

Feeding your dog and cat

There are as many myths about feeding pets as there are pets in Australia! Here's the right information for you to feed confident about selecting the right foods for your pet.

What kinds of foods should I give my pet?



Thanks to Bajimbi Cattery for the photo!

Both cats and dogs are CARNIVORES, which means their original diet was hunting prey animals.

Being a carnivore doesn't mean you only eat meat! "Wild" dog and cat diets included meat, internal organs, fat, intestine contents, bones, eggs and other foods. This variety balances protein, fat, carbohydrates ("carbs"), vitamins and minerals. BUT don't let your pet hunt prey for dinner! Most modern pet foods are carefully balanced to provide all these ingredients, but without the mess.

So do I have to give my pet a raw diet?

NO. Most people who talk about 'raw' diets mean 'home made' meat diets– which are NOT balanced and can cause illness. Most commercial pet diets are carefully balanced and based on a wide variety of ingredients. Some include only fresh ingredients, and if they are balanced that's fine, otherwise move to pre-packed wet foods (cans), dry foods (kibbles) or semi-moist foods (rolls, or chewy pellets).

Can I develop a diet for my pet at home?

This is **really** difficult. You select ingredients, decide whether to cook them and then balance them for protein/fat/carb content. Then you balance the vitamins and minerals, and ensure the ingredients don't degrade or block each other. Ingredient quality varies with time of year, climate and other issues as well. Then adjust the ingredients for different age and status (eg puppy/kitten, mother raising a litter, old etc) and work out the amount to give. In pet food companies and on farms they use university-trained nutritionists and computer programs to work all this out.

How do I pick a good commercial food?

Different pets respond to foods a bit differently, but there's a trick on the labelling that's really useful: look for the words COMPLETE DIET or COMPLETE FOOD. If the packaging includes COMPLETE DIET then it's balanced for all the things above. If it doesn't say this, then this food should not be fed as the main diet, unless you add foods that balance the diet.

That's the baseline. After that, you can generally buy more expensive foods to get a better result. Buy the very best foods you can afford for puppies/kittens, mothers raising litters, or old/ sick pets. You can mix other foods with COMPLETE FOODS, but the COMPLETE FOOD should always be the majority.



Many commercial dry foods are based on cereal protein: usually wheat and rice.

This is OK for most pets, but some pets respond better to more expensive foods which include more meat and meat by products. Some pets respond best to foods based on rice rather than wheat.

What are the three rules for feeding pets?

1. Look for COMPLETE DIET or COMPLETE FOOD as your starting point
2. ALWAYS provide clean fresh water – lots of it, and check it twice per day.
3. Feed only enough to keep the pet in good condition, don't overfeed.

What's the Difference between Dog Food and Cat Food?

Cats have special diet needs – cat food contains added taurine, and different vitamin/mineral balance. It's OK to feed cat food to dogs, but DO NOT feed dog food to cats except in an emergency.

This advice is of a general nature and is not a substitute for professional assistance.

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‘Fresh-commercial’ food, Canned food, Semi Moist or Dry food, which type is best?

In DOGS , it’s not about how the food is presented, it’s about the ingredients that make up the COMPLETE DIET. Whatever you and your dog work out is fine.

In CATS, it’s almost the same BUT it’s not a good idea to feed only dry foods. Some cats don’t drink enough on dry-food-only diets, and they can get urine problems. Feed a mix of food types.

Fresh-commercial food, Canned food, Semi Moist or Dry food, which lasts longer?

Vitamins and fats, and some proteins and preservatives can degrade over time, especially in warm conditions. Read packaging instructions to see how long the food will last in your home.

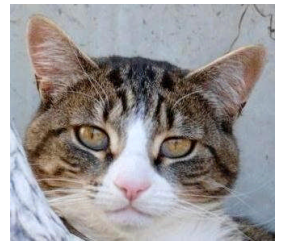
BUT pet food does NOT last once it’s in the bowl. Throw out any dry food remainders after 12-24 hours, (shorter times in summer); and not more than 6 hours for fresh/canned foods. Clean your pet’s water and food bowls daily, to stop germs breeding on the bowls.

Supermarket, Pet Shop, Online or Vet – where do I get the best foods?

It’s not the outlet, it’s the food. Get the best COMPLETE DIET you can afford at the outlet of your choice.

What about special diets?

Sometimes your vet will ask you to use a special diet to help treat a disease in your pet. These diets are balanced for good nutrition, and contain special ingredients to help your pet manage the disease. You should follow the vet’s instructions carefully and only feed the diet prescribed.



Thanks, Jo & Dave, for the photo!

What about Treats?

Just like children, too many treats can make your pet fat and many contain excess salt or sugar. Use treats as a “sometimes” food in very small amounts. Your pet should see a treat as a special event!

What about MILK?

Most pets have difficulty digesting the lactose in milk – resulting in gas or diarrhoea. Use ‘pet milk’ only.

What about BONES?

Vets recommend large meaty bones for most dogs as an occasional treat– shank bones work well. Some pets should not have bones – follow your vet’s instructions here.

What about supplements?

Some people want to add vitamins and minerals to the diet, perhaps ‘because he’s a puppy’, or ‘the queen is nursing kittens’. ONLY do this on vet’s advice - it can un-balance the whole diet and make your pet sick.

What about Table Scraps?

These are not a balanced diet. BUT if leftovers don’t contain any ‘DO NOTS’, like onions or bone, many pets appreciate small tidbits of ‘human food’ as a treat. Too much, though, can cause gut upsets.

What about Vegetarian or Vegan diets?

With a wide range of carefully balanced ingredients, it has been possible to feed dogs on a vegetarian diet, but it’s really difficult. Cats have special needs however, and vegetarian diets are NOT recommended.

What SHOULDN’T I feed?

Liver treats and fresh liver have high levels of Vitamin A, which can *cause* disease if you feed too much. Don’t feed your pet so much it gets too fat! “All things in moderation” should be your motto. Avoid foods known to be poisonous – onion, chocolate etc, or too many treats, and NEVER feed cooked or small bones.

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