

A guide to pet nutrition

For diets, feeding
advice and precautions



Introduction

Feeding your pet a wholesome, high-quality diet is an essential aspect of preventative healthcare and increases their chance of living a longer, healthier life.

In a world of dietary trends, some of which are more beneficial than others, understanding pet food and deciphering what's written on the labels is getting harder and more confusing.

Like humans, our pets 'are what they eat'. Their nutrition should be balanced and fed in a quantity that matches the individual pet's species, breed, age and other lifestyle factors.

This guide will cover pet food, what a balanced diet is and how a prescription diet could help your pet during a time of ill health. We'll also look at 'trending' diets and how to check whether your pet is at a healthy weight. After reading, we hope you'll be more confident when choosing the right diet for your furry friend.



FACT!

The first commercial dog food came about during the 1850-60s. There are two claims for this - James Spratt in England and Spillers in the US, which is now part of Purina.

A brief history of pet food

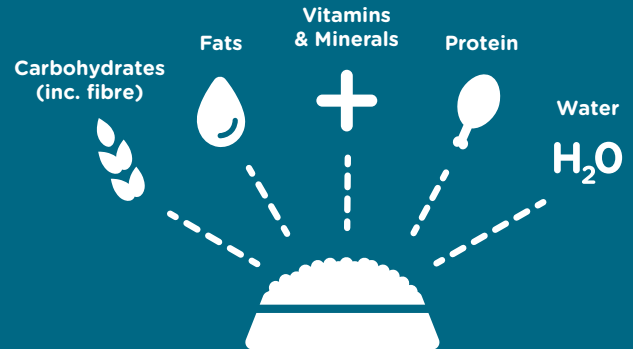
Historically, cats and dogs would hunt for their food. They'd eat sporadically, depending on when they caught prey, and their diet would consist mainly of protein and fat with a limited intake of carbohydrates.

Dogs are believed to have been domesticated by humans 16,000 years ago; by sharing our food, they've adapted to be able to digest and utilise carbohydrates. Commercialised and "complete" pet foods have since become more advanced, and we now have a better understanding of the benefits of including carbs in our pets' meals.

There's little evidence to suggest that cats' digestive systems have evolved in a similar way, although we do know that cats can digest and utilise certain carbohydrates.

What is a Complete Pet Food?

Fed in the correct quantity, a Complete Pet Food provides your pet with all the nutrients they need in one bowl. Just don't forget to add a **separate bowl for water!**



Pet food adverts often trick owners into thinking the most important aspect of their pet's diet is the taste (or palatability) – we may think it's a good sign if our pets polish off their dinner in seconds, but this isn't always the case.

We want our pets to enjoy their food, but certain 'tasty' diets can contain excess salt, fat and sugar. Pets need each of these ingredients, but they must be fed in the correct amount and in proportion to the healthier nutrients.



FACT!

It's tempting to believe that if our dogs eat their food faster, the food is good. This is not necessarily true – some 'gourmet' foods contain a dog's WEEKLY allowance of salt in just 1 portion.

Many of us humanise our pets and treat them to a few too many human snacks. Overfeeding of treats can cause serious health problems and is not advised by vets. It's best to feed your pet a balanced diet, containing all the key nutrients in suitable quantities, and tailored to their species, breed, age and lifestyle.



FACT!

Research has proven that cats don't need different flavoured foods – flavourings are produced for owners, as we often believe our cats need variety.

What exactly is a 'balanced diet'?

To stay healthy, all pets need protein, carbohydrates (which include fibre), fats, vitamins, minerals and water in their diet. However, the quantities will vary depending on the pet's stage of life.

Dogs' and cats' nutritional needs are very different. Cats are strict carnivores, so their diet must contain meat (and nutrients derived from meat).

Healthy dogs and cats

How many calories does your pet need per day?

Use this formula... **(Pet's weight x 30) + 70**

E.g. a 20kg dog will need 670 kcal per day. Individual needs vary, so follow the guidelines on the packaging and discuss with your vet to adjust appropriately.

Pet Treats v Human Treats

Are you overfeeding your dog?



1 large
treat

=



3 Donuts



5 small treats

=



2 Bars

A 4kg cat will need 190 kcal per day as a starting point.

Cats utilise protein differently to dogs, and need more of it in their diet. A cat's diet must also contain these essential nutrients - Taurine, Arginine, Methionine, Cystine, Arachidonic Acid and Vitamin A.



FACT!

Cats eat 15-20 times a day, so if they eat a small amount and then walk away from their food, don't worry, it doesn't mean they don't like it or that something is wrong.

