

DIET

There are a variety of different opinions with regards to diet and how it can potentially affect behaviour. Different diets will of course hold different nutritional values and therefore are all likely to affect dogs in different ways. When choosing a diet, you may find that you do have to do a bit of experimentation before you find that one that is right for your dog.

Food companies nowadays are very good at breaking down ingredients and listing them in such a way, that it is difficult to tell what is actually in your dog's food. However, there are a few key ingredients you can look out for, that will help give you an idea of the quality of the food.

Protein and Fat

In order to maintain healthy growth, puppies and adolescent dogs need plenty of protein and fat. Any puppy or junior specific food will often contain the right amounts. However, be mindful of the other ingredients. Although your growing dog needs the high fat and protein content, they likely don't need any additives / additional flavourings, so be sure to check for these.

Meat

In dry dog foods meat can either be dry (which is often referred to as meat meal) or fresh. Both of these meat source's will provide you dog with a sufficient, good quality meat. However, fresh meat is roughly two thirds water, while meat meal only contains around 5% water. On average, this means that 20% fresh meat, only equates to around 7% of dry meat. Meat is a good source of protein and often makes up a large proportion of the protein content within food. In order to accurately determine how much meat is in your dog's food, be sure to discount the water for a more accurate representation.

Additionally, you may also find the phrase 'total meat content' on dog food labels nowadays. Within this meat content, the brand will often include meat oils etc. These will not contribute to protein values, so be sure to check the label carefully and pick out the fresh and dry meat percentages only. Lastly, should a food label read 'meat and animal derivatives' it is best to avoid this brand. This is too vague and does not provide enough clues as to what meat is included.

Cereals

The term 'cereals' or 'grains' can refer to any product of any cereal including: wheat, barley, maize, oats rice etc.



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Seeing the term cereals listed on a food label, does not necessarily mean that the food is low quality. Some manufactures will utilise this broader term to protect their recipes. However, it is often the case that manufactures will use this term in replacement of listing the actual ingredients, as it allows them to swap out grains, depending on what is available at the time. As a general rule of thumb, I would suggest avoiding foods that utilise the terms 'cereals' or 'grains'. Although these aren't generally bad for dogs, there are a couple that have been linked with dietary intolerance, wheat being one of these. Wheat in general should be avoided in diets where possible.

Artificial Colourings

As nearly all parents would agree, foods that contain artificial colourings have a big effect on their child's behaviour. Studies have shown that artificial colourings have been linked with not only hyperactivity and ADD in children but also other health conditions. Unfortunately, these colourings have exactly the same effect on our dogs so it is best to avoid them where possible. Should the food label not state that the food contains any artificial colourings, you can often see them in the form of coloured kibble such as: green, red and yellow.

Finally, some additional ingredients it would be best to avoid where possible include:

- **Dairy products-** Generally dogs have a hard time digesting milk and dairy products. It can often bring on stomach upset and in some cases vomiting.
- **Derivatives of vegetable origin-** Another vague term that is often used in replacement of the true ingredients. Particularly useful to avoid if your dog is prone to dietary intolerances.
- **Vegetable protein extracts-** A vague term that doesn't indicate exactly what is in the food. Extracts are often extracted through chemical reactions that are far from natural, Moreover, vegetable proteins do not hold the same nutritional value as those found in meat.
- **Soya-** Often used in replacement of meat due to the high protein content. However, dogs find this difficult to digest and veterinarians have linked this with dietary intolerances.



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