

Scientific Track

Diet Dilemmas: Interactive Cases with Multiple Diseases

Dr. Deborah Linder

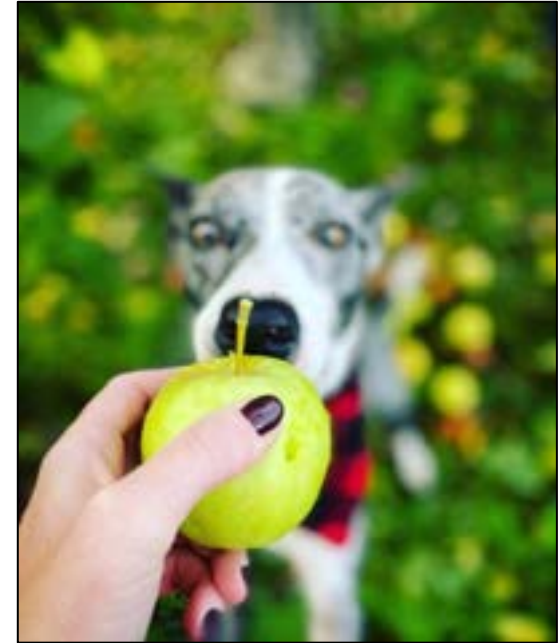
#NAVDF2025



Making Client Communication Easier: Nutrition Mythbusting and Pet Food FAQs



*Deborah Linder, DVM, MS,
DACVIM (Nutrition)
She/her/hers*



Disclosures:

- Board Certified Veterinary Nutritionist, Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University
- Dr. Linder has received research funding or speaker/consulting fees from the following entities within the last 5 years:
 - Buffalo Academy of Veterinary Medicine, National Institutes of Health (NIH), NAVC/VMX, Virbac, Royal Canin, Mark Morris Institute, Nestle Purina, Clinician's Brief, American Veterinary Medical Association, Eli Lilly Foundation, Hill's Pet Nutrition, Delaware Valley Veterinary Medical Association, Fetch dvm360, Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association, Today's Veterinary Practice, Delaware Valley Veterinary Medical Association, Rhode Island Companion Animal Health Foundation, Vet Show, American Academy of Veterinary Nutrition (AAVN), Western Veterinary Conference, Fresh Pet.

Evidence-Based Recommendations

- “Follow the evidence” philosophy
- Avoid labels like ‘good’ or ‘bad’
- What information do you/your clients need to feel comfortable?
- Recommendations can (& should!) change with new information
- Goal: families feel empowered to make informed choices



Building an Expanded Nutrition Toolbox

- Nutritional adequacy and guidelines
- Information, misinformation, and evidence-based medicine
- Communication strategies with clients
- Resources to make your life easier
- Ask away!

#1 Question: ‘What’s the Best/Safest Food for My Pet?’

- It depends & there is no “100% guaranteed safe food”
- Focus on nutritional adequacy, not marketing or advertising
- What resources are out there to make conversations easier?
- My advice for any question: block and bridge to adequacy and what is known

MYTH



www.wsava.org



www.aafco.org

AAFCO Refresher



- Determines what is 'complete and balanced'
 - Lifestages: growth, adult, reproduction/lactation, all life stages
 - Healthy pet/OTC diets AND veterinary/therapeutic diets!
- Provides nutrient profile guidelines
 - (minimums and maximums)
- Definitions on ingredients
- Does not enforce guidelines/regulate
- Don't use term '**AAFCO-approved foods**'
 - Avoid false sense of security/safety

MYTH



Nutritional Adequacy Statements



- **Every food*** (but not treats) should have an AAFCO statement!
- Three important things can be determined by these statements:
 1. Is this food complete and balanced?
 - If not, should only be fed under instruction by a veterinarian (e.g., therapeutic diets)
 2. How did the company determine the food was complete and balanced?
 - Non-invasive feeding trials vs. formulation
 3. What lifestage does this diet provide complete and balanced for?
 - Growth, reproduction, adult maintenance, or all life stages (Note: NO senior guidelines!)