Fibre

Fibre is essential in a dog or cat's diet. Some companies may claim that fibre is just a filler or bulking agent - this is simply not true.

Fibre comes in 2 main forms: indigestible and digestible. Indigestible fibre usually passes through the gut, helps to maintain a feeling of fullness and keeps the bowel moving regularly. Digestible fibre is digested within the intestines and helps to produce other substances that nourish the gut cells and provide a fuel source for the gut bacteria.



'Prescription' and 'Therapeutic' diets explained

Studies have revealed that nutrition can have a great impact on recovery from illness. Thanks to advances in this area, in some cases, nutrition may even be recommended instead of medication.

Whether illness is long or short-term, it can be highly beneficial to provide a diet that's scientifically designed to support a specific disease or symptoms.

Here's an overview of the prescription diets available, and how they work to treat our pets:

Recovery/Convalescence diets

Dense in nutrients and energy, these wet diets are easy to eat and highly digestible, promoting recovery and maintaining bodyweight.

Diabetic diets

Help to smooth out fluctuations in diabetic pets' blood glucose levels. Low-carbohydrate, high-protein diets can help to manage diabetes in cats; high-fibre, low-carbohydrate diets can help manage diabetes in dogs.

Urinary diets

These diets may contain lower amounts of protein, calcium, phosphorus and magnesium to reduce the formation of stones and crystals. In some cases, they can also help with complex conditions like Feline Urinary Disease.

Gastrointestinal/pancreatic diets

Contain less fat and more limited protein sources to aid with gastrointestinal upsets or pancreatitis. These diets also contain added Vitamin B and electrolytes, which are often lost when pets suffer from diarrhoea or vomiting. These diets are highly digestible and may be recommended to be fed before/after an operation.

Joint/arthritis diets

High in Omega-3 fatty acids and antioxidants to support mobility. These diets may also help to maintain healthy cartilage and control weight (in the case of overweight pets).

Obesity diets

High-protein, low-calorie diets can help promote fat loss and help to maintain a lean body mass. These diets can also regulate appetite, promote feelings of fullness and encourage the body to burn fat.



FACT!

Pets should get no more than 5% of their daily calorie intake from treats.

Skin disease diets

Designed to help repair the skin and manage inflammation or itching. Often low in allergens, these diets can also help to manage ear disease, food and environmental allergies.

Hydrolysed diets

Designed to control certain food allergies, these diets contain specialised protein sources, reduced to segments that are too small to trigger some types of allergic reaction.

Renal diets

Low in phosphorus and containing moderate levels of high-quality protein, these diets help pets with chronic kidney problems and can boost their survival time.



FACT!

Dry cat food does not cause kidney disease. A cat eating dry food will just drink more water than one eating wet food.

Dental diets

'Crunchy' kibbles with special fibres or other technologies to reduce tartar and plaque build-up and maintain gum health. Dental diets can be used alongside other dental care treatments (and are not a replacement to brushing your pet's teeth!)



FACT!

*The most common food allergens in dogs are beef, dairy and chicken.**

*The most common food allergens in cats are beef, chicken and fish.**

**based on global data*

Hyperthyroid diets

Contain limited iodine levels, which helps to manage hyperthyroidism in cats and in some cases, may reduce the need for medication.

Heart disease diets

May be supplemented with amino acids, such as taurine, but also restricted in salt levels and high in healthy Omega 3 fatty acids.

Liver disease diets

Specific protein sources help to reduce the build-up of toxins. These diets are high-energy and contain limited amounts of certain elements, such as copper.

Brain health/cognitive diets for dogs

Contain high levels of Medium Chain Triglyceride and Lipoic Acid (toxic to cats) as an alternate source of energy for the brain – helps increase cognitive health, support brain & brain cell function and can even reduce signs of “Canine Dementia” disease.

Microbiome diets

Probably one of the most exciting fields of nutritional science right now, both in humans and pets, these diets contain added probiotics and/or prebiotics to support intestinal health and immune system.



FACT!

“Scatter feeding” helps to provide mental stimulation, so throwing kibble over your lawn can enrich your pet’s life.

‘Life stage’ diets explained

Puppy & kitten

The ‘growth phase’ is the time in a puppy/kitten’s life when feeding the correct diet is most important. Their immune system, social behaviour, skeleton and joints are developing and it is vital that they’re fed the right diet to ensure they reach their full potential.

Dietary needs can vary according to the size of the pet. Larger breeds take longer to reach their adult weight than smaller breeds. For an accurate estimate of when it’s time for your puppy or kitten to move to a junior or adult diet, always chat with a veterinary professional.



