

A blue-tinted photograph of a dog, a cat, and a puppy. The dog is at the top, looking up with its mouth open. The cat is in the middle, looking forward. The puppy is at the bottom, looking forward.

CANADIAN
VETERINARY
MEDICAL
ASSOCIATION

A COMMONSENSE

GUIDE TO

FEEDING YOUR

DOG AND CAT



CVMA
Pet Food
Certification
Program

WHY SHOULD I KNOW MORE ABOUT PROPER NUTRITION FOR MY PET?

Proper feeding is a very important part of pet care.

Proper nutrition is essential not only to the daily health maintenance of your dog or cat, but is also vitally important in the management of many diseases.

By knowing and understanding what your pet's nutritional requirements are, you can make sure that it will remain healthy and active throughout its lifetime.



YOUR PET'S DIET MUST INCLUDE SIX BASIC GROUPS

WATER : water is the most essential nutrient of all, and is vital to all living creatures. All pets should have a generous supply of clean, fresh water at all times. When travelling, be sure that a supply of water is available. The heat and stress of travel may increase your pet's need for water.

PROTEIN : protein is essential to the body because it provides the building blocks, called amino acids with which the body performs vital functions and rebuilds its tissues.

CARBOHYDRATE : these provide the animal with fuel for the production of energy.

FAT : besides providing a good concentrated source of energy, fats in the diet are necessary for the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins and are a source of essential, unsaturated fatty acids. Fat also improves the palatability (taste) and digestibility of the diet.

MINERALS : minerals have important regulatory functions in the body. The macro minerals (calcium, phosphorus, potassium, sodium and magnesium) comprise the bulk of minerals. The micro minerals (iron, zinc, copper, manganese, iodine, and selenium) are equally vital in controlling many important functions needed for life.

VITAMINS : the main purpose of vitamins is to promote and regulate various physiological processes in the body. They are divided in two groups : fat-solubles (A, D, E, and K), and water-soluble (thiamine, riboflavin, niacin, pantothenic acid, folic acid, vitamin B6, choline, and vitamin B12).

These nutrients must be provided together in optimal proportions to be most effective in the diet.

WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF PET FOOD AVAILABLE?

1. DRY (6-10% MOISTURE) : Available as kibbles, meal or expanded particles, this form of pet food is very convenient and is usually the most popular for both dogs and cats. The sources of protein are derived from meat, chicken, or soy (vegetable protein), and other ingredients may include by-products, fish meal, corn, and meat meal. All of these ingredients contribute nutrients for the animal.

2. SOFT-MOIST (23-40% MOISTURE) : Available in individual portion or in bulk, this form is soft in texture and easy to chew. Common ingredients are similar to dry food, but the texture is moist and chewy.

3. CANNED (68-80% MOISTURE) : This form is available in a wide assortment of flavours. Since the product is held in a container, textures range from stew to meatloaf. Common ingredients include meats, meat by-products, cereals and vegetables.

4. INTERMEDIATE MOISTURE (45-55% MOISTURE) : These are specialized products which are usually meat based in a sausage or loaf format. Common ingredients include meats, meat by-products and cereals.



HOW DO I KNOW IF A PET FOOD IS OF GOOD QUALITY AND NUTRITIONALLY ADEQUATE FOR MY PET?

There are no government regulations for assuring quality and consistency of pet foods in the Canadian marketplace. Commercial pet foods on the market are generally good; however, there can be extreme variations in their nutritional quality.

Unfortunately, prior to 1976, there were no means available to consumers to ensure that the pet foods purchased on the market were of good quality and met their pets' basic nutritional requirements.



In 1976, the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) developed a third-party quality assurance program called the CVMA Pet Food Certification Program. It is a voluntary program to test a manufacturer's products and to certify those products that meet the CVMA standards.

CVMA certification includes the following :

- Products are tested by the CVMA in independent laboratories.
- Products must prove, with 12 months' production, that they are capable of meeting a normal pet's nutritional requirements throughout all phases of life.
- Feeding trials are done to ensure that the nutrients in the products are not only present, but biologically available or digestible to the animal.
- Once a product achieves certification, it is monitored to ensure that it continuously meets CVMA's high standards for composition, digestibility and palatability.
- Only those pet foods that have met and continue to meet the CVMA's standards may display the seal of certification.

HOW TO READ A PET FOOD LABEL

The Consumers Packaging and Labelling Acts and Regulations require only that product name, net quantity of food, and name of manufacturer or dealer be stated on the label. There is no law stating that manufactures have to include anything else, although most will include information such as a guaranteed analysis, list of ingredients, and a nutritional statement.

GUARANTEED ANALYSIS : This indicates the results of an analysis of the product, usually carried out by the manufacturer. It lists the minimum or maximum amounts of crude protein, fat, moisture, fibre and ash (minerals) contained in the food. However, the label does not guarantee the availability or digestibility of the ingredients. The analyses on most labels are on an “as is” basis which includes the water or moisture in the product.