***THIS INCLUDES VETERINARY DIETS!!!**

Information Can Get Lost Along the Way...



Essential / Advanced Nutrition Dog Chart Key



LIFESTAGES

All Life Stages: formulated to meet the nutritional levels established by the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) Dog Food Nutrient Profile for all life stages.

Puppy: formulated to meet the nutritional levels established by AAFCO Dog Food Nutrient Profile for growth and gestation/lactation.

Adult: formulated to meet the nutritional levels established by the AAFCO Dog Food Nutrient Profile for adult maintenance.

Senior: formulated to meet the nutritional levels established by the AAFCO Dog Food Nutrient Profile for senior dogs.



Toy/Giant Breed: toy or giant breed size formulas available. Toy formulas are formulated for the unique nutritional needs of the toy breed dog (approximately 6 lbs. or less). Giant breed formulas are formulated for the unique nutritional needs of the giant breed dog (approximately 100 lbs. or more).

Specific Breed: formulated for specific breeds such as Labradors, English Bulldogs or German Shepherds.

Hip & Joint: formulated to improve joint flexibility and support bone and joint cartilage with ingredients like Glucosamine & Chondroitin. Hip & Joint or similar mention should be noted on the packaging.

Oral Health: formulated to support oral health.

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Oral Health: formulated to support oral health.

AAFCO does not have 'senior' guidelines!

MYTH

'Senior' is only a Marketing Term!

Survey of Opinions About Nutritional Requirements of Senior Dogs and Analysis of Nutrient Profiles of Commercially Available Diets for Senior Dogs

Dana Hutchinson, DVM¹

Lisa M. Freeman, DVM, PhD, DACVN¹

Karen E. Schreiner, MA²

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Tufts University, Medford, MA

Table 5: Average nutrient analysis for key nutrients in 37 commercial over-the-counter diets marketed for senior dogs (median, range). Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) minimums for each nutrient for adult maintenance are provided.¹⁷

	AAFCO Minimum	Representative Adult Diet ⁴	Senior Diets (n=37)
Kilocalories per:			
Cup (n=25)	---	433	336 (246-408)
Can (n=10)	---		365 (312-411)
Pouch (n=2)	---		104 (100-108)
Protein (g/100 kcal)	5.1	5.9	6.9 (4.8-13.1)
Fat (g/100 kcal)	1.4	3.4	3.4 (2.4-6.3)
Crude fiber (g/100 kcal)	---	0.4	0.9 (0.2-2.9)
Sodium (mg/100 kcal)	20	105	89 (33-412)
Phosphorus (mg/100 kcal)	140	243	264 (134-412)

How Do We Navigate All These Nutrition Myths?

Block and bridge back to the basics:

- 1) Nutritional adequacy and what is known/not known
- 2) What information do you (and the family) need to feel comfortable feeding this food?
- 3) Providing resources to empower families to make informed choices
- 4) Trust and honesty (especially about what we don't know)

World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA)



Updated on 10 March 2021

WSAVA Global Nutrition Committee: Guidelines on Selecting Pet Foods



Pet food labels include a lot of required and useful information for veterinary teams and pet owners. They may also include marketing images and phrases that are designed to promote product sales rather than relay nutritional information. This means that some of the information, including unregulated terms such as 'holistic' or 'premium', is of little practical value for nutritional assessment. The veterinary team has a vital role in helping pet owners make informed decisions on the optimal diet for their dog or cat.

What to look for in a brand

- 1. Do they employ a Nutritionist?**
 - Appropriate qualifications are either a PhD in Animal Nutrition or Board Certification by the American College of Veterinary Nutrition (ACVN) or the European College of Veterinary Comparative Nutrition (ECVCN).
 - What are the Nutritionist's name, qualifications and employment status? Consultants may have limited influence compared to a staff Nutritionist.
- 2. Who formulates the diet?**
- 4. What kind of product research or nutrition studies have been conducted? Is it published in peer-reviewed journals?**
 - Pet food companies are not required to conduct or sponsor nutritional research in order to produce and sell a food, but when they do, it indicates a commitment to animal health and wellness.

