



Basic guidelines for selecting a good quality dog (cat) food.

- Meat sources should be THREE of the first five ingredients listed
- Quality, Quality, Quality! Look for the best quality ingredients possible. Look for “Local” “Organic” Grass Fed” “Pasture Raised” (Do the same with yours and your family’s food too!)
- NO by-products
- NO corn
- NO preservatives especially BHT or BHA
- NO sugars, corn syrup, glucose, molasses etc. Be careful, sugar goes by many names
- Grain free preferred but at the very least avoid wheat/gluten/soy/corn **See the grain free/heart study concerns note below. Cats don’t produce a grain digesting enzyme.*
- NO colors
- make sure lists the source of meats, fats etc. i.e. chicken or beef, not just “meat” or “animal”.
- NO ingredients that aren’t FOOD. If you can’t pronounce it and don’t recognize it, don’t buy it.
- Smaller companies typically have better quality and quality control (avoid M&M Mars, P&G etc.)

***CATS** – Basically the same rules.

Keep in mind cats need even more protein (meat) than dogs.

Organ meats are very important in a cat’s diet.

Grain free is also important.

Wet foods and occasional air dried (Ziwi Peak or Wysong) are best for cats.

Sadly, I have not found one local store that carries a good quality cat food.

My favorites for cats are Ziwi Peak, Wysong, and Darwin’s Naturals

Cat treats. Be aware you will create a monster 😊 I do have freeze dried minnows on hand but I don’t treat often.

Variety! Vary the protein sources and even the type and brand. Variety will ensure better nutrition, healthier gut and help keep the allergies and food sensitivities (inflammation) at bay that can come from eating the same thing all the time.

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I typically have 3-4 choices on hand and may feed one in the morning and another at night or a few days of one then another.

Just because your dog ingests their food doesn't mean they process and absorb the nutrients well.

Dry Kibble vs Wet, Raw, Fresh, Air Dried or Dehydrated

Keep in mind, the more processed a food is the less nutrition remains.

Eating poop, rocks, sticks, always searching for food, eating but still not looking well nourished, all these are clear indicators that something is missing from the diet.

The extreme heat used in making dry kibble destroys the enzymes needed to digest as well as any good fats most other nutritional value. While I do have a bag of good quality dry kibble on hand usually, I feed it less than any other. *Cats especially should eat wet food.

Contrary to popular belief, dry food does nothing to help keep teeth clean. See more on teeth below.

Supplements can help. Supplements such as Addlife or Wild things from Wysong are very good. <https://www.wysong.net/dog-supplements>
Nutri Thrive is another great product <https://ultimatepetnutrition.com/>

Adding probiotics and digestive enzymes (as in the above supplements) are a huge help. Raw foods or dried raw still have their natural enzymes.

Concerned about grain free? Many vets are now warning against GF foods. The concern, as I understand it, is the pea and lentil protein. Here's the thing, as the guidelines above state, MEAT should be the main if not the only source of protein in your dog's food. Peas and lentils are cheaper sources of protein so many companies now use them as the main protein source. It's ok to have some but they should not be listed in the top ingredients.

Concerned about the slowly changing foods myth?

If the food is good quality, the dog is healthy, it's gut is healthy, switching foods should NOT be an issue. Do you eat the same thing every day, every meal? If you eat eggs for breakfast one day and pancakes the next do you end up at the doctor with a stool sample?

Where to buy? Local feed stores often have many good options and the staff is usually quite knowledgeable about the quality of the foods and integrity of the makers. *Chewy.com* and even *Amazon* are also options. Darwin's Naturals and Chewy ship to my door every 8 weeks. Easy!

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As a rule, if you can buy it at your local grocery store, Walmart or Target, it's NOT a good quality pet food.

Many brands that started out producing great products have been bought out by large companies and quality greatly suffered. Do your homework.

Be aware: The ingredient list may look good but the quality of those ingredients is just as important.

