

Life stage is important because your dog's nutritional needs will change over time or due to circumstance (like pregnancy). Lining up the life stage of the food with the life stage of your dog will help make sure you're providing appropriate nutrition.

Ok, but how do I know what is the best kind of dog food to get?

Deciding on the best dog food for you and your dog comes down to a variety of preferences. Nutrition, price, type, features, health benefits and more all can be important. If you're in a Tractor Supply store, one of our associates can help walk you through the differences.



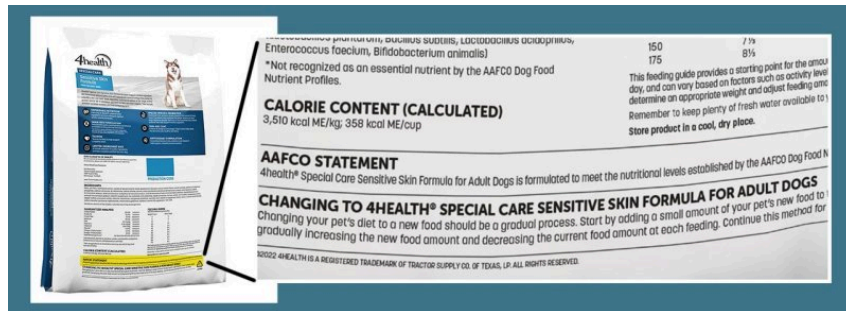
What are the basics of dog nutrition?

Dogs need balance. They are not strictly carnivores and need a healthy mix of protein, fats and fatty acids, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, fiber, and water. Defining the balance of these elements varies according to dog age, breed, activity level, sensitivities and allergies, and any other known health problems.

Protein helps in muscle development; fats are great for shiny coats and fiber aids in digestion. The right amount of all these things is great, but too little or too much of any can cause issues. A good dog food contains a healthy mix of meat, vegetables, grains, and fruits that provide balanced nutrition.

How do I know what ingredients are in a dog food?

The ingredients are listed on the label in order of weight. A product that lists a meat, meat by-product, or meat meal or meal near the top is typically preferred. You'll want to look for words like "chicken," "beef," or "fish," in the first few items, although you may also see "duck," "venison," or even "lamb."



Now, this can get a bit tricky. The "weight" of an item includes water, so an ingredient like "chicken" listed early, may have less meat or protein than a product with "meal" or "chicken meal,"³ listed early.

What is the bad dog food?

P: If the food has an AAFCO statement, it's a least safe and will provide adequate nutrition. That said, you may want to steer clear of dog food that lists common carbohydrates in their top ingredients and look in favor of dog food with protein-heavy ingredients at the top of their list.

Also, watch out for labeling. A word like "chicken" in the title of the product means chicken must make up at least seventy percent of that product. Great, right? Well, something called "chicken dinner" or "chicken platter" only has to be ten percent chicken. Something referred to as "with chicken" only has to have three percent chicken, and if all that's written is "chicken flavor" then the amount of chicken is likely less than three percent. Keep these rules in mind when looking at labels and titles.

What does good dog food cost?

That depends. Price isn't always an indication of quality. When selecting the right dog food for you and your dog, consider the above factors as well as what works best for your household and budget.

Should I feed my dog wet food or dry food? What's the difference between wet food and dry food?

The actual difference between wet food and dry food is just the amount of water. The in-use and preferential differences are more varied.

Wet Food

- Usually in convenient, pre-determined serving size
- Long shelf life in can, short shelf life in bowl
- Can be smelly, sometimes a plus for older
- Tends to contain higher amounts of fresh ingredients
- Meals can last longer, and provide dog with more water⁴

Dry Food

- Undetermined serving size makes diet adjustments easier
- Lasts a long time in bag or bowl
- May be better for dental health
- Widely available and affordable
- Easily digestible and safe

What should I look for in a dog food for a dog with special needs?

The most common special needs are food sensitivities or allergies and breed-specific needs. Many regularly available dog foods account for special needs like being grain-free, high protein, or breed-specific diets designed to help manage known issues. Your best source for learning the special needs of your dog is the advice of your veterinarian, your own instincts, and the cues you get from your dog. If you're noticing your dog not feeling well, showing skin problems, or having a digestive issue, you may want to try changing the food.

How do I switch dog food?

Gradually. Changing food is a good idea even without health issues, just to make sure the dog is getting the most complete nutrition possible. You'll also want to make food adjustments as necessary to match your dog's current life stage.

One way to switch food is through the three, three, three plan. Use 1/3 new and 2/3 old food for three days, half old and half new for three days, 2/3 new and 1/3 old for three days, and then fully transition to the new food. Watch out for any vomiting, diarrhea or loss of appetite and contact your vet if you notice these or other symptoms during the process.

¹ This is the Association of American Feed Control Officials and the non-profit that informs FDA regulations on dog food.

² Canine is just latin for dog

³ This is chicken with the water and fat removed

⁴ Wet food is great for dogs who are sometimes reluctant to drink as it provides them more water than dry food, but it is not a substitute for the dog staying hydrated with clean, fresh water.