What to look for on a label

- 1. Nutrition Adequacy Statement?**
 - Is it a complete diet? Foods should be labeled to indicate if they provide a "complete" diet with all required nutrients. The label might also specify if this was determined via life stage feeding trials or formulation to meet requirements. Those labeled as intended for "short-term", "intermittent", or "complementary" feeding should only be fed as a small portion of the diet (10% or less), or under veterinarian supervision if feeding a therapeutic diet.
 - Does the food match the nutritional needs of the



The Savvy Dog Owner's Guide: Nutrition on the Internet

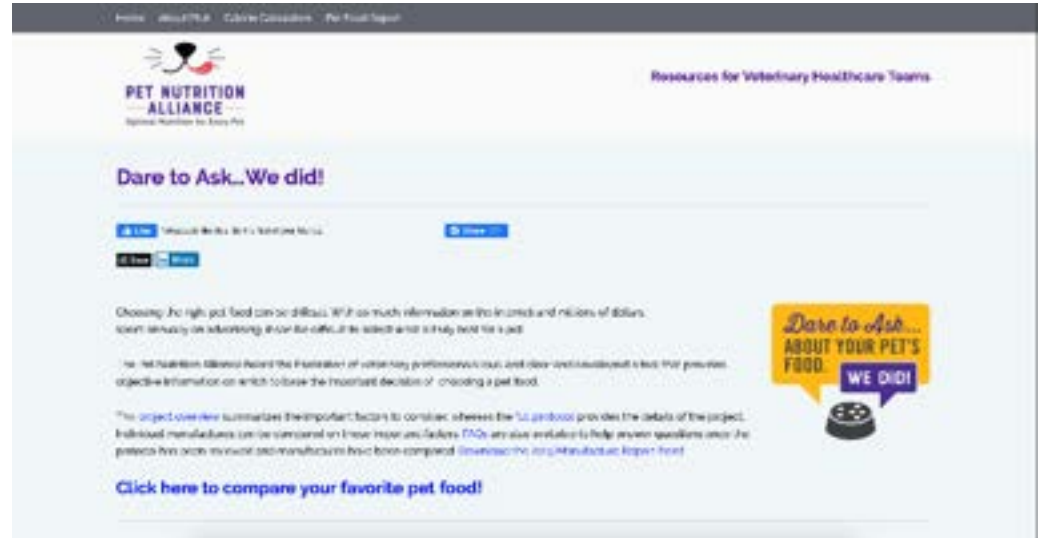
More than 75% of all American homes have computers and this is both a blessing and a curse. For dog owners, the internet provides vast amounts of information on many subjects. The information, however, is virtually unregulated and its quality ranges from excellent to pure quackery. Deciding which websites are trustworthy can be difficult!

Canine nutrition is a popular topic. There are literally thousands of websites, promoting everything from recipes for raw food and vegetarian diets, advertisements for supplements and holistic foods, recommendations for diets

Check the source of the information. Do the authors simply state that a product "prevents cancer" or is there a reference to a scientifically-conducted research study? It is easy - though illegal - to make unproven claims for nutritional products but it is much harder to back them up scientifically. If there is a reference, where is it from? Is it from the author's own article or promotional literature or is it from a peer-reviewed veterinary journal? Most products on the internet do not cite studies to back up their claims. Those that do often cite studies on humans or rats which may not be pertinent to dogs.