This makes it very difficult to compare products, because they all have different levels of water. To determine the percentage of nutrients on a dry-matter basis, divide the nutrients by the amount of dry matter. For example, if the analysis reads 75% moisture (water), 7% protein and 2% fat, this indicates that there is 25% dry matter and the product would therefore have 28% protein and 8% fat on a dry-matter basis.

LIST OF INGREDIENTS: These may be listed in decreasing order by weight or percentage. This type of listing gives no indication of the quantity or quality of the various ingredients.



NUTRITIONAL STATEMENT : This simply states the purpose of the diet ; e.g. dog food, cat food, or a statement on the adequacy of the product. References to the NRC (National Research Council) standards are no longer permitted by that organization. Any reference to nutritional standards for products coming from the United States should be to the American Association of Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) nutritional standards for dogs and cats. Whether the reference is to the NRC or the AAFCO, it must be borne in mind that neither one of these organization tests pet foods, and statements that the product meets NRC or AAFCO standards do not imply endorsement by either group or that the product in fact meets the nutrition standards set by them.

If a product bears the CVMA logo and the words “certified by the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association”, you can be assured that the product is being tested continuously by CVMA for nutritional quality and has met the CVMA standards, which are designed for optimum nutrition and are higher than the current U.S. NRC standards.

Products certified by CVMA must also conform to labelling and advertising guidelines, which are not required by the Consumer Packaging and Labelling Regulations. The CVMA Pet Food Certification Program is the only program that involves a third party to test and assure consumers that the statements made on a pet food label are valid.

HOW TO FEED YOUR DOG

HOW MUCH SHOULD I FEED MY DOG?

The amount of food your dog needs depends both on the nutritional value of the diet and your dog's individual requirements; such as presence or absence of stress, level of activity, health status and stage of life (growth, pregnancy, etc.).

Many pet food labels indicate amounts that should be fed based on the animal's weight, however, this may be misleading, since your pet may require more or less food, depending on its needs. Your dog should only eat whatever amount is necessary to maintain its optimal body weight and condition. Most dogs should have little fat under the skin and the ribs may not be visible, but are easily felt. If your dog is overweight, feed less. Obesity can cause a variety of health problems and shorten your dog's life.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I FEED MY DOG?

There are two ways to feed your dog, free-choice or scheduled-feeding.

Free-choice feeding (food is left out all the time and your dog can eat as much, and whenever it wants) is not recommended. Besides contributing to obesity, free-choice feeding may lead to skeletal and bone disorders in puppies during their growing phase.

The preferred method of feeding is scheduled feeding (a specific amount at certain times). Puppies should be fed 2-3 meals a day until they are adults (about 12 to 15 months of age), at which time they are reduced to one or two meals daily.

Fresh water should be available at all times. Table scraps and between meal snacks should be avoided.



HOW TO FEED YOUR CAT

HOW MUCH SHOULD I FEED MY CAT?

Like dogs, your cat should only be fed as much food as it needs to maintain its optimal body weight and condition. Pet food labels usually list suggested amounts to feed by body weight. The amount of food required depends on the individual cat's needs based on level of activity and life stage (growth, pregnancy, etc.). Ribs are not visible, but should be easily felt. There should be no excessive fat which is most noticeable between the back legs in the abdominal region. Feed less if your pet appears to be overweight.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I FEED MY CAT?

Cats can be fed by either free-choice feeding or scheduled-feeding. They will usually eat every few hours all day long if left to themselves. Cat owners may prefer to feed set amounts twice a day. If obesity is a problem, or only canned food is fed, scheduled-feeding, that is, feeding a specific amount of food at specified regular mealtimes, is recommended.

Fresh water should be available at all times. Table scraps and between-meal snacks should be avoided.

DO I NEED TO SUPPLEMENT MY PET'S DIET WITH VITAMINS AND MINERALS?

Well-intentioned owners often add vitamin, mineral, or protein supplements to their pet's diet under the mistaken impression that this will be beneficial to their pet.

Routine supplementation of the diet is not recommended. In fact, current nutritional problems are more likely to be caused by over-supplementation rather than deficiencies.

In some specific cases, supplementation may become necessary to manage or treat certain medical conditions. In those situations, supplementation should be done with the advice and supervision of your veterinarian.

CAN I FEED TABLE SCRAPS?

Table scraps should not be fed because they can disturb the nutrient balance provided in pet foods, cause obesity, or lead to medical problems.

Between-meals snacks should also be avoided, because they can turn pets into finicky eaters or lead to obesity.

ARE FOOD ADDITIVES HARMFUL TO MY PET?

Additives are added to most pet food in order to prevent rapid deterioration after processing and also to enhance the quality, flavour and appearance of the food.

Most commonly used additives are: emulsifiers (to keep water and fat together), antioxidants (to keep fat from becoming rancid), flavours (to give food a specific flavour), antimicrobial agents (to slow down spoilage) and colours (to improve appearance). All additives used in pet food are those used in human food and, as such, are as safe for our pets as they are for us.

Additive-free or "all-natural" foods are nutritionally no better or worse than pet foods with additives.

CAN I FEED...

