



Pet Nutrition

Wholesome food for healthy pets.

DEBUNKING PET FOOD MYTHS

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Good nutrition, based on fresh, wholesome food, is the foundation of good health. This basic principle applies whether we are a human being or an animal. While many people worry about what they feed themselves and their family, these same people often incorrectly assume that all pet food is equal. Based on the aggressive and confusing marketing practices of pet food companies, people erroneously presume they are feeding their pet a quality food at a reasonable price, when in fact they may be unknowingly doing the exact opposite.

When it comes to pet food, the consumer's motto definitely should be "buyer beware." The pet food industry has done a great job of promulgating several myths about their products which many people sadly accept as fact. I encourage you to take the time to learn about these myths so that you can make an informed decision when choosing food for your furry friends.

Myth #1 - Pet Food is 100% Complete Nutrition

Many pet foods are labeled with statements such as "100% Complete and Balanced Nutrition" or "100% Complete Nutrition." If those statements were true, it would imply we (humans) know everything possible there is to know about nutrition. Knowledge about nutrition is dependant on our knowledge of genetics, physics, chemistry and biology. Since our learning of those sciences is not 100% complete, it is extremely presumptuous to make a claim that we have 100% knowledge of the nutritional requirements of any species. Have you ever noticed that several times per year we learn about some new vitamin or micronutrient and its role in nutrition? Why do scientists keep making these discoveries if we already have 100% knowledge of nutrition? Commonsense dictates that the claim of "100% Complete and Balanced Nutrition" cannot be true, and to put it on a label is at best, misleading.

There is a famous breakfast cereal that was advertised as being 100% complete balanced nutrition. If that claim were truthful, we could assume that if you only ate that cereal, and never anything else, you would be healthy. Does that make sense to you?

Myth #2 - Each Meal Must Be 100% Balanced

Along with the idea of 100% complete knowledge of nutrition goes the myth that each of our pet's meals must be 100% balanced. This is often the argument used to support the myth that pets should never have "people" food. Commonsense should also make short work of refuting

this myth. When was the last time you made sure each of your meals throughout the day was 100% balanced? While balance is important over time, animals in the wild do not eat a balanced meal every time they consume food.

Myth #3 - Never Feed “People” Food to Pets

Notice I have the word people in quotes. Who decided that fresh, whole food was “people” food and that our pets should only be fed highly processed, fragmented, non-fresh food? Feeding your pet fresh, whole foods is probably one of the best things you can do for them. It will not upset the delicate balance of their diet as long as you take the time to learn about which fresh foods are appropriate for your pet and which may be dangerous. Nor will it cause them to steal food or beg at the table, as it is how the food is delivered that causes this behavior.

Myth #4 - Raw Meat & Bones Are Bad for Pets

More and more people are looking at the natural diet of felines and canines and as a result are feeding their pets raw meat and bones. In response many of the pet food companies are actively warning people about the dangers of a raw diet. Again if we let commonsense prevail, this myth just does not hold up. Have you ever seen a cat eat a mouse? Who do you suppose cooks food for feral dogs, wolves and foxes? Canines and felines, when left to their own devices, would eat a diet of fresh, whole food, including raw meat and bones. They have survived doing exactly that for millions of years.

There are risks feeding a raw diet, but if you take the necessary precautions and ensure your animal receives the appropriate nutrients, it can be quite safe and very nutritious. If you do decide to explore this option, take the time to educate yourself and read many of the excellent books on the subjects such as *Ultimate Diet: Natural Nutrition for Dogs and Cats* by Kymthy Schultze. You might also consider feeding one of the commercially prepared raw diets, available in the freezers section at your favorite pet store.

Myth #5 - Never Change Formulas or Brands of Pet Food

How many times have you heard that you should NEVER change the food you are feeding your pet because it will cause them digestive upset and other problems? Now think about how much sense it would make for you to eat the exact same thing, at every meal, every day, for the rest of your life. Do you think that would be a prescription for optimal health or more likely a path to poor health and a guarantee to maintain market share for the manufacturer of that food?

It is true that you cannot change diets with some pets because they do have overly sensitive digestive systems. Unfortunately, that is not a sign of health but a sign of disease. Dr. Wysong, founder of the highly reputable pet food company Wysong, actually believes a major reason for the food allergies and intolerances seen in pets is the fact that they are fed the same thing day after day. Fortunately you can change foods with most pets and when you are doing so you are helping them achieve optimal health.

We change protein sources (chicken, lamb, turkey, fish, etc.) and brands, every time we get a new bag of food for our pets, and we recommend our clients do the same.

Myth #6 - Always Feed the Appropriate Age Based Formula

Formulas such as Puppy, Adult, Senior and Lite are largely a marketing device designed to take up shelf space that could be used by other brands of food. While there are some occasions where

one of these special formulas might make sense, for most pets they are unnecessary. Again, think about cats and dogs in the wild. They do not have a different diet dependant upon their age or physique. In fact if you take the time to read the fine print on a bag of pet food you will find it usually includes a statement indicating that the food is adequate for all life stages. We have fed puppy food to older dogs when they need to put on some extra weight and have fed “senior” foods to young dogs that have a lower need for calories, all without ill effect.

Myth #7 – The Best Value Is the Food That Costs the Least Per Pound

Everyone wants to get a good value for their hard earned money, unfortunately, many people fall into the trap of incorrectly assuming that the pet food with the lowest cost per pound is the cheapest or best value. Some stores even support this myth by putting labels on the shelf, which clearly state the cost per pound. The fact is pet food is more complex than just price per pound.

Pet food manufacturers use different ingredients in different amounts to formulate their products. Some use high quality ingredients which are also more expensive. Because these high quality ingredients contain more nutrition per pound, you can feed your pet less. For example, a well known low end dog food states that a 50 pound dog will require 4.33 cups of their food per day to get the minimum required level of nutrition. That same 50 pound dog could get the same amount of nutrition from only 2 cups of a well known high quality dog food. Even if the cost per pound of that high quality dog food is double that of the low end product, the quality food is still a better value.

In order to determine the true cost of a pet food you need to know two things; 1) the amount of food you need to feed you pet in volumetric ounces or cups, and 2) the food density of the food, or how much one volumetric cup of the food weighs. You can then use this information to determine the number of days a bag of food will last, which allows you to determine the daily feeding cost. While regulations require pet food manufacturers provide you with information on how much to feed your pet, they are not required to indicate the food density of their food. As a result most companies do not put this valuable piece of information on the label, and some will not even release it if you call and ask, making it impossible to determine the true cost of their product. In my estimation, their failure to disclose that information is enough to discourage me from feeding or recommending their food.