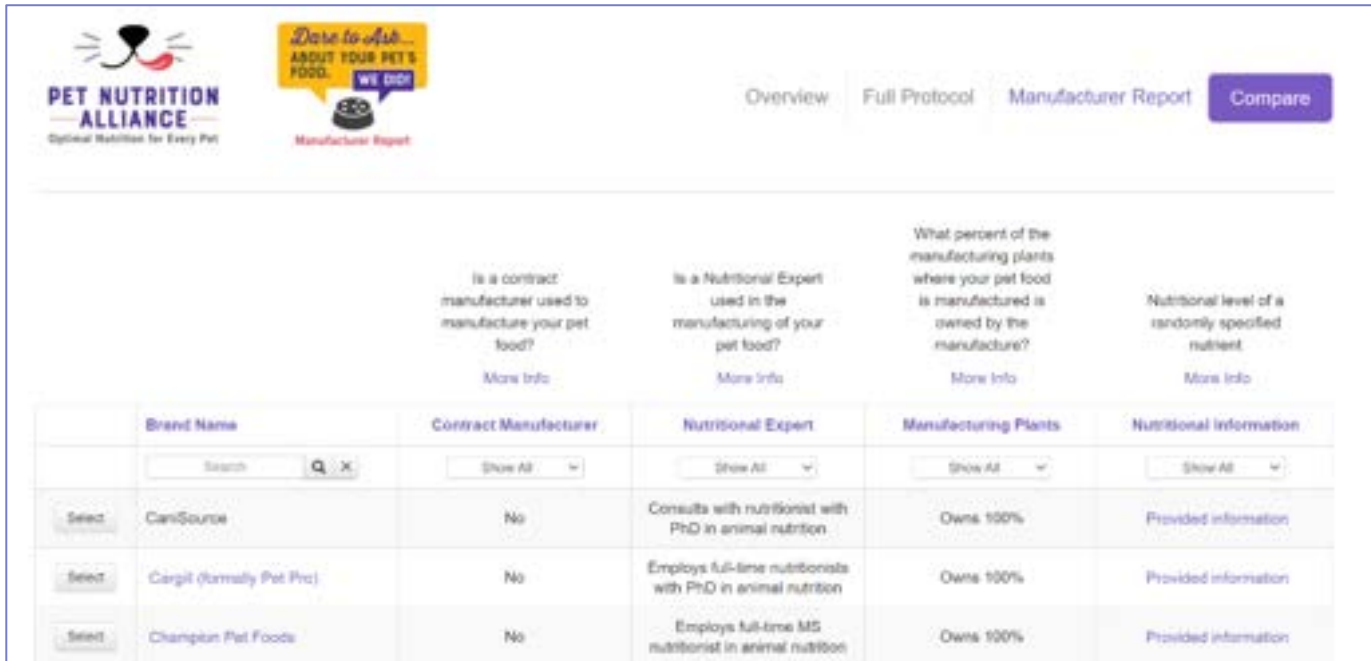
How Do We Determine Nutritional Adequacy?

- WSAVA Guidelines
- Call companies to ask questions
- Nutritionist on staff to formulate diets?
- How can I get information on your diets?



<https://petnutritionalliance.org/>

Empower Clients with Resources: *Dare to Ask*



The screenshot displays the 'Dare to Ask' website interface. At the top left is the Pet Nutrition Alliance logo with the tagline 'Optimal Nutrition for Every Pet'. To its right is a yellow speech bubble icon containing the text 'Dare to Ask... ABOUT YOUR PET'S FOOD.' and 'WE DID!' above a pet food bowl icon. Below this is a 'Manufacturer Report' section with navigation tabs: 'Overview', 'Full Protocol', 'Manufacturer Report', and 'Compare'. The main content area features a table with columns for 'Brand Name', 'Contract Manufacturer', 'Nutritional Expert', 'Manufacturing Plants', and 'Nutritional Information'. Each column has a 'More Info' link below its header. The table lists three brands: CaniSource, Cargill (formerly Pet Pro), and Champion Pet Foods. Each row includes a 'Select' button on the left and 'Provided information' on the right.

