

Why Buy Premium Dog Food

Basic Canine Education



CARE SHEET

Developed with and approved by a Qualified Veterinarian

As you shop for dog food, the wide range of foods available often astounds you. You notice some brands are labeled “premium”. What does this mean, how does premium food affect your dog’s health, and how do you choose the right premium food for your dog?

What is Premium? Sources and availability of nutrients is key in the choosing your dog’s food. Dog foods vary in the quality of ingredients, formula and the nutritional value in the food. Premium dog foods typically have higher standards in each of these important variables.

How is Premium better for my dog? Your dog’s nutritional needs are based on age, activity level, temperament, environment and physical makeup. Look for a food that fits your pet and the environment rather than breed. If you’re unsure about what to feed your pet, contact your veterinarian.

Premium dog foods typically have higher quality protein sources, no artificial dyes, and added antioxidants and vitamins. Better ingredients means better digestibility and contributes more to the health of your dog. The nutritional value per kibble is higher than most economy brands, meaning your pet will have to eat less of a premium brand to get the same nutrition. A major difference aside from cost is the poop! If your dog has to eat more of the economy brand than the premium brand for the same nutritional content, there is a lot more waste that you will have to dispose of.

So before you buy, compare the feeding guide of each brand (usually at the back of the bag). You may be surprised to find that premium foods may actually be less expensive and healthier for your dog.

What to look for in dog food When you look at the nutrient analysis on the back of the package, you will find the minimum levels of protein, fiber and fat in the diet. But you also need to carefully examine the ingredient list. Protein can come from a variety of sources, including plant matter, so you need to make sure the bulk of the protein is derived from meat and poultry products. Many pet foods, especially the economy brands, use corn, wheat, gluten, soy, meat and bone meal as a major source of protein, but these are inferior sources of protein for your pet. The list of ingredients is based on their percentages in the food, from greatest to least. It is best to look for diets with meat products making up at least 3 or 4 of the first 6 listed ingredients.

There are a few things to look for before you pick your pet’s food:

High Quality Protein Sources: High quality protein sources should include protein from meat sources. Plant based proteins are commonly used in many dog foods but are not good sources of protein.

Preservatives: Chemical preservatives such as BHA, BHT and ethoxyquin are often added in pet foods. Natural preservatives such as Vitamin C, Vitamin E, and oils of rosemary, clove, or other spices are a better alternative. Natural preservatives do not provide as long a shelf life but are generally safer.

By-Products: By-products can vary from batch to batch. They can contain internal parts of animals such as necks, heads, feet, intestines, and other internal organs. Many manufactures use by-products because it’s less expensive, these may not be the best source of food for your pet.

Antioxidants: Antioxidants are often added to dog food to supplement and help a dog’s immune system. Antioxidants can help deter many diseases including kidney disease, heart disease and cancer.

Artificial Dyes: Artificial dyes are often used in pet foods for visual purposes, but it is not necessary and some have been linked to medical problems.

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How to read labels

Labels differ from brand to brand, and can sometimes be quite challenging to understand. On the plus side, there are special labeling requirements for pet food regulated by the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) and many manufactures adopt AFFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials) standards.

AFFCO Product Name 4 Rules:

95% Rule (Example: Beef for Dogs, Chicken 'n Liver Dog Food)

95% of the product must be the named ingredient (of animal origin), not counting the water added for processing. If more than one item is named then the combination must total 95%, with the first named ingredient of higher quantity than the second. Counting the added water, the named ingredient still must comprise 70% of the product.

25% or "Dinner" Rule (Example: Beef Dinner for Dogs, Chicken formula Dog Food)

25% of the product must contain the named ingredient, not counting the water added for processing. "Platter," "entrée," "nuggets" and "formula" are also used within this rule. If more than one ingredient are named, then at least 3% of each ingredient must be added.

3% or "With" Rule (Example: Dog Food With Beef)

At least 3% of the ingredient must be used in the product. This label can be easily confused with the 95% rule label. "Beef Dog Food" will contain at least 95% beef, while "Dog Food With Beef" will possibly contain only 3% beef.

"Flavor" Rule (Example: Beef flavored Dog Food)

A specific percentage is not required under this rule. But the product must contain an amount sufficient to be detected (using animals trained to prefer specific flavored to verify). The ingredient may or may not be the ingredient named, instead it could be a substance that will give the characterizing flavor of the ingredient.

A good way to verify the product names is reading the ingredient list. All ingredients are required to be listed in order of predominance by weight. Ingredients that are in the labels should appear in the ingredient list accordingly to the rule applied.

What labels don't reveal

"Plump chickens, choice cut beef, fresh grains and wholesome nutritious meals for your dog." Through media and advertising, these are the images the pet food manufacturers wants consumers to believe they are purchasing in their products. But not all manufacturers are the same.

Manufacturers have differing standards regarding the freshness of ingredients they use to make pet food. Some manufacturers may cut costs by using the cheapest ingredients available at the time food is made. Since costs rise and fall, the manufacturers vary the ingredients from batch to batch, resulting in different nutritional value.

You cannot determine the freshness, or quality of an ingredient by reading the label, instead you must **trust** the pet food manufacturer to use quality ingredients and produce food that is best for your pet. Start by choosing brands that put their company reputation on the line for the products they sell and ones that are recommended by your veterinarian.

Note: The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for veterinary care. If you need additional information, please refer to the above sources or contact your veterinarian as appropriate.