

Hazeldean Animal Hospital

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Misconceptions about Pet Food

On a daily basis we hear from clients a lot of misconceptions about pet food. We wanted to address some of these concerns and open up the conversation. This conversation could go on forever, so if you have any further questions please don't hesitate to contact us.

A Weight Control food will be low calorie and help my pet lose weight.

The only regulated words regarding reduced calorie content are: "light", "lite", "low calorie", "less" and "reduced calories". All other phrases like Weight Control are just marketing; they may or may not mean that the product has low calories. Also even the Royal Canin Weight Control diet that we sell is not a weight loss diet but is meant to control weight in those chubby prone individuals. Ultimately, many factors go into weight loss including calories per cup (which can range from about 200 kcal/cup to over 600 kcal/cup), fibre and protein contents just to name a few. If you cannot find out the calorie content of a food, or if it is over 350 kcal per cup, this is not the right product for an overweight animal.



All life stage food

A pet food company can market any food that meets the requirements for growth and reproduction as an all life stage food. This means these are foods that meet the requirements for a growing individual. These products generally have a higher protein calorie and fat levels compared to their adult counterparts. This could lead to overtaxing of the kidneys, pancreas and liver in an adult, and also contribute to obesity. Also if a food manufacturer is paying attention to urinary health (which they should be) an adult diet should have a slightly acidic pH whereas a growth formula should be a neutral pH.



Grain Free is better, and will help with my pet's allergies.

The latest craze in pet food is grain free diets. This has come about as a reflection of what is happening in the human food market. Celiac disease is a condition seen in people. Gluten sensitivity has not been shown in pets, except for a rare condition seen in Irish Setters. Often foods that are advertised as gluten free still have grains in them. For instance, I saw a “grain free” diet the other day that oats were the 2nd ingredient.



Also owners will often try and use these diets to help with an allergic condition. The problem is that some of the most common allergens are meats. Also since these diets aren't made to be hypoallergenic there is often contamination from other diets from the same facilities. True hypoallergenic diets are only run through the equipment after the machines have been cleaned and there is no risk of contamination.

The third problem we often see with grain free diets is that the carbohydrate to replace the grains is often more starchy and therefore higher in calories than traditional grains used. Grain free diets therefore tend to be calorie dense and many contain sweet potatoes that can increase risk of bladder stones.

Ingredient Formulation vs. Nutrient

Marketing also puts a lot of focus on ingredients which seems to deflect from a focus on true nutrition. Some of these “bad ingredients” owners are cautioned to stay away from

include corn and chicken by products. Corn – specifically field corn not sweet corn (like we eat) can be quite nutritious and provides not only a source of starch and fibre, but also a good source of protein, omegas, vitamins and minerals. Also the delineation between chicken and by products is not as clear cut as companies would make you believe. By products can include high quality ingredients such as heart and liver, while chicken skin, bones and tail are classified as chicken. It is important to cut through the marketing fiction and look at the nutrient content and not just the ingredient list to make your pet food decision.

Guaranteed vs Typical Analysis

Owners will also often look at the side of the bag and think this information represents what is in the bag. The list of percentages that you see on the bag of food are what is called the guaranteed analysis. The guaranteed analysis is required by law, but actually gives very little information. When you look closely you will notice it says minimum or maximum next to all these percentages. So it is saying there is at least 23% protein, it isn't actually saying how much protein is in the food. A typical analysis is what is needed to let you know what is actually in the food and that is what we see in the grocery store on human food products.

Guaranteed Analysis:		
Crude Protein	Min.	21 %
Crude Fat	Min.	13 %
Crude Fiber	Max.	12 %
Moisture	Max.	11 %
Ash	Max.	5.5 %
Calcium	Min.	0.5 %
Phosphorus	Min.	0.4 %
Vitamin E	Min.	400 IU/kg
Ascorbic Acid* (Vitamin C)	Min.	75 mg/kg
*Not recognized as an essential nutrient by the AAFCO Dog Food Nutrient Profiles.		

All in all, this is information meant to help you make more informed decisions and start the conversation. If you want any further information don't hesitate to contact us to further explain any information.