Adult

An Adult diet will usually cover dogs from 1-8 years of age and cats from 1-11 years of age. Dietary requirements can vary from pet to pet (e.g. how often they exercise, whether or not they're pregnant or feeding a litter.)

Adult diets can help with keeping pets' teeth clean, maintaining a healthy weight and body condition, and even hairball control and urinary issues in cats.



FACT!

Preventing obesity and maintaining a lean bodyweight can reduce the risk of arthritis and even extend longevity.

Senior

Just like humans, our pets' organ function can deteriorate as they grow older. Senior diets provide support for issues like:

- 🐾 **Reduced or limited movement**
- 🐾 **Poorer coat quality**
- 🐾 **Weight gain or loss**
- 🐾 **Decreased immune function**
- 🐾 **Limited ability to ingest nutrients**
- 🐾 **The early stages of certain diseases (e.g. kidney disease)**

Senior diets often contain fewer calories and work to support kidneys and arthritic joints. If you think a senior diet may be beneficial to your pet, have a chat with your vet or nurse.



Trending diets – yay or nay?

Raw feeding

This has gained popularity in recent years, but no long-term benefits of raw feeding have yet been proven. Experts know that cooked food is easier to digest, but that cooking breaks down certain nutrients (vitamins, fatty acids, amino acids), which then need to be re-added.

Many experts are concerned that raw feeding poses health risks. Raw meat can contain pathogens, such as Salmonella and E Coli, which can be passed from pets to humans. Although cats and dogs can digest raw meat, there is the potential risk of bacteria, which can linger in their mouths, saliva and faeces. Raw food diets could put owners at a greater risk, especially children, elderly people or those who are immunocompromised.

Some raw foods may not follow strict regulations, and may even contain disease-causing pathogens/bacteria. Take care when feeding raw bones too – they can splinter and cause serious internal damage, puncture the gut, cause obstructions (which will need surgery) or even fracture teeth.

For more info about the benefits and risks of raw feeding for your specific pet, have a chat with a veterinary professional and make sure you're fully aware of the potential risks associated with raw feeding before you make your decision. Please remember, your veterinary team will have the best interests at heart for your pet and family.

High-protein

The popularity of high-protein diets is also driven by what cats and dogs ate historically, and in the wild. Modern pets (dogs especially) are well adapted to diets rich in carbohydrates, fats and protein.

Pets can't store excessive protein, meaning that in many cases, it isn't put to any use by their body. Diets high in meat can lead to incorrect calcium:phosphorus ratios – this can inhibit bone growth and worsen pre-existing kidney damage.

That said, protein can be a useful source of calories for active pets. Cats are more accustomed to high-protein diets.

Gluten & Grain-free

Apart from a small group of Irish Setters and certain Border Terriers, the gluten intolerance that affects humans is not recognised in dogs – most can digest gluten easily.

Grains are a rich source of nutrients. They contain protein, essential fatty acids, B vitamins, minerals and fibre, which can be beneficial for the bowel and pets suffering from diabetes, as well as help to keep the anal glands emptied naturally.



FACT!

Grains are not a common cause of food allergy in dogs or cats.

Kibble-based grain-free diets often use pea starch as a replacement starch form.

Many view grains as fillers, containing lots of indigestible fibres – but this isn't always the truth. Most high-quality pet

food brands will add the appropriate levels of indigestible and digestible fibres and include the most beneficial nutrients.

As an owner, what should I look for?

- 🐾 Choose a lifestage or prescription diet appropriate to your pet's age and health.
- 🐾 When buying pet food, make sure the packaging states 'Complete and balanced', and that the company has a high standard of quality assurance. If in doubt, ask your veterinary team.
- 🐾 If a pet food is high-quality, you should see on its packaging:
 - 🐾 The phrase 'Complete and balanced'
 - 🐾 The country of manufacture
 - 🐾 Minimal legal requirements
 - 🐾 Contact details for enquiries/complaints
 - 🐾 A money-back guarantee
 - 🐾 Meets FEDIAF and local authority standards
 - 🐾 Has passed feeding trials or made efforts to ensure the formula line has been subject to feeding trials
 - 🐾 'Clinically proven'
 - 🐾 The protein source - Protein may come from by-products, but this isn't always bad. Sustainable and high-quality by-products such as cheese and yoghurt can add plenty of nutritional value.

