

The Bark & Mew

Updates & Information from Falconbridge Animal Hospital & Village Veterinary Hospital
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Choosing a Diet for Your Pet

Many of our furry family members tend to overindulge during the holidays along with their human family. And just like the human family members, they can gain a little weight from all the treats and goodies. As the holidays wind down and we all look at our diet, it is also a good time to re-evaluate what our pets are eating.

If your pet is on a diet that was prescribed by your veterinarian, then the diet should not be changed without first consulting your veterinarian. For most prescription diets to be effective, your pet should not eat any other foods. That includes treats, human foods, and other pet foods. Talk to your veterinarian before giving a pet on a prescription diet anything else to eat. Even small amounts of other foods or treats can negate the benefits of some prescription diets.

Pets should receive a diet that is appropriate for their species, life stage and activity level. Dogs and cats have different nutritional needs and should not eat each others food. Dogs are omnivores, meaning they eat both plant and animal foods. Cats are obligate carnivores, meaning they must have meat in their diet. A pet's diet needs to provide appropriate nutrients to supply adequate energy (calories), vitamins and minerals.

A high quality food that costs more by weight may actually be less expensive to feed. Your pet will need a

smaller quantity of a food that is nutrition and

Reading the Pet Food Label

The guaranteed analysis lists the minimum or maximum amount of various nutrients. The amounts are listed as percentage. The percentages are not the actual amounts contained in the food. Since moisture content varies between foods, it is virtually impossible for the average consumer to compare the nutrition content.

The ingredients are listed by weight in decreasing order. Most meats (chicken, beef, lamb) are high in water content, so they are typically heavier and therefore first on the list. An ingredient containing the work "meal" is in dried form. For example, chicken meal is dehydrated chicken meat.

The AAFCO Statement gives the method of testing used to determine the nutritional adequacy of the food. It also gives the lifestage the food is appropriate for (growing, pregnant and nursing mothers, or adults). If a label states the food is for all life stages, it contains the higher level of nutrients needed by growing pets (puppies and kittens).

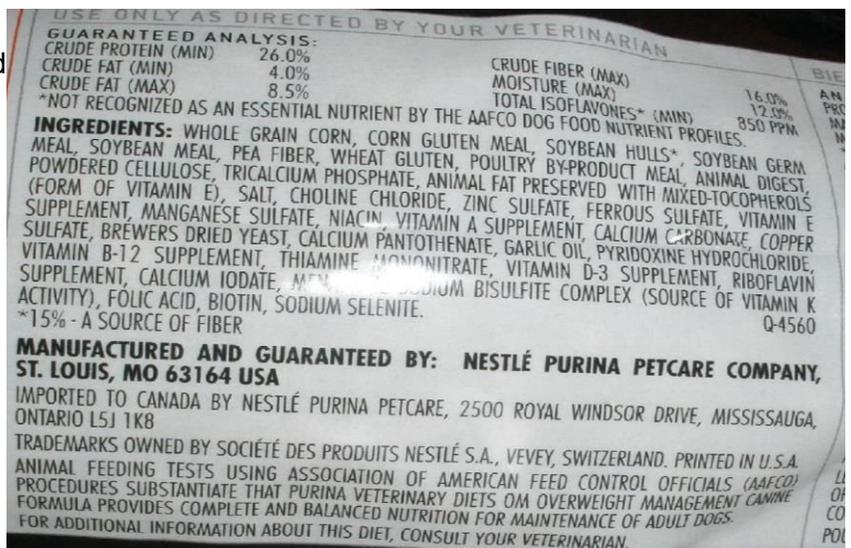
None of the information on the label indicates the quality of the nutrients. There are many other aspects to package labels, some of which are regulated and others are not. When choosing pet food, keep in mind that the

calorie dense. In addition there will be less waste, so you will have less poop to scoop.

One way to determine if a food is appropriate is to check for an AAFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials) statement on the bag. If the manufacturer follows AAFCO standards, the food has appropriate levels of nutrients for the species and life stage listed on the package. In addition to recommendations for lower limits, AAFCO has upper limits for those nutrients where it is known that an excess can be harmful.

When reading labels on food packages, keep in mind that they are a form of advertisement. The manufacturer wants you to pick their food to purchase, so the packaging is designed with that in mind. There are labeling requirements set by the AAFCO as well as those required by law in the U.S. However, certain terms do not have any legal meaning. There are no legally specified requirements to use terms like "natural" and "holistic" on a package label.

So what is the best way to choose a food? Ask your veterinarian. The sales folks at the stores and the manufacturer's representatives with the free samples did not have to take any special courses for those jobs. Your veterinarian spent many years in school learning about animal health, including nutrition.



1. Guaranteed Analysis 2. Ingredients List 3. AAFCO Statement

quality of the nutrients is what impacts your pet's health.

