



Choosing the Right Food

Nutrition is one of the most important determinants of health. This is true for both humans and animals. In fact, many of the most common chronic illnesses can be eliminated through good nutrition. Most commercial processed foods are woefully inadequate. Processed foods have less nutrition than whole fresh foodstuff, are full of preservatives, and contain poor and inappropriate ingredients.

Food Quality and Processing

It is important to take a historical perspective to understand how we got to this place in nutrition for animals. Dogs are meant to eat mostly meat but will eat a fair amount of vegetables, fruit, and grain opportunistically. Cats are obligate carnivores and rarely eat the occasional greens. Before the introduction of commercial pet foods people fed their pets (who were usually working dogs or cats) table scraps and they hunted their own meals as well. The pet food industry dates back to 1926 when Purina began making products for hunting and working farm dogs. They introduced the first kibble food to grocery stores in 1950. From there it has grown into a multi billion dollar industry that produces mostly what I consider to be "junk" food. Today we have commercial processed foods that use the dregs of the food industry for ingredients. These foods contain everything that was not fit for human consumption including feathers, beaks, animal waste products, and many other horrid things. Some food companies have even used rendered euthanized pets in food! The following book is a great eye opener if you want to know more about this: *Foods Pets Die For* by Ann N. Martin. Additionally, the processed foods contain a plethora of objectionable preservatives to keep the food from spoiling whilst it sits on the shelf for years. Lastly, the ingredients are heated and extruded to the point where all the vitamins have been destroyed. Then, manufactured vitamins are added back to balance the diet. There is an inverse correlation to the degree of processing and the amount of original nutrition remaining. For example, starting with the most processed and least nutritious we have the following relationship:

Processing	most→least
Kibble/Canned-Dehydrated-Freeze dried-Fresh cooked-Frozen raw-Fresh raw	
Quality of Nutrition	least→most

Ingredients and Grains

Many of the "better" kibbles now have human grade ingredients. This is a very important step in the right direction. If you can get past the fact that the food is highly processed you will find many kibbles that meet this higher standard. But, another point to make about ingredients is the amount of grain. Most kibbles are as much as 40% grain. Grain is cheap and it holds the nugget or kibble shape easily. This is too much grain for dogs and absolutely inappropriate for a cat. Nowadays we have many options for processed kibble with lower or

no grain. But, I do have a few words of caution, especially since I have not been able to convince myself to use or recommend these foods either. You may be wondering if they don't contain grain to hold them together, then what acts as the glue? Basically, these foods use fats and starches. For example, they may contain fairly large amounts of white potato, yams, and tapioca. These foods are very high in carbohydrates and are still not ideal in large amounts for a dog or cat. You will often see weight gain with these foods. Also, we really don't know if these ingredients will be better in the long run than a high quality grain. For example, grains such as barley, brown rice, and whole oats are actually more nutritious than white potato. But, grains such as corn, and extruded wheat products are vastly less nutritious than yams. I have no answers on the subject of making an ideal kibble. There truly isn't one. Canned foods with better ingredients don't need a starch or grain to hold them together. So, canned food will be better and more appropriate than the kibbled foods. If you must feed a processed food to your cat or dog canned is better than kibble.

The Ideal Diet

In summary I do not recommend any kibble or canned foods for dogs or cats. I think the ideal diet is made from fresh raw organic meat, fish, vegetables, fruits, grains, and bones or other calcium source. It is made for the individual with consideration of species, breed, and individual needs. It is varied for completeness. It can be cooked if there are concerns about using raw foods. I realize every household has individual needs, and serving raw homemade diets may be inconvenient, costly, and has some risk involved. Dietary choices for your pet will affect their health just as it does your own. Remember that the consequences of a poor diet are costly to health and longevity. I do think that the commercial frozen prepared diets are the best compromise to homemade. Freeze dried and dehydrated mixes are a close second. Everything else is less than ideal. There are higher and lower quality processed foods. If you are choosing these foods for your cat or dog, please examine all the ingredients, look at the company for quality assurances, and if you can, choose canned over kibbles. I can give you assistance in evaluating any specific processed foods. I am happy to help you decide which evil is less evil. But, know that these are not things I recommend or use myself.

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