

Healthy Pet Food

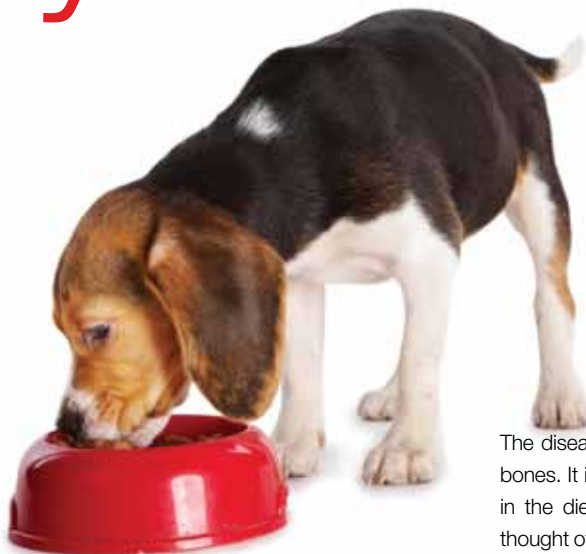
[by Dr. Elizabeth McGill]

Have you ever been to a really nice restaurant and feel a little anxious when you look at the menu? Nothing is recognizable. You scan past cipollini confit, crab stuffed agnolotti and fricassee of escargot. Panic sets in. You hope someone else orders first so that you can just say, "I'll have the same."

Reading pet food labels can cause a similar anxiety invoking experience. Reading past soluble fibre, Fructo-Oligosaccharides and Alpha-Tocopherol can be very confusing. Trying to interpret percentages of fat, protein and fibre can be misleading. It is possible for a pet food company to create a product that includes motor oil, old shoe leather and feathers and the percentages of protein, fat and fibre look great on the label. Unfortunately all these ingredients are non-digestible and have no nutritional availability for the body. In fact your pet would get sick eating these ingredients. There is very little regulation about what goes into pet food and there is a large variety of pet food qualities on the market.

Poorer quality pet foods predispose pets to a myriad of medical conditions. When I examine pets on poorer food they have flaking skin (dandruff or something that looks like dust in the coat). They have increased odour to their skin and my hands feel greasy after touching them. They have increased shedding of their hair coat. I also see an increased incidence of bladder disease, bladder stones, diarrhea, constipation and poor resistance to infections and cancer.

Premium quality food promotes optimal health. When I switch pets onto premium food I routinely see improvement in the pet's health. There is decreased itchiness of the skin. The coat that had dandruff and was greasy becomes glossy and clean. The unpleasant odour to the skin is gone and is replaced by that "fresh laundry" smell. People report to me decreased allergies to their pets. (It is the pet's dander that triggers human allergies).



Clients also report to me less gas production (no more explanations to Aunt Gertrude next time she comes over), less stool production (less backyard mushrooms) and less odour to the stool (litter boxes are more tolerable). There is a higher tolerance against diarrhea if your pet is exposed to a food (or dead something your dog finds) that they are not used to. Clients tell me their pets have more energy and I assume a large reason for this is that their pet is no longer experiencing gut cramping every time they eat. These foods also boost the animal's immune system for resistance against infections and cancers.

One of the first reactions I get from clients when I mention premium food is that it must be really expensive. This is not true. Pets eat less of the premium food because they contain highly digestible products. They are more nutrient dense. Basically they contain less fillers. When this is taken into consideration our calculations tell us that premium food is not more expensive. Surprisingly we often find that they are actually less expensive.

I would like to clear up some common food ingredient misconceptions that clients ask me about. Clients are often concerned about food containing corn. Corn is an excellent energy, protein and carbohydrate source. Dogs are not carnivores as previously thought. They are omnivores which means that they need to eat a variety of foods, not just meat.

Growing puppies that eat only meat can get a disease of the bones called osteomalacia.

The disease causes soft and poorly developed bones. It is caused by an imbalance of minerals in the diet. Meat bi-products are often falsely thought of as something bad. A meat bi-product is simply an animal product other than skeletal meat such as liver, lung or kidney. The ingredient "meal" is also often misinterpreted. Meal is ground down meat and is sometimes frozen but there is no decrease in its nutritional value.

Premium pet food companies also make food geared to control or alleviate the symptoms of some diseases. Did you know that cancers grow faster when pets eat diets high in sugar and carbohydrates? Diets that are high in protein and fat slow cancer growth. I have had improvement in some of my cancer patients simply by changing their diet. Diets high in Green Lipped Muscles significantly control the inflammation and pain of arthritis. Diets with omega three fatty acids, flax seed, beet pulp and Fructo-Oligosaccharides control inflammatory bowel disease.

When you know the facts feeding your pet premium food becomes the obvious and smart choice. Premium foods are equal to or cheaper in price than poor quality foods. Your pets smell better, feel better, are sick less often and trigger less human allergies. Pets suffering from certain illness's can have their medication dose reduced as the diet helps to control their illness.

The quality of pet food greatly impacts the health of your pet. Educate yourself by talking to your veterinarian. Veterinarians have seven years of post-secondary education. They are your best source for pet health. There is nothing that gives me more personal satisfaction than to go home at the end of the day knowing that I have improved my patient's quality of life. ■