	Brand Name	Contract Manufacturer	Nutritional Expert	Manufacturing Plants	Nutritional Information
	<input type="text" value="Search"/> <input type="button" value="Q"/> <input type="button" value="X"/>	<input type="text" value="Show All"/>	<input type="text" value="Show All"/>	<input type="text" value="Show All"/>	<input type="text" value="Show All"/>
<input type="button" value="Select"/>	CaniSource	No	Consults with nutritional with PhD in animal nutrition	Owms 100%	Provided information
<input type="button" value="Select"/>	Cargill (formerly Pet Pro)	No	Employs full-time nutritionists with PhD in animal nutrition	Owms 100%	Provided information
<input type="button" value="Select"/>	Champion Pet Foods	No	Employs full-time MS nutritionist in animal nutrition	Owms 100%	Provided information

<https://petnutritionalliance.org/>

MYTH



**U.S. FOOD & DRUG
ADMINISTRATION**

‘No Recalls Means It’s Safe Right?’

- No recalls could be lack of harm, lack of testing, lack of reporting
- <https://www.fda.gov/>
- E-list for notifications
- Searchable archive

Date	Brand Name(s)	Product Description	Recall Reason Description	Company Name
10/30/2023	Victor Super Premium	Dog Food, Select Beef Meal & Brown Rice Formula	Potential Salmonella contamination	Mid America Pet Food
10/27/2023	Blue Ridge Beef	Breeders Choice Raw Pet Food 2 lb	Salmonella contamination	Blue Ridge Beef
10/21/2023	Retriever	Mini Chunk Chicken Recipe Dry Dog Food	Potential Salmonella contamination	Texas Farm Products Company dba TFP Nutrition

PetHelpful
PET NEWS ASK A VET ASK A DOG TRAINER DOGS CATS HORSES FISH & AQUARIUM

5 Safe Dog Foods That Have Never Been Recalled

RECALLS UPDATED MAR 1, 2024 1:02 AM EST

5 Safe Dog Foods

If you are concerned about what you are feeding your dog, the foods on this list may put your mind at ease.

When in Doubt, Report!

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the FDA website with the logo and search/menu options. Below is a breadcrumb trail: Home / Animal & Veterinary / Safety & Health / Report a Problem / How to Report a Pet Food Complaint. The main heading is 'How to Report a Pet Food Complaint'. Below the heading are social sharing buttons for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Email, and Print. A sidebar on the left has a 'Report a Problem' section with a link to 'How to Report Animal Drug and Device Side Effects and Product Problems'. A central blue button says 'Report a Pet Food Complaint'. Below the button, text explains reporting options: 'You can report complaints about a pet food product electronically through the [Safety Reporting Portal](#) or you can call your state's [FDA Consumer Complaint Coordinators](#).' On the right, a footer note states 'Content current as of: 04/04/2023'.

FDA U.S. FOOD & DRUG ADMINISTRATION

Q Search Menu

← Home / Animal & Veterinary / Safety & Health / Report a Problem / How to Report a Pet Food Complaint

How to Report a Pet Food Complaint

f Share t Tweet in LinkedIn ✉ Email 🖨 Print

[Español](#)

[Report a Pet Food Complaint](#)

You can report complaints about a pet food product electronically through the [Safety Reporting Portal](#) or you can call your state's [FDA Consumer Complaint Coordinators](#).

Content current as of:
04/04/2023

Report a Problem

How to Report Animal Drug and Device Side Effects and Product Problems

Product Research

- What product research has been done?
- If there are claims for product benefits, how did the company determine that?



Product Research

- What product research has been done?
- If there are claims for product benefits, how did the company determine that?
- Call and ask!
 - Peer reviewed studies?
 - AAFCO definition?



Example: AAFCO and Dental Claims

- ‘Foods and treats bearing claims to whiten or cleanse/freshen teeth by abrasive or mechanical actions are not objectionable.’
 - Will not pursue possible false claims



www.costo.com



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www.costo.com

- Alternative: VOHC Seal of Acceptance
 - Voluntary, but requires clinical trials



Lily

- 9 mo old FS mixed breed dog
- Intermittent chronic small bowel diarrhea, ear infections, pruritus
- Fecal negative and empirically dewormed with fenbendazole
- CBC normal
- Chemistry normal
- Cortisol normal
- Serum TLI normal
- Next step???



