

Finding Healthier Foods For Our Fur Friends

By Shawna Winn, (Guest Contributor)



I began delving into pet nutrition and a healthier lifestyle after I lost my 14 year old Yorkie to stomach cancer and less than a month later my 17 year old Poodle to kidney disease. They both lived a long life but neither were particularly healthy. My father is a Master Herbalist and Naturopath so I had a good background knowledge of diet and healthy living. I just needed to figure out how to apply this knowledge to my pets' lives.

I started a group on Yahoo Groups and realized I loved sharing and conversing with others on the same path I was on. I was one of the original posters on Dr. Karen Becker's forum (now closed) on Mercola Healthy Pets. From there I became a regular contributor on Dog Food Advisor. I'm still a regular on [Dog Food Advisor](#) but have branched out to do other things as well. My travels have afforded me some fun and interesting opportunities - but that's for another time.

Through fostering, I've found that good nutrition can help or even alleviate physical, emotional, and behavioral problems in dogs. It has been my experience with my own fur-kids however that spawned me to learn all I could about **canine nutrition**. And it is my successes that keep me a devout **natural foods advocate**.

One of my successes, my Audrey (pictured to the right), was born with kidney disease. She started showing symptoms even before weaning. Audrey lived with kidney disease for eight years and seven months and until the last few months on this earth her kidneys remained stable. It was the toll a bacterial infection took on her kidneys that took her from us, not natural progression of the disease. That's pretty great considering her vets thought she wouldn't be with us much past age two. I believe in my heart that she would not have lived such a healthy and long life if not for excellent nutrition and clean living.



In honor of Audrey, here's a few things you may not know about the **pet food industry** and your bag of pet food:

Human vs. Pet Food

The pet food industry is an extension of the human food industry. Foods not fit for human consumption, byproducts of human food manufacturing, or worse (guess where moldy grains end up) are used by some pet food manufacturers to keep expenses down and profits up. Unfortunately, this can be disastrous for the health of your pet. Brewers' rice and corn gluten meal fit into this category—ever wonder what corn gluten meal really is?

Brewers' Rice

Per [Wikipedia](#), brewers' rice is:

"...the small milled fragments of rice kernels. Brewers' rice is a processed rice product that is missing many of the nutrients in whole ground rice and brown rice thus reducing the quality. Brewers' rice and second heads are one of the many byproducts that rice milling creates... Brewers' rice is sold for pet food and dairy feed exclusively."

Brewers' rice has very little nutritional value, yet it is the first or second ingredient in some foods.

Euthanized Animals

The [FDA](#) tested several brands of pet food and found the presence of pentobarbital:

"There appear to be associations between rendered or hydrolyzed ingredients and the presence of pentobarbital in dog food. The ingredients Meat and Bone Meal (MBM), Beef and Bone Meal (BBM), Animal Fat (AF), and Animal Digest (AD) are rendered or hydrolyzed from animal sources

that could include euthanized animals."

This is an example of the kind of ingredients you should avoid feeding your pet.

Generic Protein Sources

Protein meals and by-product meals can be from a named source like chicken or a generic source such as poultry. These generically named meats can include cancerous tissue or originate from 4-D animals such as road kill. Look at this quote from the [FDA website](#) regarding 4-D animals:

"CVM is aware of the sale of dead, dying, disabled, or diseased (4-D) animals to salvagers for use as animal food. Meat from these carcasses is boned and the meat is packaged or frozen without heat processing. The raw, frozen meat is shipped for use by several industries, including pet food manufacturers, zoos, greyhound kennels, and mink ranches. This meat may present a potential health hazard to the animals that consume it and to the people who handle it" [emphasis mine].

So why is it in the food? Simple: **profit**. A cheap source of animal protein increases the bottom line of the manufacturer. Fed over time, this cheap product can cause you and your pet undue and possibly dire consequences.

Lower Quality Foods

Can your dog survive on these foods? Sure. *Can he truly thrive* on these foods? Not likely.

Don't rely on the pet food manufacturer to paint a true picture of what is in their food. Instead, educate yourself as to what the individual ingredients in the food really are. You may find that your bag of XXX brand is not the good food you originally thought it to be. Carefully scrutinize "premium" foods from the large pet food stores as well. You just might be surprised at what you find.

What to Feed Your Furry Friend for Better Health?

1. Better quality kibbled and canned foods will list a **named meat source** such as "chicken" or "lamb" as the first ingredient. They will not have ANY generically named meats or meat-by-products in the ingredient list (meat, poultry etc).
2. Avoid foods with **BHA**, **BHT**, and **Ethoxyquin**. Look for preservatives such as mixed tocopherols (vitamin e), grapeseed extract, or rosemary instead. These will generally be found after the fat source (about the fourth to seventh ingredient in the list) and at the end of the ingredient list.
3. Look for whole grains or chose a grain free food. Whether whole grains or grain free, pick a food with moderate to lower overall amounts of carbohydrates. To help with this, check out the **five star foods** on [Dog Food Advisor](#) or a similar pet food rating site.
4. Watch for **grain/carb bundles**—chicken, potato, pea protein, oatmeal, chicken fat—in this case, carbohydrates and vegetable proteins are the predominant ingredient in the food even though meat is the first ingredient.

Don't count on the protein content in the nutrient profile exclusively – read the individual ingredients to get the best overall picture. The protein content in the nutrition panel on the bag includes all sources of protein. Grain and vegetable proteins, although digestible, have a lower biological value than animal proteins.

5. Dog foods, by law, cannot advertise that they are made from "human grade" foods unless that food is also produced in a facility that also manufactures **human food**. Although rare, there are a few companies that have their products made in such a facility and therefore are legally allowed to advertise as human grade on their product packaging.
6. Some pet parents prefer to have complete control over what foods their furry friends eat and, therefore, feed foods prepared at home. This takes knowledge though. A well prepared and balanced **homemade diet is ideal**. But if you can't do it properly, you are much better off feeding a complete and balanced commercial raw/dehydrated, canned or kibble diet. Commercial raw/dehydrated and better quality

canned and kibbled foods can often be found in pet specialty boutiques, grooming facilities and holistic veterinary offices.

Although not a cure all, a healthy diet is the best insurance you have in your quest to keep or get your pets happy and healthy.