



WHAT SHOULD I FEED MY DOG OR CAT?

written by Jessica Slade, DVM

There are so many options for pet food diets on the market today, it can be overwhelming to choose one. Grain-free, raw, freeze dried, homemade, fresh loafs, dry kibble, by-products, etc. I hope this summary will shed some light on how your veterinarian evaluates diets and makes recommendations.

“NO” to grain-free diet

- 30 years ago, taurine was identified as a vital amino acid in cat diets. If left out, the cats developed Dilated Cardiomyopathy (DCM) since they cannot make their own. A few years later, some dogs also developed DCM in relation to taurine deficiency. Further research revealed that although most dogs can make their own taurine, certain dog breeds cannot.¹
- Today's diet associated cardiomyopathy has NOT been linked with taurine. Although the exact cause has not yet been identified, a link to grain-free diets has been confirmed. This is why we recommend saying “no” to grain-free diets until further research is published.¹

“NO” to raw diets

- Raw meat can host a variety of disease-causing organisms such as:
Bacteria (E. coli, Salmonella, Yersinia, Campylobacter, Listeria, and Mycobacterium bovis)²
Parasites (Toxoplasma)²
- The pets who ingest the meat, as well as the people who handle the meat or pet feces, may become infected with a food borne illness which can be serious or fatal.²
- Freezing, dehydration or freeze-drying methods do not kill all the bacteria in the food.²

“NO” to homemade diets*

- “Published recipes have been found to be almost uniformly unbalanced, which can lead to nutritional deficiencies or excesses.”³
- It is difficult to provide the vitamins and minerals necessary to balance a diet using over the counter human supplement varieties as they cannot be accurately divided for the individual pet. There are animal supplement varieties available but an animal nutritionist should be consulted in order to assess what is actually needed in order to properly balance the diet.³
- Homemade diets are more expensive, inconvenient, and more time consuming overall than a commercially available pet food diet.³

* If you truly want to pursue a homemade diet, please visit www.wynwooddogfood.com as a veterinarian has been involved in the creation of the supplement and recipes for homemade dog food in order to ensure they are balanced.

“YES” to AAFCO approved

- AAFCO stands for Association of American Feed Control Officials. It is a private, non-profit corporation featuring a process for defining ingredients used in animal feed and pet food. ⁶
- AAFCO Pet Food Label Statement lets you know if the food contains the essential nutrients, how that was determined, and what life stage it is appropriate for. ⁶
- Products marketed as “complete and balanced” for a certain life stage have met or exceeded nutritional adequacy standards established by AAFCO. ⁶
- Products marketed as for “intermittent or supplemental feeding only” do not meet AAFCO standards. ⁶

“YES” to WSAVA approved

- WSAVA stands for Worldwide Small Animal Veterinary Association. The Global Nutrition Committee within WSAVA offers expert, evidence-based nutritional information and has developed guidelines based on this research. ⁴
 - WSAVA’s Nutritional Committee has a goal to support the veterinary healthcare team and pet owners to ensure that dogs and cats are on an optimal nutrition plan tailored to the needs of the individual pet. It does not endorse, recommend, or support specific products or companies. ⁴
 - WSAVA Guidelines ask the following questions to Pet Food Manufacturers:
 1. Do they employ a Nutritionist?
Appropriate qualifications are a PhD or board certification in animal nutrition ⁵
 2. Who formulates the diet?
Appropriate qualifications are a PhD or board certification in animal nutrition ⁵
 3. What is the quality control process for ingredients and finished products?
Diets should meet AAFCO guidelines and proper quality control methods ⁵
 4. What kind of product research or nutrition studies have been conducted?
Pet food companies are not required to conduct research, but when they do, it indicates a commitment to animal health and wellness ⁵
 5. Is there a Nutrition Adequacy Statement on the label?
Foods should be “complete” with all the required nutrients and indicate the current life stage of the pet (growth, adult, etc) per AAFCO standards ⁵
 6. How many calories per gram or serving of food on label?
Obesity prevalence is increasing in pets so having easy access to accurate calorie information can help prevent unintended overfeeding. ⁵
 7. Does the company provide immediate contact information such as a phone number or email address?
Company representatives should be easily accessible for questions and be able to provide “average” or “typical” analysis for all essential nutrients in the food. ⁵
 8. Who makes the food?
You should know if the company makes the food or uses a third party manufacturer. ⁵
- **Use caution if a company cannot provide or will not provide information to answer these questions.** ⁵

** Pet Food Companies that meet WSAVA guidelines include: Purina ProPlan, Hill's Science Diet, Royal Canin, Eukanuba, Iams and Wellness.**

What you should know about "by-products"

- Blue Buffalo's \$50 million annual advertising campaign has flooded the pet food market with claims that it never contains poultry by product meal. However, in 2014, Purina filed a lawsuit against Blue Buffalo for false advertising when their diets were in fact found to contain poultry by product meal. Purina's spokesperson reports "Only when faced with undeniable evidence from the lawsuit has Blue Buffalo admitted the truth to the court: a 'substantial' and 'material' portion of Blue Buffalo pet food sold over the past several years contained poultry byproduct meal. It is unclear to us if or when this practice stopped, or whether any Blue Buffalo pet food containing byproduct meal is still on store shelves."⁷

- AAFCO defines meat by-products as "the non-rendered, clean parts, other than meat, derived from slaughtered mammals. It includes, but is not limited to, lungs, spleen, kidneys, brain, livers, blood, bone, partially de-fatted low temperature fatty tissue, and stomachs and intestines freed of their contents. It does not include hair, horns, teeth and hoofs. It shall be suitable for use in animal feed. If it bears a name descriptive of its kind, it must correspond thereto." To put it another way, it is most of the parts of the animal other than the muscle tissue, including the internal organs and bones. It includes some of the parts people eat (such as livers, kidneys and tripe), but also parts that are not typically consumed by humans in the US. Some by-products, like udders and lungs.⁸

- AAFCO defines poultry by-products as non-rendered clean parts of carcasses of slaughtered poultry such as heads, feet, viscera, free from fecal content and foreign matter except in such trace amounts as might occur unavoidably in good factory practice. If the product bears a name descriptive of its kind, it must correspond thereto." Similar to "meat by-products," it is most of the parts of the bird that would not be part of a raw, dressed whole carcass. That may include the giblets (heart, gizzard and liver) but also other internal organs, heads and feet.⁸

**For more information regarding AAFCO's definitions on ingredient labeling, please visit <https://www.aafco.org/Consumers/What-is-in-Pet-Food>.

Sources

1. Mark Rishniw, BVSc, PhD, DACVIM (SA-IM), DACVIM (CA). Diets and Heart Disease in Dogs and Cats. VIN. Date Published: 03/05/2019
2. WSAVA. Raw Meat Based Diets For Pets.
3. Susan Wynn, Claudia Kirk, Joe Bartges, Craig Datz. Homemade Pet Foods. Published 4/10/07 and revised 7/6/17
4. WSAVA. Global Nutrition Guidelines.
5. WSAVA. Selecting a Pet Food.
6. Aafco.org
7. Blue Buffalo admits to byproduct meal, Purina responds. Pet Food Industry. <https://www.petfoodindustry.com/articles/5166-blue-buffalo-admits-to-byproduct-meal-purina-responds>
8. What is in Pet Food. AAFCO. <https://www.aafco.org/Consumers/What-is-in-Pet-Food>.