...bones? Even though dogs love to chew bones and chewing helps somewhat to reduce tartar build-up on their teeth, bones can cause many problems for dogs, such as vomiting, diarrhea, constipation, intestinal obstructions and punctures. Bones are best avoided and should be substituted by other chewables, such as rawhide chew strips or nylon bones. Rawhide chew strips have been shown to be effective in decreasing the incidence of tartar build-up at the margin of tooth and gum.

...raw fish? Raw fish should not be fed in excess, since certain raw fish (such as smelt, herring, catfish and carp) contain an enzyme called thiaminase, which destroys the vitamin Thiamin (B1). This enzyme is destroyed by cooking.

...milk? While milk is not necessary if your pet is fed a well-balanced diet, pets do enjoy drinking it. However, milk can cause diarrhea in some dogs and cats, if they lack the enzyme lactase which breaks down the lactose in the milk.

...eggs? There are no benefits to supplementing a diet with eggs, if a well-balanced diet is fed.

...chocolate / candy? While some cats and all dogs love candies and chocolates intended for humans, feeding them can cause dental decay and obesity. Chocolate also contains theobromine, which is toxic to dogs and cats, if taken in excess. There are, however, commercial "chocolate" treats which can be fed with confidence.

...cat food to my dog or dog food to my cat? No! Both species have very different nutrient requirements! For example, cats need arachidonic acid and taurine which are essential in a cat's diet. Cats fed dog food may risk blindness and paralysis.

WHY ARE HOMEMADE DIETS NOT RECOMMENDED?

Homemade diets are not recommended because there is a good chance that all the necessary nutrients or the proper proportions will not be provided. Incorrect preparation and cooking may also deplete certain nutrients and result in a deficient diet.

As well, homemade diets are usually more expensive to produce, without necessarily providing better nutrition.

WHAT ARE SPECIAL-PURPOSE DIETS?

Most pet foods on the market are maintenance diets, designed and formulated to provide adequate nutrition for the average dog or cat on a day to day basis. However, there are special-purpose diets that are designed to meet specific nutritional requirements, such as pregnancy, nursing, periods of high stress, or growth.

Your veterinarian should be consulted to find out whether a special-purpose diet is necessary for your pet.



DOES MY PET NEED A HIGH PROTEIN DIET?

High protein diets usually contain 25-35% protein and 18-22% fat, and are used mainly for working or show dogs, pregnant or nursing bitches, or animals under stress.

These diets are not recommended for all pets, particularly those who lead a sedentary lifestyle.

WHAT ARE THERAPEUTIC DIETS?

These are designed to assist in the management of specific diseases such as heart or kidney disease.

They should not be fed to your pet unless under the supervision of your veterinarian.

SHOULD I FEED MY CAT A MAGNESIUM-RESTRICTED/ pH-CONTROLLING CAT FOOD?

A small percentage of cats are prone to a disease which causes crystals to form in the urine. This disease goes by many names, including feline bladder disease or feline lower urinary tract disease (FLUTD).

Today, diets maintaining a reasonable urine pH are more relevant to the management of FLUTD. This has led to the recommendation that cats be fed diets which contain restricted levels of magnesium. Not all cats need to be on a magnesium-restricted/pH-controlling diet, only those cats found to be prone to this disease.

Magnesium levels on a dry matter basis should be no more than 0.1% and no less than .05% in a magnesium-restricted/pH-controlling cat food. These diets also maintain an average resting urine pH of 6.5 or less and an average postprandial peak pH not to exceed 7.0. All magnesium-restricted/pH-controlling cat foods certified by the CVMA must conform to these standards and are designated with the term “magnesium-restricted/pH-controlling” on the package along with the CVMA seal of certification.



BEFORE CHOOSING THE RIGHT PET FOOD FOR YOUR PET, KEEP THE FOLLOWING POINTS IN MIND:

- Choose a brand that is consistently available where you shop. Changing your pet's diet abruptly can cause vomiting or diarrhea. Any change in diet should be introduced gradually.
- Read the label or package to ensure that the diet is suitable for your pet. A puppy food or high protein food may not be appropriate for an adult dog who is exercised only moderately.
- Does the product meet your pet's nutrient requirements? If it is certified by the CVMA, you can be sure that it has been tested and will be monitored regularly to ensure that it meets all the nutrient requirements of your pet.
- Never feed cat food to a dog, or dog food to a cat. They each have very different nutrient requirements.
- Monitor your pet's eating habits. If your pet shows signs of extreme thirst or loss of appetite, consult your veterinarian.
- Remember, your pet depends on you for proper nutrition!

LOOK FOR THE CVMA SEAL OF CERTIFICATION



YOUR ASSURANCE OF PET FOOD QUALITY!

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As part of a continuing effort to increase public awareness of companion animal nutrition and welfare, this booklet was made possible by the pet food manufacturers participating in the CVMA Pet Food Certification Program.

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The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) is a national association which serves the interests of the veterinary profession in Canada striving for excellence in veterinary medicine and the health and well-being of animals.

CANADIAN VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION