

Understanding the dog food label



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Expert Nutrition

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Let's examine a national brand label

Chicken and Brown Rice Adult Formula

With hundreds to choose from how you begin. In a few words, read the label. The front is filled with marketing and great art. The side and the rear have the facts as required by law. This may help you understand what it all means to make better choices.

I have spent decades working with dogs of various breeds, ages and both sexes and although there are breed specific behaviors, there is no scientific evidence to support “breed specific” dietary formulas that’s marketing not science.

“My breeder recommended.....”

From the day you bring that new addition home you have been given advice as to what to feed, when to feed and quantity to feed. Sometimes they are right too, but more often people, including breeders, are not. It is the human condition to make purchases based on packaging, a friend’s suggestion, a perceived expert and oddly our own personal human nutritional beliefs. There are over 500 brands of dog food on the market today. Many are made by the top 5 manufacturers and are simply variations on the same formula. So how do you know which is best for your dog.

Although it is not “rocket science” as they say, it is science. First, we need to read the bag / can carefully there are 2 important elements. The ingredients of course and the guaranteed analysis. These two panels tell you what is in the food and how much it is based on weight. Unfortunately, they are misleading. Examine the bag of dog food you have and look at the label, this is what you might find as an example.

Actual label from a major US brand commonly recommended by veterinarians.

INGREDIENTS

Chicken, rice, whole grain wheat, poultry by-product meal, whole grain corn, soybean meal, beef fat preserved with mixed-tocopherols, corn protein meal, dried egg product, natural flavor, dried beet pulp, glycerin, mono and dicalcium phosphate, wheat bran, calcium carbonate, fish meal, salt, soybean oil, potassium chloride, MINERALS (zinc proteinate, ferrous sulfate, manganese proteinate, copper proteinate, calcium iodate, sodium selenite), VITAMINS (Vitamin E supplement, niacin (Vitamin B-3), thiamine mononitrate (Vitamin B1), calcium pantothenate (Vitamin B-5), Vitamin A supplement, riboflavin supplement (Vitamin B-2), Vitamin B-12 supplement, pyridoxine hydrochloride (Vitamin B-6), folic acid (Vitamin B-9), menadione sodium bisulfite complex (Vitamin B-12), biotin (Vitamin B-7) Vitamin B-3 supplement) choline chloride, dried Bacillus coagulans fermentation product, L-ascorbyl-2-polyphosphate (Vitamin C), L-Lysine monohydrochloride, garlic oil

Let's examine it,

Proteins (total of 5)

1. First ingredient, Chicken not sure which parts of the chicken, but chicken

2. Third ingredient Poultry by Products Meal, (poultry? Not necessarily chicken)

a. (Definition) Meat by-products are the non-muscle parts of a slaughtered animal, such as organs (liver, kidneys, spleen), bones, fat, and sometimes even emptied stomachs or intestines. While some by-products, like gelatin or certain organ meats, are consumed by humans as delicacies, many are used in non-food products like pet food

3. Seventh Ingredient; Beef fat

4. Ninth ingredient; Dried Egg Product

5. Sixteenth ingredient; Fish Meal

a. (Definition) fish meal is a dry, protein-rich flour made from rendered, ground whole fish or fish by-products like bones and offal (offal are the internal organs)

Carbs; (total of 7)

1. Second Ingredient Rice
2. Third ingredient Whole Grain Wheat
3. Fifth Ingredient Whole Grain Corn
4. Sixth Ingredient Soybean Meal
5. Seventh Ingredient Corn Protein Meal
6. Fourteenth Ingredient Wheat Bran
7. Eighteenth Ingredient Soybean Oil

Minerals and Vitamins

Minerals are the “electrolytes”)

The list of vitamins, many of which you are probably familiar with, is complete and extensive so we will not be examining that here, but if you have questions about your pet specifically related to supplements feel free to contact us.

Let’s explain the words you may not be familiar with.

i) Mixed Tocopherols

- (1) Tocopherols are a group of antioxidants designed to help the fats from degrading; the purpose is to ensure that enough get into the system to convert to Glucose which is essential to the brain. They are found naturally in seeds and nuts as well as in certain vegetable oils.

ii) Dicalcium phosphate

- (1) It enhances nutritional value by adding essential minerals for bone and teeth health

iii) Calcium Carbonate

- (1) ingredient in dog food that provides calcium, an essential mineral for dogs for bone density.

iv) Potassium Chloride

(1) Regulates fluid balance, supports muscle function, maintains proper nerve function, and helps with heart health.

GUARANTEED ANALYSIS

Crude Protein (Hin)	26.0%
Crude Fat (Min)	16.0%
Crude Fiber (Max)	30%
Moisture (Max)	12.0%
Linoleic Acid (Min)	10%
Calcium (Ca) (Min)	0.8%
Selenium (50) (Min)	0.35 mg/kg
Vitamin A (Min)	15.000 IU/kg
Vitamin E (Min)	400 IU/kg
Ascorbic Acid (Vitamin C) (Min)	70 mg/kg
Glucosamine (Min)	400 ppm
Omega-6 Fatty Acids" (Min)	(in my professional opinion this ingredient is unbalanced it must be at a proper ratio between Omega-6 "Linoleic Acid" and Omega-3. Unbalanced as in this case can lead to inflammatory responses in some dogs)
Phosphorus (P) (Min)	1.5%
Bacillus coagulans (Min)	600 million CFU/
CALORIE CONTENT(Fed)(ME):	3790kcal/kg 369 kcal/cup
MADE IN U.S. FACILITIES	

Summary

You have probably been convinced through marketing that meat as the first ingredient is essential in determining the quality of a food. You are not wrong, but when you look carefully you will find that in this case there are more carbohydrates and fats in the food than meat proteins by volume. This is a loophole that is often exploited. The above labels are from the number 1 selling dog food in the US.