

Decoding Pet Food Labels

Helping Pet Owners Read the Fine Print



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Pet owners are often label readers; but reading pet food labels can trigger questions. The following FAQ provides common-sense answers to common questions.



CLIENT QUESTIONS	DVM RESPONSES
<p>“My pet’s food contains wheat gluten. Isn’t gluten bad?”</p>	<p>Gluten is a protein from certain grains and contains essential nutrients and amino acids. The vast majority of pets don’t have adverse reactions to wheat gluten.</p> <p>Unlike people, pets don’t develop celiac disease. It’s also rare for pets to be allergic to grains and much more common for them to be allergic to meat proteins, such as chicken, beef or pork.</p> <p>The bottom line: While a gluten-free pet food can be good, avoiding wheat gluten is not necessary for cats and dogs.</p>
<p>“Isn’t whole chicken better for my pet than chicken meal?”</p>	<p>Meat, poultry or fish meal is simply meat/poultry/fish that is cooked and dried to a powdered-like consistency, which concentrates the protein. The amount of chicken that can be used in dry foods is limited by the high moisture content. Both whole chicken and chicken meal can provide excellent sources of protein.</p> <p>The bottom line: Meat, poultry and fish don’t have to be whole to be nutritious.</p>
<p>“Ugh. This pet food label says the food contains ‘meat by-products.’ I wouldn’t eat by-products; why should my pet?”</p>	<p>By-products from chicken and other meats are the nutritious, edible portions of animals, including organ meats such as liver and kidney, that would otherwise go to waste because they aren’t widely consumed by people in American culture, but are consumed in other cultures.</p> <p>Also, by-products are often the first part of the prey consumed by wild hunters.</p> <p>The bottom line: Meat by-products are highly nutritious.</p>
<p>“Why does the therapeutic diet you prescribed for my pet have such a long ingredient list? I thought fewer ingredients were better.”</p>	<p>Do you eat one food or multiple, varied foods? Chances are, your diet includes protein and fat sources, grains, fruits and vegetables. Why? Both pets and people need a variety of different food ingredients because no single food—no matter how nutritious—provides everything needed.</p> <p>Many pets eat a single commercial pet food every day, but—like you—they require a variety of food ingredients. This variety must be found within the bag or can of food they eat, and food ingredients are carefully selected by pet nutritionists to deliver important nutrients.</p> <p>Therapeutic diets, which are designed for pets with specific health conditions, may contain greater or lesser amounts of key nutrients (e.g. protein or fat) than a well-pet food. Because pets with health conditions have very specific nutrient needs, the use of small amounts of many different ingredients can result in a longer-than-usual ingredient list.</p> <p>The bottom line: It’s the quality—not the quantity—of the ingredients that counts.</p>