

Prepared pet food – the importance of feeding a balanced diet, avoiding scraps/garbage & storage

The importance of a balanced diet



Just like their owners, dogs and cats need a balanced diet which contains just the right amount of protein, fat, carbohydrate and essential vitamins and minerals to ensure that they stay in peak condition. These nutrients must be present, not only in the correct amounts, but also in some cases in the correct proportion to each other to provide a nutritionally complete and balanced diet.

Like people, a pet's requirements for these nutrients varies throughout life and are determined by factors such as age, whether the pet is active or sedentary, state of the pet's health, reproduction, and environmental conditions. In meeting the particular needs of an individual animal the owner must provide the required amount and correct balance of energy and essential nutrients in a quantity of food the pet will consume. Since animals eat to meet their energy needs, all essential nutrients should be present in the correct amounts relative to the energy (joules or calories) in a complete and balanced food. Prepared pet foods that are complete and balanced will have a statement on their label advising this fact.

Choosing the right food for your pet

The choice of food type for pet dogs and cats is very much a personal matter. While various factors are involved in this choice, the main considerations are:

- Your pet's age and lifestyle
- Owner preference for a type of feeding (e.g. canned, dry, chilled or combinations of these)
- The feeding habits and preferences of the pet, fussy feeders may prefer canned, dog roll or pouch type foods, over some dry foods
- Lifestyle or economic considerations and convenience

What are the benefits of prepared pet foods

- Excellent nutrition, with many foods providing the correct amount, balance and availability of nutrients to sustain physical and mental health and activity
- Convenience
- Cost effective
- Safety
- Consistency
- Variety and palatability to ensure the food is eagerly consumed, since an uneaten meal has no nutritional value. Palatability of the food is important as feeding time should be a rewarding experience for both the owner and the pet which reinforces the bond between a dog or cat and its owner.

Home prepared food & table scraps

Some owners like to prepare at least some of their pet's meals themselves.

While it is possible, some effort, knowledge regarding pet nutrition needs and food preparation are needed to feed your pet a consistent and adequate home prepared diet. A diet of fresh meat alone is not nutritionally complete, meaning it is failing to provide some important nutrients in the correct amounts for dogs and cats and therefore an 'all meat' diet is not recommended for any pet.

Feeding table scraps can result in unbalanced diet, which may lead to nutrient deficiencies and over-consumption, which may result in obesity. Some human foods are also poisonous for dogs and cats. Small bones should never be fed to pets as they could cause choking, mouth injuries and some like chicken bones are prone to splintering and can cause death or severe illness in cats and dogs. Whatever diet you choose to provide for your cat or dog, make sure that they have plenty of water available at all times.

Storage of prepared pet foods

Correct storage of pet foods (both unopened and open packets) is important to ensure both freshness and food safety. Pet foods should be stored according to instructions on the label. Storage conditions will be determined by the type of food. Dry pet foods should be stored in dry, cool conditions, away from

sunlight and humidity to avoid spoilage with molds and other microorganisms. Always store opened cans or other moist pet foods in the refrigerator. Do not feed prepared pet foods that are beyond their 'best before' or 'use by' date.

Summary

There is a wide range of quality, prepared commercial pet foods now available through supermarkets and mass merchandise outlets, specialist pet supply retailers, veterinary clinics, rural supply outlets and on-line retailers, providing today's pet owner with many choices and product types. These pet foods provide a great basis for your pet's diet, delivering variety, palatability, value, consistency and safety, making for healthy pets and happy owners.

