

**How to read a pet food label**

*It is important that you understand exactly what it is you are buying when it comes to pet food.*

**Ingredient listing:**

* Ingredients are the delivery vehicles for nutrients and are listed on a pet food label in descending order by weight. Ingredients such as chicken, beef or lamb contain more than 50% water. The high-water content makes them weigh more than dry ingredients such as grains, meat/ poultry meals, minerals, and vitamins, so they are listed first.

**The guaranteed analysis:**

* The guaranteed analysis is designed to provide consumers with nutrient information about the pet foods they purchase. It indicates minimum or maximum levels of nutrients such as protein, fat, and fiber in the product to guide consumers. It is important to remember, however, that the guaranteed analysis is not an indication of the actual nutrient content of the food. The analysis is by chemistry, but not an indication of nutrition when digested. They can be misleading. The manufacturer needs to do trials for that a true picture of how pets absorb and deal with the food’s nutrients.

**The minimum guarantee:**

* The minimum guarantee gives the lowest amount of each nutrient in the food, not the actual amount. For example, the minimum fat guarantee may be 8% but the product can legally contain 15% fat or more. Likewise, a product with a maximum guarantee of 5% fibre may only contain 1%. Obtaining the actual nutrient content from the manufacturer is a better way to evaluate products. We prefer to look at nutrients measured on a dry matter basis. All quality manufacturers have this information easily accessible.

**The nutritional adequacy statement:**

* This portion of the label verifies that the food provides complete and balanced nutrition for growing animals, pregnant and nursing mothers, or adults – or it might say the product is nutritionally adequate for all these groups (“all life stages.”)
* Caution should be exercised when considering foods intended for **“all life stages.”** They may contain excessive levels of some nutrients – which are targeted for puppies and kittens with need for high levels of some nutrients but making them inappropriate for adult and senior pets.

**The manufacturer’s name and toll-free phone number:**

* Consumers are encouraged to call the 800 number for product information not on the label such as the actual nutrient content of the food and its caloric content. There is no way to determine the true quality of a pet food by reading the ingredient listing or the guaranteed analysis. In fact, two products that may appear to have the same guaranteed analysis might have actual nutrient levels that vary significantly.

**Corn or wheat:**

* Corn and wheat both have carbs, protein, fiber, minerals, and vitamins. Neither are an “empty calorie” filler.

**Allergies:**

* Allergies are caused by proteins in food and in environmental and airborne particles such as pollen, grass, mold, dust mites, fleas. Breeds that are susceptible to developing a hyper-immune system will develop allergies to whatever they are exposed to the most. Usually the foods are proteins - chicken, beef and more recently, lamb and dairy. Fish, venison, duck, buffalo, kangaroo, corn, wheat, oats, peas, potatoes, or any other ingredient that is fed and has some protein can eventually trigger the immune system. The ingredient which happens to cause this in your pet is not bad, but the individual response is.

**Determining quality:**

* *INDIVIDUAL INGREDIENTS DO NOT DETERMINE THE QUALITY OF A PET FOOD.* The quality of a pet food is determined by the nutritional value of the food as a whole (including all ingredients,) and how it is digested then absorbed to deliver nutrients based on your pet’s specific age or condition. The guaranteed analysis is **not** a guarantee of nutritional quality – nor is the ingredient list or the presence or absence of a “guarantee of nutritional quality. “*Think of how much variation you have in 2 cars, or 2 houses built with exactly the same raw materials.*

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