

why buy premium dog food?

basic canine education

As you shop for dog food, the wide range of food available often astounds you. You may notice some brands are labeled premium. What does this mean, how does premium food affect your dog's health and how do you choose the right premium food for your dog?

What is premium?

Sources and availability of nutrients are key in choosing your dog's food. Dog food varies in the quality of ingredients, formula and the nutritional value in the food. Premium dog food typically has higher standards in each of these important variables.

How is premium better for my dog?

Your dog's nutritional needs are based on age, activity level, temperament, environment and physical makeup. Look for a food that fits your pet and the environment rather than their breed. If you're unsure about what to feed your pet, contact your veterinarian.

Premium dog food typically has higher quality protein sources, no artificial dyes and added antioxidants and vitamins. Better ingredients can contribute to better digestibility and the overall health of your dog. The nutritional value per kibble is higher than most economy brands, meaning your pet will have to eat less of a premium brand to get the same nutrition. A major difference aside from the cost is the poop! If your dog has to eat more of the economy brand than the premium brand for the same nutritional content, there is a lot more waste that you will need to dispose of.

Before you buy, compare the feeding guide of each brand (usually on the back or side of the packaging). You may be surprised to



Developed with and approved by a qualified veterinarian.

find that premium foods may actually be less expensive and healthier for your dog.

What to look for in dog food:

When you look at the nutrient analysis on the back or side of the package, you will find the minimum levels of protein, fiber and fat in the diet. But you also need to carefully examine the ingredients list. Protein can come from a variety of sources, including plant matter, meat and poultry. Many pet foods, especially economy brands, use corn, wheat, gluten, soy, meat and bone meal as major sources of protein, but these are inferior sources of protein for your pet. The list of ingredients is written based on each ingredient's percentage in the food, from highest to lowest. It is best to look for diets with meat products making up at least three or four of the first six listed ingredients.

There are a few things to look for before you pick your pet's food:

High-quality protein sources:

Protein should include high-quality meat.

Preservatives:

Chemical preservatives such as BHA, BHT and ethoxyquin are often added in pet foods. Natural preservatives such as vitamin C, vitamin E and oils of rosemary, clove or other spices are a better alternative. Natural preservatives do not provide as long of a shelf life but are generally safer.

By-products:

By-products can vary from batch to batch. They can contain internal parts of animals such as necks, heads, feet, intestines and other internal organs. Many manufacturers use by-products because they're less expensive, but they may not be the best source of food for your pet.

Antioxidants:

Antioxidants are often added to dog food to supplement and help a dog's immune system. Antioxidants can help deter many diseases, including kidney disease, heart-disease and cancer.

Artificial dyes:

Artificial dyes are often used in pet food for visual purposes, but they are not necessary and some have been linked to medical problems.

How to read labels:

Labels differ from brand to brand and can sometimes be quite challenging to understand. On the plus side, there are special labeling requirements for pet food regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and many manufacturers adopt the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) standards.

AAFCO's four rules for product names:

95% rule (Example: Beef for Dogs, Chicken 'n Liver Dog Food) 95% of the product must be the named ingredient (of animal origin), not counting the water added for processing. If more than one item is named, then the combination must total 95% and the first named ingredient must have a higher quantity than the second. Counting the added water, the named ingredient still must comprise 70% of the product.

25% or "Dinner" rule (Example: Beef Dinner for Dogs, Chicken Formula Dog Food) 25% of the product must contain the named ingredient, not counting the water added for processing. "Platter," "entrée," "nuggets" and "formula" are also used within this rule. If more than one ingredient is named, then at least 3% of each ingredient must be added.

3% or "With" rule (Example: Dog Food with Beef) At least 3% of the product must contain the named ingredient. This label can be easily confused with the 95% rule label. "Beef Dog Food" will contain at least 95% beef, while "Dog Food with Beef" will possibly contain only 3% beef.

"Flavor" rule (Example: Beef-flavored Dog Food) A specific percentage is not required under this rule. But the product must contain an amount sufficient to be detected (using animals trained to prefer specific flavors to verify. The flavor may or may not be the named ingredient; instead, it could be a sub-

stance that will give the characterizing flavor of the ingredient.

A good way to verify the product names is to read the ingredients list. All ingredients are required to be listed in order of predominance by weight. Ingredients that are in the labels should appear on the ingredients list accordingly to the rule applied.

What labels don't reveal:

“Plump chickens, choice cut beef, fresh grains and wholesome nutritious meals for your dog.” Through media and advertising, these are the images the pet food manufacturers want consumers to believe when they purchase their products. But not all manufacturers are the same.

Manufacturers have different standards regarding the freshness of ingredients they use to make pet food. Some manufacturers may cut costs by using the cheapest ingredients available at the time food is made. Since costs rise and fall, the manufacturers vary the ingredients from batch to batch, resulting in different nutritional value.

You cannot determine the freshness or quality of an ingredient by reading the label; instead, you must trust the pet food manufacturer to use quality ingredients and produce food that is best for your pet. Start by choosing brands that put their company reputation on the line for the products they sell as well as food that is recommended by your veterinarian.

Note: The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for veterinary care. If you need additional information, please contact your veterinarian.