

FORGET the packaging, read the ingredient list

When you read a pet food ingredient list there may be unfamiliar terms that may leave you scratching your head. Here's your cheat sheet to understand ingredient list linguistics.

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size

Amount Per Serving

Calories

% Daily Values*

Meat. Muscle tissue that may or may not include fat and portions of the skin, sinew, nerve and blood vessels.

Meat byproducts. Most of the parts of the animal other than the muscle tissue, including familiar parts such as livers, kidneys and tripe, but also udders and lungs.

Poultry. The parts of the bird you would find if you purchased a whole chicken or turkey at the grocery store. This likely includes backs and necks and may include bone, which can serve as a source of calcium.

Poultry byproducts. This includes most of the parts that are not included in a dressed bird such as the heart, gizzard and liver, but also other internal organs, heads and feet.

Meat meal. This is a product made from mammal tissues that have been subject to cooking to destroy any harmful bacteria and to remove most of the water and fat, leaving primarily protein and minerals. Meal products are ground to form uniform sized particles.

Meat and Bone Meal. Similar to meat meal, but contains added bone.

Animal Byproduct Meal. Similar to meat meal and meat and bone meal, but may include additional byproducts.

Poultry Byproduct Meal. Essentially the same as "poultry byproducts," but in rendered form.

Poultry Meal. Rendered part of the whole carcass and skin with or without accompanying bone.

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Vitamins and minerals. Many names are recognizable. But others, like the following, may not be: Cholecalciferol (supplies vitamin D from animal sources), Ergocalciferol (supplies vitamin D from plant sources), Riboflavin supplement (a source of vitamin B2), Alpha-Tocopherol acetate (supplies vitamin E), Thiamine mononitrate (source of vitamin B1), Pyridoxine hydrochloride (source of vitamin B6).

Chemical preservatives. Commonly used ingredients include ascorbic acid, benzoic acid, butylated hydroxyanisol (BHA), butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT), calcium ascorbate, citric acid, ethoxyquin, potassium sorbate, sodium bisulfate and mixed tocopherols.

Conditioning agents, thickeners, emulsifiers, sequestrants, flavors and seasonings. Commonly used ingredients include carrageenan, propylene glycol (prohibited from use in cat food), sodium hexametaphosphate (to reduce dental tartar in dogs and cats), agar-agar and guar gum.

When in doubt, ask

✓CALL YOUR VETERINARIAN

Talk to your veterinary team about your nutrition questions and how to appropriately transition your pet to a new food. If you think your pet is showing signs of illness related to his or her pet food, call your veterinarian.

✓CALL THE MANUFACTURER

The “manufactured by” label statement identifies the party responsible for the quality and safety of the product, along with contact information. Don’t hesitate to contact the company with questions or complaints about a product.

DEFINITIONS SOURCED FROM THE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN FEED CONTROL OFFICIALS (AAFCO)