

A DEEP DIVE INTO THE BOWL (AND BEYOND!):

**ALMOST EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT
CANINE NUTRITION AND FEEDING YOUR BEST FRIEND...**



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I. Introduction: Making A Very Important Decision For Your Best Friend

Give this some thought: How did you originally decide what to feed your dog? Was it just what you have always fed your dogs or maybe a recommendation from a neighbor or at the dog park? Advice from a family member? A catchy advertisement on TV? Or perhaps a quick suggestion from your vet? When you stop to think about it, the process is very much like the one we used for our "two-legged kids". We gather information from every corner, hoping to make the right choice.

However, following the success and high level of member engagement at our March 13th meeting featuring Dianne Krenzer from Big Woof Pets it became clear that our community is looking for more than just anecdotes. The overwhelming interest in that presentation served as the primary driving factor for this Research Summary and Guardian's Guide.

To understand why choosing a diet feels so difficult, we must look at the scale of the industry. The pet food market is a massive global enterprise, currently exceeding \$150 billion annually.

The best choice of food for your dog should not be based on how attractive the packaging is, the marketing and advertising, or whether it's fancy or colorful. Whether the food is wet or dry, fresh or frozen, canned or bagged is secondary. What is most important is the nutritional value. We will provide some general guidance below to help you navigate these choices.

Our goal here is to simplify this landscape. Throughout this report, we will keep one guiding principle at the forefront: The most important consideration is a healthy, nutritionally sound diet that your best friend actually enjoys eating.

II. The Regulatory "Guardians"

Before choosing a brand, check to see if the store-bought products meet the safety and nutritional standards set by these organizations:

- **FDA (Food and Drug Administration):** Regulates the safety of pet food and ensures that labels and marketing claims are truthful.
- **AAFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials):** An independent organization that has guided regulators for over 110 years by establishing ingredient definitions and labeling standards; they set the nutritional benchmarks for "complete and balanced" pet food. Guardians should always look for the "AAFCO Statement" on packaging to ensure a diet meets these rigorous health and safety requirements.
- **NRC (National Research Council):** The scientific body that provides the clinical research used to determine the specific nutrient requirements that AAFCO then implements as standards.

III. The Eight Categories of Canine Nutrition

Category	Best Known Leading Brands
1. Premium Kibble	Hill's Science Diet, Royal Canin, Orijen, Acana, Merrick, Nulo, Instinct, Wellness, Blue Buffalo.
2. Canned/Wet	Hill's Science Diet, Merrick Wet, Instinct, Wellness CORE, Ziwi Peak, The Honest Kitchen.
3. Freeze-Dried	Stella & Chewy's, Primal, Open Farm, Instinct Raw Boost, Vital Essentials, BARF World.

Category	Best Known Leading Brands
4. Air-Dried	Badlands Ranch, Ziwi Peak.
5. Fresh Frozen	JustFoodForDogs, Freshpet (shipped frozen), Stella & Chewy's Frozen, Darwin's Natural, Viva Raw Pets.
6. Fresh (Refrigerated)	Freshpet, JustFoodForDogs, The Farmer's Dog, Nom Nom, Ollie, PetPlate, Spot & Tango.
7. Shelf Stable - Nutri-Pack / Tetra Pak	JustFoodForDogs (Pantry Fresh), The Honest Kitchen (WholeMade).
8. Homemade & Toppers	Should include a Nutrient Balancer Keep toppers to 10% or less of daily calories.

IV. Sensory Science: Why the Nose Knows

- **The Reality Check: A dog's world is colored by their nose, not their eyes. Those vibrant orange carrots, green peas and 'meaty' looking red chunks in commercial kibble are actually 'eye candy' for humans—marketing designed to appeal to our sight, while your dog uses a specialized organ to 'taste' the aroma before the first bite even happens.**
- **Scent Power: While humans have 6 million scent receptors, dogs possess up to 300 million.**
- **Temperature Matters: Warming fresh food or adding warm water to kibble releases "aromatic volatiles,"**

making the meal much more enticing to a senior or picky eater.

V. The Treat Trap & Dental Safety

Nearly every guardian uses store-bought branded cookies, jerky, or snacks. We must be just as diligent with these "extras" as we are with the main meal.

- The Thumbnail Test: If you cannot dent a chew with your thumbnail, it's too hard and can break a tooth.**
- Choking Hazards: Be extremely wary of "Rawhide." It is often indigestible and can lodge in the throat.**
- Size Matters: Always choose a chew larger than your dog's mouth. If it gets small enough to swallow, take it away immediately.**

VI. Nutritional Benchmarks: The "Floor" and the "Ceiling"

Table 1: The AAFCO Nutritional "Floor" (Adult Maintenance)

These figures represent the minimum percentages required on a "Dry Matter" basis.