All meat, is NOT created equal. Many (most?) manufacturers use rotting, diseased meat that was turned away for use as human grade. You may have seen one of the many stories on dogs getting sick and dying from euthanasia drugs found in their dog food. Label said meat... not required to tell you any more than that. Scary? Yes!

A few great options:

Darwin's Naturals - Offer a great introductory package. (They also offer prescription food for some common issues) <https://www.darwinspet.com/>

Ziwi Peak

Wysong

Open Farm

Tip: Go to the company websites. They have some great educational information! Especially Wysong & Darwins.

Also good choices:

Nutra-Source/Pure Vida

Honest Kitchen

Vital Essentials

Fromm

Is good food expensive? It's all relative.

- Feed nutrient dense food and you'll feed less.
- Good diet will eliminate the need for many medications and vet bills. Can your dog still get sick? Yes, of course, but they will get sick less, not get as sick and recover quicker.
- Smaller poops and less stinky poops! Need I say more?
- Behavior issues **Balanced diet = Balanced dog**

I've seen MANY dogs get off anxiety meds or supplements, aggression and behavior issues disappear, allergies disappear, nervous, or overstimulated energy disappear simply because their greatly diets improved!

What about table scraps?

If it's meets the "good food" requirement's, sure! Meat, veggies, all good to share. Be aware of how much you give and reduce (or eliminate) your dogs regular breakfast/dinner accordingly. With meat, we tend to want to feed the fat scraps to our pets. DON'T. While they do need fats, excess fats can cause issues such as pancreatitis.

To curb begging, try setting the scraps aside and feeding later in your dog's bowl.

A word on making food for your dog.

To me it sounds like a nice idea, "I love you so much I'm willing to do this" and not knowing what pre-made foods are good choices (now you do!) however, it's a lot of work that to be honest, I haven't seen many do properly. A typical home cooked dog food I see is chicken breast and carrots, sweet potatoes, rice, and peas. So? Chicken breast: No fat, no bone. Rice: starch (sugar) Carrots & sweet potatoes: sugar, starch (sugar) and usually in a large quantity, Peas: legumes not veg. No variety, not enough protein, high in carbs, few vitamin sources, no organ meats (minerals) no calcium sources etc. Not nutrient dense ingredients. Think more money, more poop, more work, not the nutritional bang you're hoping for.

Sourcing the ingredients, making a variety of meals, making sure to meet all the nutritional requirements, a lot of work. Can it be done? Yes. If you choose this route, the same basic guidelines apply and you'll want to do your research.

I'm 100% happy with the foods/brands I currently use. I'm confident in the quality, nutritional value and price. I don't feel I could duplicate it myself and I don't really want to try 😊

What I want you to take away.

There are many pet foods available with new ones on the market every day. Don't just ask for a recommendation. Educate yourself so you know the what's and why's that make up a good healthy diet. With that knowledge, you'll be able to decide for yourself what the right choices are for you and your pets. Keep in mind that things change, the foods you choose to feed today may not be available or be the same quality two years from now.

A Word About Teeth

Bad breath is NOT normal! Bacteria from dirty teeth and gums goes directly into your pets bloodstream and negatively affects their health. We have seen several dogs and cats with organ infections (including heart) all from bad teeth.

In all of my experience, with my pet's as well as the hundreds of guests that have stayed with us, I have NEVER seen a dental "treat" of any sort that works. They are made of things I would not give my pet. They add unnecessary calories and they cost money that can be better spent.

While something like a Nylabone Dental Dino to gnaw on, or a marrow bone once a week are not bad ideas, nothing replaces regular dental care in the form of cleanings.

Brushing your pet's teeth can help prolong the time needed between vet cleanings but they will still be needed.

I have always felt that I chose to have my pets, they did not choose me. In choosing to have them in my life I accepted the responsibility for their lives. To me that means nothing less than providing the best life I can for them. The more I learn, the better I do. 😊