- 🐾 Weigh your pet regularly, and make sure you're feeding them the correct portion size (you should find this on your chosen pet food's packaging). Remember that every pet is different – use your own judgement and don't hesitate to speak to your vet or nurse if your pet is losing/gaining weight.
- 🐾 Unless advised otherwise by a veterinary professional, if you're changing your pet's diet, do so gradually – ideally over 7-10 days. Start with 10% new food, 90% old food, then 20%-80% the next day and so on. For dogs, you can mix the two food types into the same bowl; for cats, it's best to use two separate bowls. Bear in mind that fussier pets may take time to adjust to the smell, texture or taste of new food.

Body Condition Scoring

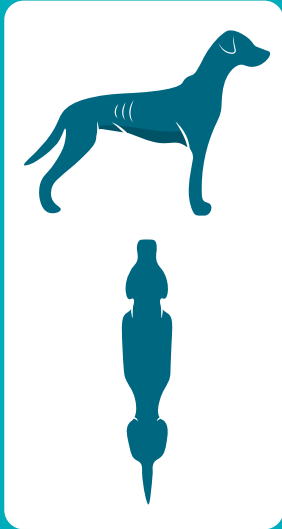
Body condition scoring (BCS) is a system developed by vets to help assess whether pets are at the correct weight. After all, pets come in all shapes and sizes, just like humans; weight alone is not a great measure of overall health. Use the charts below to identify your pet's body condition score.

Look at our **Body Condition Score** diagrams for cats and dogs on the **next page!**



UNDERWEIGHT

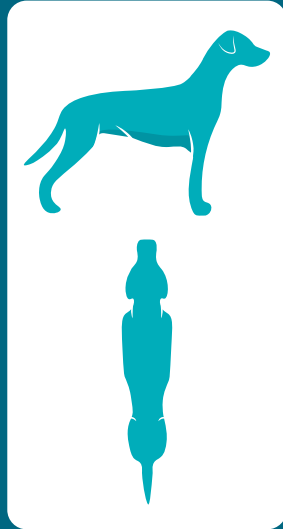
1-3



Ribs, spine and hips are sticking out and easy to see. There is no (or very little) body fat or muscle. The dog almost looks like they are breathing in very deeply.

IDEAL

4-5



You can feel the ribs, spine and hips easily. You can see the ribs when the dog is moving, twisting or turning. There is a gentle abdominal tuck but it's not too severe.

OVERWEIGHT

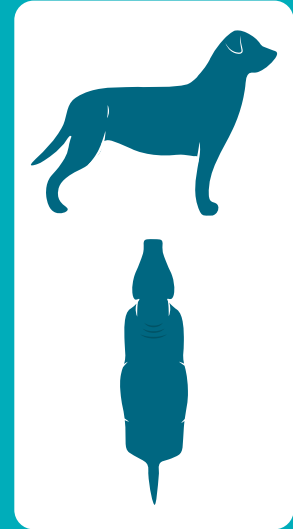
6



The dog weighs 10-20% more than their ideal weight. You struggle to feel their ribs, you spot fat on the body, the back is broad and there is no abdominal tuck.

OBESE

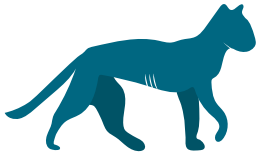
7-9



The dog weighs over 20% more than their ideal weight. You can't feel their ribs. You see fat around the spine, neck, chest, belly and on the base of the tail.

UNDERWEIGHT

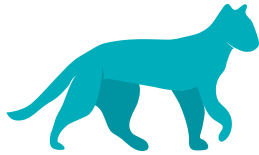
1-3



You can see the ribs from all angles. They're easy to feel because the layer of fat is absent or very thin. There's a severe abdominal tuck below the ribcage.

IDEAL

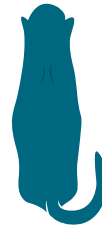
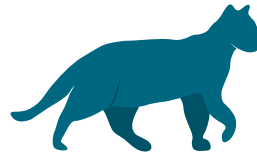
4-5



You can feel the ribs. They are covered by a thin but substantial layer of fat. You can spot an abdominal tuck but it isn't too pronounced.

OVERWEIGHT

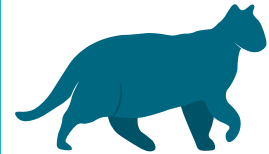
6



The cat is 10-20% over their ideal body weight. You struggle to feel their ribs. The back is broad and there is no abdominal tuck - the abdomen is round.

OBESE

7-9



The cat is 20% or more over their ideal body weight. Ribs are hard to spot. The body is broad, the abdomen is sagging, you can see fat around their neck and limbs.

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