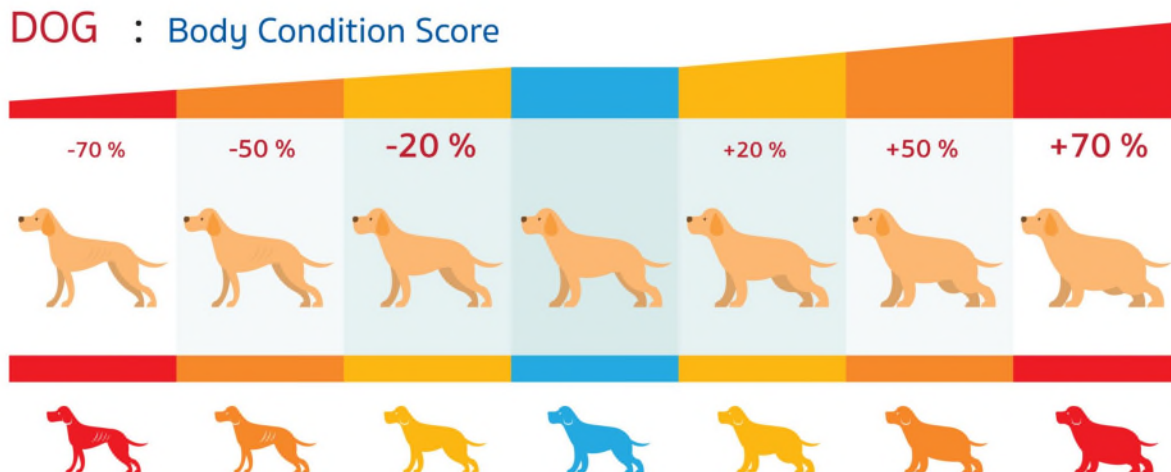
Nutrient	AAFCO Minimum	Professional Aim	Key Role
Crude Protein	18.0%	25% – 30%	Muscle repair and immune health.
Crude Fat	5.5%	12% – 16%	Primary energy; skin and coat health.
Calcium	0.5%	0.8% – 1.2%	Bone strength and heart function.

Table 2: Estimated Daily Caloric Requirements

Needs vary based on activity level. For reference, the average caloric density of dry kibble is approximately 450 kcal/cup.

Dog Weight	Inactive / Senior	Typical / Active
10 lbs	~250 kcal	~350 kcal
30 lbs	~575 kcal	~800 kcal
70 lbs	~1,100 kcal	~1,500 kcal

The Rib Test: If you can't easily feel your dog's ribs, it's likely "Too Much." If hip bones are prominent, it is "Not Enough."



VII. Vitamins, Minerals, and the Supplement Trap

It is a common misconception that "more is better" when it comes to vitamins and supplements.

- **The Balanced Diet Rule: If you are feeding a food labeled "Complete and Balanced" according to AAFCO standards, that food already contains the precise ratio of vitamins and minerals your dog needs. Adding more can throw this delicate balance out of alignment.**

- **The Danger of Excess:** For example, excessive Calcium can cause major skeletal issues in puppies, and too much Vitamin D can be toxic.
- **When to Supplement:** Supplements should be treated like medicine—not snacks. They are appropriate for:
 - **Specific Health Issues:** Such as glucosamine for joint support in seniors or probiotics for GI health.
 - **Homemade Diets:** If you cook for your dog, a **Nutrient Balancer** is mandatory to avoid "The Big Deficiencies."
- **The Golden Rule:** Always consult your veterinarian before adding a supplement. If the dog is healthy and the food is high-quality, the best "supplement" is often just a high-quality topper or fresh water.

VII. The Guardian's Table & Disaster Preparedness

- **The "Toxic List":** Avoid Grapes/Raisins, Onions, Wild Mushrooms, Chocolate, Macadamia Nuts, and anything containing Xylitol.
- **The 10% Rule:** Treats should never exceed 10% of total daily calories.
- **Safety Sidebar:** Store a 14-day supply of shelf-stable food and one gallon of water per day for emergencies.

VIII. Final Advisory: Choosing What's Best for You and Your Dog

Ultimately, the final choice is about selecting a safe, healthy food that meets approved nutritional requirements. The form

that food comes in—whether it be kibble, fresh, frozen, freeze-dried etc.—is secondary and largely a matter of individual preference and lifestyle.

Advice Caution: Store employees are retail specialists; it's a good idea to cross-reference suggestions with your Veterinarian or Certified Canine Nutritionist.

The Golden Rule: Consult a Veterinarian first. Once you have their guidance, choose the format that works for your storage, your budget, and your best friend's appetite. The health of your dog always comes first!

Bone Appétit