OBESITY IN DOGS AND CATS

What is Obesity?

Obesity is the most common nutritional disease occurring in the dog and cat. Obesity becomes more of a problem as the animal gets older and is shown to be more common in females than in males. It is also more common in dogs than in cats.

Why is Obesity Dangerous?

Overweight pets generally have more physical problems and a shorter life span than those of average weight. This decreases the pet's enjoyment of life and your enjoyment of your pet.

Obesity can lead to:

- Lung Disease
- Heart Disease
- Liver Disease
- Diabetes
- Gastrointestinal issues
- Constipation
- Pancreatitis
- Increased surgical risks
- Increased anesthetic risks
- Lowered resistance to infectious diseases
- Musculoskeletal problems

What Causes Obesity?

Most commonly, obesity is caused by the consumption of too many calories. Some animals need less to maintain than others and if there's too much, it is excreted out of the body or is turned into fat. Too much food, too little exercise or both can lead to a "porky pet".

Like people, boredom, idleness, and nervousness can increase food intake in dogs and cats. If your pet eats homemade diets or table scraps, they are more prone to be overweight than if they ate just dog or cat food. Neutering an animal decreases roaming, therefore decreasing the energy need. The same is true if your pet doesn't get a lot of exercise. Their energy need isn't as high, lowering their need for food. Their food intake should be adjusted appropriately to their lifestyle.

Overfeeding puppies can also lead to an overweight adult. Overfeeding increases the number of fat cells and, after maturity, these cells do not increase as readily but increase in size instead. During weight reduction, regardless of age, the size of the fat cells decrease but not the number of them.

Overfeeding during growth in larger breeds is less likely to cause obesity but results in a faster growth rate that predisposes the animal to skeletal problems.

There are some glandular diseases that cause obesity. Hypothyroidism (in dogs) is one, but you should always try to decrease your dog's weight through diet control before assuming that the cause is medical. Consult your veterinarian if you are not seeing results.

Is Your Pet Overweight?

The amount of excess tissue that overlies the rib cage is the best way to evaluate your pet's condition. If the ribs are easily felt, your pet is thin or normal. Any difficulty in feeling the ribs causes a concern for obesity. If the ribs are not felt at all, your pet is dangerously overweight and strict diet measures should be taken. Any concern should be confirmed by your veterinarian, and a diet started only on the advice of the veterinarian. It is important to rule out possibilities of conditions that can look like obesity such as fluid accumulation in the body, heart or kidney disease, or other diseases.

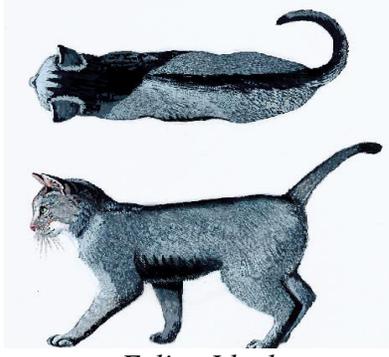
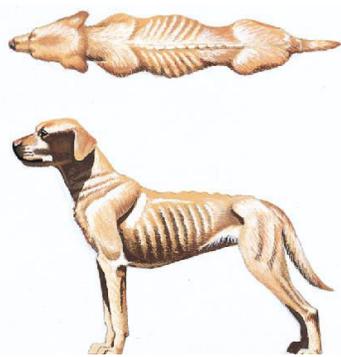
Obesity Management

Realizing your pet is overweight is the first step to management. Total commitment to helping your pet is the second.

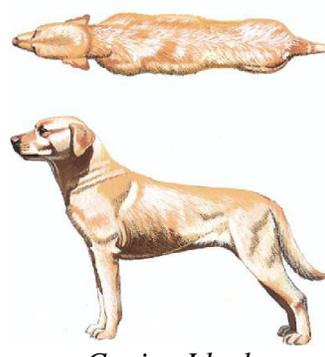
Your pet must burn more calories than are eaten. If your pet is otherwise healthy, decreasing caloric intake and increasing exercise will help. You and your veterinarian should set a weight goal and an estimated time for weight loss for your pet and a regime to get to that goal. Small, medium, and large breeds should be expected to lose 1, 2, and 3 lbs. per week respectively. A cat should lose ¼ lb. per week. If home management does not work, you and your veterinarian may decide to put your pet on a special prescription weight loss diet.

With time, patience, and commitment, the road to a happier, healthier (and leaner) pet will be much smoother.

The Body Condition Scale (BCS) - Used to gauge if a pet is at a healthy weight; 5 is considered ideal and is determined by the ribs being easily palpable, with minimal fat covering, the waist is easily noted, viewed from above and the abdomen is tucked up.



Feline Ideal



Canine Ideal



1---2---3---4---5---6---7---8---9