Lily

- Adverse food reaction?
 - If improvement on diet, what is it they're responding to?
 - Protein (source)? Fat? Fiber? Digestibility? Combination?
- Trial and error!
- It's never wrong to start with a dietary elimination trial...



Lily

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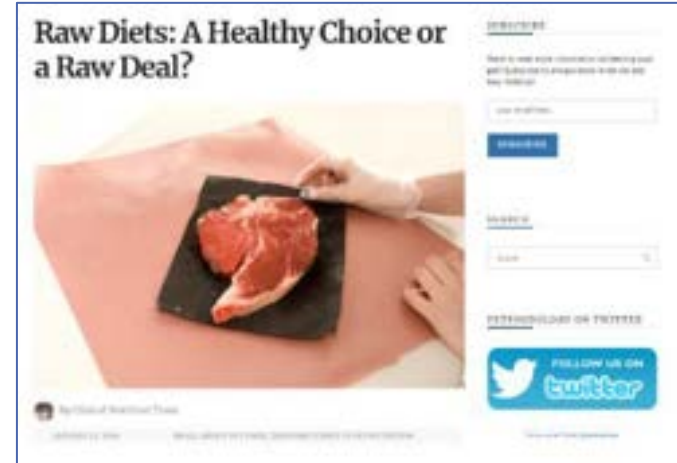
Owner response: "My friend has her dog on a raw diet and says her dog has never been better and it 'fixed' his GI and he has such a shiny healthy coat! Can we trial that?"



Communication Tips: Informer, not Enforcer!



- Inform about risks for raw diets (to pets and people) that may not outweigh benefits
 - Don't assume: ask companies about risk reduction!
- Owners appreciate being heard and more likely to listen if the focus is not on what they're doing 'wrong' → defensiveness
 - "Not all pets or people will get sick, but some may and we don't know who or when, so let's discuss what we do know so you can be informed..."
- ***DOCUMENT THESE CONVOS IN RECORD!***



The AVMA recognizes public interest in feeding raw diets to dogs and cats. However, the AVMA discourages feeding any raw or undercooked animal-sourced protein (e.g., meat, poultry, fish, egg, milk*) to dogs and cats because of their risk to human and animal health.



More Questions from Owners

+

•

○

- Family didn't want to take the risks after hearing about raw, but expressed concern for 'fresher' or 'healthier' foods...so what about home-cooking?
 - Need proteins novel *to this pet*
 - Complete diet history
- Family also asked about:
 - Allergy tests to identify proteins?
 - Why veterinary and not over-the-counter?

More Questions from Owners

+

•

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- Family also asked about:
 - Allergy tests to identify proteins?
 - Why veterinary and not over-the-counter?
- When in doubt, follow the evidence!

More Questions from Owners: Over-The-Counter?

- Do we need a therapeutic diet?
 - 'Follow the evidence'
 - Study of OTC Venison limited ingredient diets:
 - 3 out of 4 diets ELISA positive for soy
 - Remaining diet ELISA positive for beef



“If the four OTC venison products selected in this study are representative of OTC products in general, then the use of OTC venison dry dog foods should not be used during elimination trials in suspected food allergy patients.”

More Questions from Owners: Allergy Tests?



PAPER

Hair and saliva test fails to identify allergies in dogs

K. COYNER^{1,*} AND A. SCHICK¹

¹Dermatology Clinic for Animals, Lacey, Washington 98516 USA

²Dermatology for Animals, Gilbert, Arizona 85234 USA

*Corresponding author email: kdcovner@comcast.net

OBJECTIVE: Several companies offer saliva and/or hair tests for food and environmental allergies in companion animals, but provide no validation of test accuracy. We examined one such hair and saliva allergy test to determine whether it could reliably differentiate between a normal dog and an allergic dog, and to examine test repeatability.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: Ten fur and saliva samples were submitted from a known allergic dog and a normal, non-allergic dog. Five fake fur samples and water were also submitted to determine whether the test could differentiate between a real dog and toy animal. The company performed testing for 128 food and environmental allergens. Statistical analyses were performed to determine whether the response distribution differed significantly between dogs, using the Pearson chi-square coefficient, as well as to determine test-retest reliability by calculating Cohen's kappa for each allergen.

