

The First 3 Questions to ask about Pet Food

Here at Altitude Veterinary Hospital we want what is best for your pet. Nutrition is one of the key components for optimum Wellness. We understand there are many resources when finding the right diet for your pet but please consider our words and advice for we are your pet's primary advocate.

- **Feeding Trial vs. Formulated?**

- **Formulated** is a pet food recipe with minimal nutritional requirements whereas **Feeding Trial** goes through a 6 month process evaluating a) blood samples for physiological effects b) digestibility c) palatability d) weight loss or gain e) illness f) tested for specific life stage. Formulated Diets do not assess these parameters. Feeding Trials are expensive and time consuming and are considered the Gold Standard in pet foods.

- **Pet food made for all or specific life stages?**

- Our pets have different stages of life each with a different nutritional requirement. "Growth" describes our young pets less than a year of age, "Adult" for pet's 1-6 years of age, and "Senior" for those 7 and over.
- In the text book Small Animal Clinical Nutrition 5th Edition key nutritional factors are listed for dogs and cats. The list gives the ideal parameters required for these different ages (as well as large breed). When a pet food states that it is for "all life stages" it is made as a growth (puppy or kitten) formula. This diet is then **not** suited for a senior pet. The best nutrition for your pet is a diet created for his or her appropriate life stage.

- **What does the Guaranteed Analysis tell us?**

- Only minimums and maximums are listed, not the actual amount of each nutrient. Carbohydrate content is not listed. The analysis gives no indication of the quality of the nutrients or it's digestibility by the pet.
- The only way to determine actual amounts and digestibility is to contact the pet food manufacturer. If they will not provide you with this information, then we advise you to switch pet foods. If they do not disclose basic information, can they be trusted?
- If you do receive this information from the manufacturer, you must compare diets on a "Dry Matter Basis". This takes the moisture out and compares diets "apples to apples" so evaluating nutrients is made fair. It is important to note that we want nutrients to be within the acceptable range for your pet's life stage. Again, these ranges are noted in the Small Animal Clinical Nutrition 5th Edition.

Just a few tasty tidbits about words used on pet food labels

Certain words in the pet food industry have legal definitions. Since the bag is a legal document, these words cannot be printed on a food bag unless the food fulfills the proper definition. However, you will commonly see variations of these terms on websites, pet food blogs, or commercials. None of these are regulated sources of information.

- **Light or Lite** This is the only terminology used that legally means a diet is low calorie.
 - A “Lite” diet for a dog contains less than 3100 kcal/kg.
 - A “Lite” diet for a cat contains less than 3250 kcal/kg.
- **Natural** The use of the word “natural” indicates the food contains no chemically synthesized ingredients. The only exceptions to this rule are the vitamins and minerals that cannot be obtained through natural means.
- **Organic** A food claiming to be organic MUST have the USDA seal located on the bag. If the seal is not on the bag it is not guaranteed to be organic. If there is a seal on the bag, be sure it is indeed the USDA organic seal.



- **Human Grade** There is no such thing as “human grade” ingredients! Due to the immense variety of the foods consumed around the world there is no way to define “human grade.” Legally, companies are not allowed to print this on a bag, but you will occasionally see it.

Terms that commonly misleads consumers:

- **Low Fat or Reduced Fat** This may be true but compared to what? To the manufacturer’s regular high fat diet? Evaluating pet food by their guaranteed analysis on a dry matter basis is comparing apples to apples.
- **Ideal Weight** Ideal as compared to what? Breed specifics are helpful but pets are all made differently. Ask your veterinarian about body condition scores.
- **Weight Management** Is it really formulated to control weight or is the fat or carbohydrates still high?
- **Healthy Weight** Veterinarians are trained to score your pet’s body condition. Ask what they think.
- **Holistic** There is no legal definition. This is just a word to catch the consumer’s eye, but an empty statement.
- **Organic** Organic foods are foods that are produced that do not involve modern synthetic inputs such as synthetic pesticides and chemical fertilizers. Organic foods are also not processed using irradiation, industrial solvents, or chemical food additives.