

## NUTRITIONAL NEWS FOR YOUR PETS

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More than twenty years ago, between the first and second year of my veterinary education, I spent a summer as a Veterinary Medical Officer for the United States Department of Agriculture. This meant I had the opportunity to see just how meat gets from the live food animal (cow, sheep, pig, chicken) to the store you buy your steak at. Each day I visited a different slaughter house to enforce the regulations set forth by the USDA pertaining to the care and handling of food being processed for human consumption. This experience, I can tell you, was one of mixed emotions and surprises. The biggest surprise came when I asked how the bruised, decayed, and cancerous meat was disposed of. In other words, that material not considered sufficient for human consumption. The answer was pet food. Yes, pet food! All the cancerous tissue that was condemned for human consumption was, in fact, used to go into pet food!! I was shocked, appalled and disgusted. Thus started my investigation into the commercial pet food industry, the importance of diet in your pet's life and just what we buy for our companion animals to eat. This started me thinking hard about exactly what we feed our pets because I have never seen so much cancer and chronic disease as I see now in clinical practice.

We now know that most pet food contains pesticide residues, road kill, Styrofoam packaging, outdated meat that can no longer be sold for human consumption, metal tags, hormones, and pets. Yes, even euthanized pets can end up being rendered into pet food!! Worse than that is the fact that the drug used to euthanize a pet is called pentobarbital, and it does not break down in the rendering process.

In 2004, pet owners spent \$ 34.4 billion on their pets, making the pet industry larger than the toy industry. One study projected that pet owners will spend \$14.5 billion dollars on pet food in 2005. Chew on that on for a while.

Here are some very important things that you can do to help ensure that your pet gets good quality food.

- Avoid generic or store brand pet food, it's cheap for a reason.
- Check the expiration date. Food that is on sale is frequently outdated or about to be.
- Smell the food when you open it. If it smells bad take it back or throw it out but do not give it to your pet.
- Avoid treats that have food colorings in them. Just because they are various shapes with pretty colors does not mean they have any nutritional value attached to them.
- Read the ingredients on the label. **THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU CAN DO.** Ingredients are listed in decreasing order from most to least. The three top ingredients are the bulk of what is in that product. A source of protein from meat is ideally what you want. Good protein sources are beef, chicken, turkey, lamb, rabbit or venison.
- Avoid foods that contain by-products. By-products are the most inexpensive sources of animal protein and consist of blood, beaks, hooves, horns, pus, intestines, ligament, bones and subcutaneous tissue. So avoid anything that says chicken by-products or meat by-products.
- Avoid products that have water as the first ingredient because that is exactly what you will get the most of in that food. Water is a wonderful medium for serious bacteria to grow and flourish in. A type of toxin called endotoxin can be produced that makes most animals sick. Endotoxins are released from dead bacteria and cause inflammatory bowel disease, diarrhea, allergic reactions and can damage the liver, just to name a few effects.
- Avoid chemical preservatives such as BHT (butyrate hydroxytoluene), BHA (butylated hydroxyanisole), EQ (ethoxyquin), and propyl gallate.
- Additives are added to commercial pet food to increase stability and improve the products appearance. Additives have no nutritional value. Additives such as sorbitol can cause diarrhea and

ethylene glycol can cause anemia in cats. Carrageenan can cause intestinal inflammation.

Additives DO NOT have to be revealed on an ingredient label.

Cats have very particular nutritional needs. As a result, their commercial diets must be formulated differently than canine diets. Amino acids make up proteins and cats do not make certain amino acids to make those proteins within their bodies. Therefore, it must come from their diet. Cats require two to three times more protein than most other animals under the same conditions. Cats are meat eaters and carnivores. They require good protein sources. Cats cannot synthesize or make the essential amino acid citrulline. They can convert arginine to citrulline, however. Feline commercial diets must contain arginine or a deficiency disease develops that result in elevated ammonia levels in the bloodstream. Cats also have very limited ability to make another essential amino acid called taurine. Taurine deficiency causes a serious heart muscle disease called cardiomyopathy. When that was discovered in the 1980's, the better cat food manufacturing companies reformulated their cat food to include taurine.

If you choose to prepare your pet's food from scratch, a great book is *Home-Prepared Dog and Cat Diets, the Healthful Alternative* by Donald R. Strombeck, DVM, PhD. Personally, I find it perfectly fine to give your dog or cat some of the foods we enjoy. Some examples are the following: a scrambled egg, applesauce, cooked oatmeal, organic plain yogurt, cottage cheese, cooked quinoa, couscous, millet, bulgar, amaranth, brown or white rice, sweet potato, steamed or cooked asparagus, peas, zucchini, carrots, broccoli, or spinach. Of course, beef, chicken, lamb and venison would always be a grand treat for any dog or cat. *Dr Rose DiLeva is president and owner of Animal Wellness Center in Chadds Ford, Pa. She practices various holistic modalities including acupuncture, Chinese herbs, Traditional Chinese Medicine and pet adjustments.*