RESULTS: The distribution of test results from samples obtained from allergic, non-allergic or fake dogs was not different from that expected due to random chance. Test-retest reproducibility was poor to slight.

CLINICAL SIGNIFICANCE: Hair and saliva testing should not be used to diagnose allergies and is not a substitute for veterinary-directed allergy evaluation and diagnostics.

More Questions from Owners: Home-cooking?

- Concern especially in growing animals
 - Very narrow nutrient needs
 - Significant consequences if unbalanced
- Alternative Option?
 - Veterinary diet short term for dietary elimination trial
 - If improved, use that time to identify proteins she does or doesn't react to
 - Switch to home-cooking at full skeletal maturity?

Talking about Home-Cooking with Pet Owners...

- Owners should use board-certified veterinary nutritionists for a complete and balanced recipe
 - www.balanceit.com
 - www.petdiets.com
- Generic recipes are rarely balanced, ensure specific to pet
 - Must strictly adhere to recipe!
 - Exact brands, no substitutions

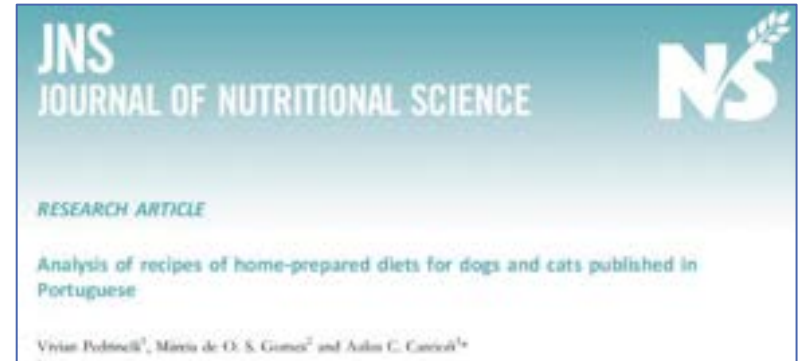
‘But I Used A Recipe I Found Online...?’

- In one study, 106 recipes were found by internet search and university library search
 - *Every* recipe had at least one essential nutrient deficient
 - Of recipes recommending supplements, 88.2% did not specify a brand name or amount to add
 - 10.2% of recipes included potentially toxic ingredients (e.g., onion, garlic, etc.)



Photo credit: www.flintstonesvitamins.com

*Watch for human supplements
(especially Vitamin D)!*



Evidence-Based Medicine: What Do Owners Have to Say?



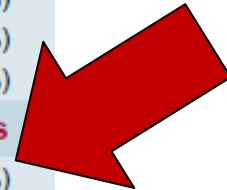
Client Expectations



Client Reality

Table 2. Aspects of feeding an home-cooked diet that owners liked and disliked and owner motivations for feeding an home-cooked diet, from 47 respondents who answered these questions (out of 53 total respondents)

	Likes	Motivations
Perceived superiority over commercial diets	15 (32%)	9 (19%)
Appropriateness for medical needs	15 (32%)	34 (72%)
Desire for control over dogs' diet	11 (23%)	5 (11%)
Greater palatability	8 (17%)	8 (17%)
Mistrust of commercial dog foods	2 (4%)	6 (13%)
		Dislikes
Work		30 (64%)
Poor palatability		5 (11%)
Expense		4 (9%)
Sensory process of food preparation		2 (4%)



Diet Drift Concerns...

- Only 13% were following home-cooked diet recipe by a Board Certified Veterinary-Nutritionist 6-12 mo after initial visit
- Of those with changes, 62% did not know/disclose change:
 - Only determined by comparing self-report to original recipe
- Client communication is critical before, during and after recipe formulation and implementation
- So what next for Lily's case?

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 - Only determined by comparing self-report to original recipe
- Client communication is critical before, during and after recipe formulation and implementation
- So what next for Lily's case?
 - Family finally ready to compromise and do a dietary elimination trial with a therapeutic diet. But which one? And how do we make sure the trial is done correctly?

