicken meal, turkey meal, beef meal; OR "meat meal" "meat and by-product meal", "poultry meal", etc. In a lesser quality food meat and poultry meals, by-product meals, and meat-and-bone meal are common ingredients which indicates the use of less desirable animal products such as slaughterhouse offal.

One of the main meat sources in the prescription foods sold by many veterinarians is "Chicken by-product meal", which translates to: chicken feet, chicken entrails and other parts of the chicken unfit for human consumption. While the processing of meats and by-products for pet foods can destroy a great deal of the nutrients in the food, it does not necessarily destroy the hormones used to fatten livestock or increase milk production, or drugs such as antibiotics or the barbiturates used to euthanize ani-

mals. This is why foods that use human grade meat sources are the best choice.

Grain sources must be considered, as well. Along with "meat and bone meals," grains such as corn and wheat are usually among the first ingredients listed on both dry dog and cat food labels. Most dry foods use grain products for a large portion of the protein content, but not all protein sources are as readily digested and utilized. Cats, especially, are obligate or "true" carnivores and should derive their protein from meat, not grains. And, as with the "meat" sources used in these foods, the grains are frequently not whole grain but the by-products of milling and processing grains for other uses.

The dry foods and kibble sold at Only Natural Pet Store use human-grade, wholesome ingredients. While we recommend feeding raw food a minimum of 3-5 times a week, and providing the freshest food you can, high quality dry foods can be included in your companion's balanced diet. When feeding dry kibble, be sure to supplement with digestive enzymes and essential fatty acids (like Salmon Oil), and consider nutrition enhancers such as a high quality multivitamin & mineral supplement, Sold Gold's Sea Meal, Wysong's Add-Life, Udo's Choice Pet Essentials, or Missing Link. Top dress with people food such as leftover meats and vegetables. (Don't forget to reduce the serving of kibble in proportion to the table scraps. Overfeeding is a common problem for many companion animals and compounds their risk for poor health and disease.)

About Puppy & Kitten Food

While most manufacturers of pet food market a particular product for growing animals, we do not think this to be necessarily in your companion's best interest. If you've read this far you have some understanding that a raw diet is the best diet for dogs and cats. The same is true for puppies and kittens. Their dietary needs are fully met by a high-quality diet of all raw food or the best possible combination of fresh foods and processed foods you can provide supplemented with raw or cooked meat and vegetables. Many puppy

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and kitten foods encourage the over-feeding of young animals which can lead to a host of chronic health issues later in life. Puppies and kittens should not be round and roly-poly as they are often depicted in photos, they should be appropriately trim just like adult dogs and cats. Growing too fast can predispose an animal to joint problems also.

Prescription Diets Many veterinarians are recommending prescription diets on a more regular basis. While it is a great way for veterinarians and especially the pet food industry to make more money, it is a very poor way to feed most companion animals. These diets are typically highly processed and contain highly questionable ingredients. The most popular brand of these foods uses grains as a principle protein source and includes "chicken by-product meal", which translates into: chicken feet, chicken entrails and other parts of the chicken unfit for human consumption. In addition they contain the preservatives BHA and BHT — common ingredients in floor cleaners and paint products which, according to the manufacturer's Material Safety Data Sheet, may be harmful if ingested, inhaled and through skin contact, and is a skin and eye irritant. Would you knowingly feed that to your companion?

These diets may help certain symptoms simply by providing a change, but they do not address the underlying causes. The best diet for any animal is a biologically appropriate diet.

For dogs and cats that means fresh raw meat is the ideal. Diet is the foundation of good health. For many health issues in companion animals, a change in diet to real food can make all the difference in the world.

Maintaining a Healthy Weight

One of the most commonly asked questions in our veterinary practice is "how much should I feed my companion?" The answer is always the same — only you can determine that through time and experience. Every pet has a different metabolism, lifestyle and caloric need. Indoor cats will usually expend less energy than cats with access to the outdoors. A 50 lb. not-so-active Basset probably needs less than a hard working 50 lb Australian Shepherd. Feeding guidelines on food labels are just that — guidelines. You have to watch your pet carefully and adjust their portion size appropriately.

If you have a hard time seeing the weight until he or she is "fat", use a scale a couple times a month. Stand on a bathroom scale to determine your own weight, (you can do this when no one is looking — your pet won't tell anyone), then pick up your pet and calculate their weight by subtracting yours. (Obviously this is easier with small dogs and cats). You should be able to feel your dog's ribs, and they should not have a lot of "cushion". Their abdomen should be hourglass shaped — they should have a waist. If their stomach protrudes on either side and they "waddle"

when they walk, it's time for a diet. Another sign of an overweight dog is extra fat around the base of the tail.

Overweight pets are at increased risk of developing orthopedic problems, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, respiratory disease, liver disease. Obesity also can affect an animal's mental health and they can become lethargic and less enthusiastic about life. So keep this in mind when you reach for the treat jar for the tenth time and adjust dinner accordingly.

Consider Supplements

Nothing can replace a wholesome well-balanced diet when it comes to promoting good health for your pet. Proper supplementation however, can make a great diet even healthier. In addition, common problems such as arthritis and "aging changes" such as poor coat and decreased activity don't always improve when diet alone is improved. By identifying specific problems and providing additional nutritional support through supplementation, many such conditions can be helped. Only Natural Pet Store offers a wide range of food supplements for dogs and cats. If you are unsure of which supplements are best for your companion, please consider a phone consultation with one of our veterinarians for advice.



Dr. Larry Siegler graduated from Cornell School of Veterinary Medicine in New York in 1980.