

PET NUTRITION

Quick Reference Guide

WATER

- Access to clean water is vital to good nutrition. Always have fresh, clean water available. Consider a circulating water fountain for cats.
- Clean water is relative. Consider having your water tested and getting a filtration system to address your specific water quality.
- Switch to food with a higher moisture content. Remember that animals get water from their food as well as from drinking. Canned or fresh, whole- food diets have a much higher moisture content than dry kibble.

PROTEIN

- Protein in dog and cat food should be from meat sources. Foods containing soy, gluten, or other grain-based proteins are not optimal nutrition.
- Keep it real. Meat by-products and meat meals are inconsistent in their nutrient availability and digestibility. Pet food manufacturers use them because they are inexpensive. Stick to foods that use actual whole-meat products.
- Aim for higher levels of protein. All foods balanced by a nutritionist have adequate levels of protein, but higher-quality foods and fresh foods tend to have higher levels. Somewhat higher levels of protein provide good nutrition and pose no harm to most animals, provided the diet is properly balanced by a nutritionist.
- Calculate protein on a dry matter basis. Comparing and evaluating amounts of protein as listed on pet food labels can be tricky, so please review Chapter 4 for instructions on how to calculate protein on a dry matter basis

FATS

- Remember your essential fatty acids (EFAs). EFAs are fats the body cannot make and must be included in the diet: omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids. Omega-6 is mostly found in plant sources, while omega-3s are mostly from animal sources (primarily fish).
- Supplement your pet's diet with a fish or marine algal oil supplement. This is the best way to ensure they're getting enough omega-3s. (Omega-6 is plentiful in food, so supplementing is unnecessary.)
- Research your supplement companies to avoid toxins. Find a company that does independent testing for metals and other contaminants in their fish oils. Avoid oils and supplements made from genetically modified organisms (GMOs); farmed, grain-fed fish; and conventionally raised farm animals.
- Feed fat in appropriate amounts. Too much fat can lead to weight gain and/or gastrointestinal upset.

CARBOHYDRATES

- Carbohydrates can be a useful part of your pet's diet. Carbohydrates can be found in plant material, fruit, and grains. Digestible carbs are a quick energy source for the body, while fiber aids the digestive process.
- Less is more. Dogs and cats evolved to thrive on low amounts of carbohydrates. Excessive amounts of carbs can lead to weight gain, inflammation, and potentially disease. Keep carbohydrate levels low for diabetic cats in particular.
- Commercial kibble contains far more carbohydrates than your pet needs. Even "grain-free" and "low-carb" dry foods contain several times the optimal amount of carbohydrates. Carbohydrates are primarily used in pet foods because they are an inexpensive source of energy and are necessary in the manufacture of extruded dry food. This, if for no other reason, is justification to move away from kibble.

VITAMINS AND MINERALS

- Always use foods and recipes balanced by a qualified nutritionist. Do not attempt to create a nutrition plan yourself; having the correct level of vitamins and minerals is essential to your pet's health. Oversupplementing can be as unhealthful as undersupplementing.
- Don't make your own substitutions in recipes. When purchasing supplements to utilize in a home-prepared diet, be certain to get exactly what is recommended. It is very easy to inadvertently over- or underdose by getting the wrong product.
- Additional supplementation is not needed when your pet has a nutritionally balanced diet. However, there are occasions when additional supplementation can be healthful. Always consult with your veterinarian or a veterinary nutritionist to determine what may be the most beneficial for your pet.