AAFCO Statement Refresher

- ‘Formulated to meet’ ...
 - No feeding trials
- ‘Feeding trials substantiate that’
 - Feeding trial tested
- ‘Intermittent or supplemental feeding only’ ...
 - Not complete and balanced for any lifestage
 - Many therapeutic diets fall under this
 - Need for modifications outside needs of healthy pet
- Why is this important?
 - “Can my other cats eat this diet too?”
 - “Is this ok for a puppy?”



Example Considerations:

Feeding and Administration:

Animal feeding tests using AAFCO procedures substantiate that Purina Pro Plan Veterinary Diets EL Elemental Canine Formula provides complete and balanced nutrition for growth of puppies and maintenance of adult dogs, including growth of large sized dogs (70 lb. or more as an adult).



Animal feeding tests using AAFCO procedures substantiate that Hill's® Prescription Diet® z/d® Canine provides complete and balanced nutrition for maintenance of adult dogs.

NUTRITION STATEMENT:

ROYAL CANIN® Canine HYDROLYZED PROTEIN PUPPY dry is formulated to meet the nutritional levels established by the AAFCO Dog Food Nutrient Profiles for growth, including growth of large size dogs (70 lb. or more as an adult).



Nutrition Life Hack: Resources!

Elimination Diet Trial Plan for _____
(pet name)

To be filled out by a veterinarian or questions owners can ask their veterinarian to help plan a successful elimination diet trial

Recommended length of trial (after transition to the new diet): _____ weeks
Date starting trial (after transition to the new diet): _____

Recommended diet(s)
Dry _____
Wet _____
Amount to feed _____

Recommended treats

 Recommend no treats during trial

Recommended method to administer pills

Other recommendations (heartworm and other)



Think Your Pet has a Food Allergy? Eliminating Mistakes in Elimination Diet Trials



Checklist for Successful Elimination Diet Trials

Pet food:

- Feed only the food(s) recommended above.
- Prevent access to the food of any other pets in the house (or in the neighborhood).

Treats:

- Commercial pet treats: To do the most effective elimination diet trial, it's best to avoid all treat and to throw away (or give away) all commercial pet treats in the home to avoid temptation.
- Avoid all rawhides, pig ears, bully sticks, and other treats made from dried animal parts.
- Avoid all dental chews and any flavored chew toys.
- Warn dog walkers, house guests, pet store clerks, and other people your pet encounters who might give treats.

People food:

- Avoid giving your pet any people food (a sign on the refrigerator door or at the dining table can be very helpful as a reminder for everyone in the home). Even things you might not expect can ruin an elimination diet trial – this includes things like fruit or vegetables and things you might not think about, like marshmallows (or any other foods that contain gelatin).
- If you have children who might drop food for the pet (or just drop food in the course of eating), the pet should be out of the room when they're eating.

Don't forget about:


- Dietary supplements should be discontinued unless specifically recommended by your veterinarian (and known not to contain any ingredients that could trigger allergies).
- Avoid pet toothpaste during the elimination diet trial (continuing to brush without toothpaste can help to maintain your pet's dental health during the diet trial).

Concerned About Ingredients? Additional Resources:

Why you shouldn't judge a pet food by its ingredient list



by Clinical Nutrition Team

 ABOUT

Free Public Access to AAFCO's Official Publication "Chapter Six"

To advance transparency and encourage consumer education about feed ingredients, AAFCO provides a free electronic version of the official feed terms, common or usual ingredient names, and ingredient definitions found in Chapter Six of its *Official Publication* (OP).

Take Home Points:

- Provide information on resources to empower owners
- Reinforce WSAVA guidelines to guide question asking
- Discuss what information is needed to feel comfortable about a diet
- There is no '100% safe guarantee' on any diet
- Be open and honest that recommendations can (and should) change as more information becomes available
- Personal approach: it's not about making the 'right' decision but the *most informed decision*

Questions?

**Reminder: no
judgement zone!**

