

# Understanding Pet Food Labels: Choose the Healthiest for Your Pet!

## 1. Check the Ingredient List

- Prioritize real, whole ingredients like chicken, beef, or fish as the first ingredient for quality protein.
- Avoid "meat by-products" or "meat meal" as primary ingredients—they're lower-quality protein sources.

## 2. Look for Specific Protein Sources

- Cats need high protein, ideally with real meat as the main ingredient.
- Dogs need a balanced diet but should also have a quality meat source first.

## 3. Understand the Guaranteed Analysis

- **Protein:** Dogs (18-22%), Cats (26-30%) – supports muscles and overall health.
- **Fat:** Dogs (8-12%), Cats (9-15%) – provides energy and supports skin/coat health.
- **Fiber:** Dogs (3-6%), Cats (2-4%) – aids digestion.

## 4. Seek the AAFCO Statement

- Ensures the food meets nutritional standards. Look for statements indicating suitability for "Growth," "Maintenance," or "All Life Stages."

## 5. Avoid Artificial Additives and Fillers

- Opt for foods with natural preservatives (Vitamin E, C). Avoid BHA, BHT, propylene glycol, and fillers like corn, wheat, and soy.

## 6. Understand "Natural," "Organic," and "Grain-Free"

- **Natural:** No artificial additives but doesn't mean high-quality.
- **Organic:** Grown without synthetic pesticides; look for USDA certification.
- **Grain-Free:** Suitable for pets with grain allergies but not necessarily healthier.

## 7. Monitor Calorie Content

- Check for "kcal per cup" or "kcal per can." Adjust feeding based on pet's size, activity, and weight goals.

## 8. Follow Feeding Guidelines

- Use feeding recommendations as a starting point but adjust based on your pet's specific needs.

## 9. Focus on Ingredients Over Marketing Claims

- Terms like "premium" and "gourmet" are unregulated. Focus on ingredient quality and nutritional info.

## 10. Consider Unique Dietary Needs

- Puppies/kittens need nutrient-dense food; seniors benefit from joint supplements; pets with allergies may need hypoallergenic diets.

