

# How to Read Your Dog's Food Label

*Trying to understand the back of your pet's food bag can seem overwhelming! There are some very important areas you want to pay close attention to, and once you know how to decode the lingo, it's super easy to compare brands and select the best food for your dog!*

## The Ingredient List

Ingredients are listed by weight, from heaviest, therefore the last ingredient is not necessarily the least important, it just weighs little- like parsley or other herbs that might be in your dog's food. Did you know that most meats can contain up to 75% water? 'Meal' after a protein (i.e Chicken Meal) means that most of the water and fat have been removed, leaving a concentrated protein level. Many people believe that meal has a nefarious purpose... but actually it's not necessarily a bad thing in most cases!

Dogs are carnivores by nature, which means their digestive system is completely different than that of humans. They need a diet primarily composed of meat, that will give them the proper nutrients they need to stay healthy. An ingredients list should have plenty of proteins, fats, carbohydrates, and fatty acids to keep your dog's teeth clean, digestive system healthy, and their coat shiny and soft. Here are some ingredients you will ideally want to find in the first couple spots on the ingredients list: Chicken, Lamb, Turkey, Beef, or Fish. Here are a few ingredients to avoid when searching for high-quality dog food: Corn, Soy, Wheat, Artificial food coloring, Meat by-products, Artificial sweeteners, Artificial preservatives.

## Guaranteed Analysis

The Guaranteed Analysis(GA) must be displayed on your pet's food bag. It lists the minimum amount of protein and fat that must be found, along with the max fiber and moisture level to be found in the kibble. If a company claims that there are other supplements in the food, they must be listed. The protein and fat are listed as crude sources and not as digestible sources. The digestibility of protein and fat can vary widely depending on their sources. The list of ingredients should be examined closely to determine how digestible the sources are.

## Feeding instructions

Feeding instructions or guidelines should be included on every bag and can of dog food. These guidelines give the recommended amount to be fed based on growth level and weight. These are very rough guidelines. Every animal has a different level of activity, metabolism, and ambient environmental temperature. In addition, breed, age, and other environmental stresses all impact daily requirements. Guidelines should be used as rough starting points. If your dog is thin or hungry, feed more often and in greater quantity. If your pet is overweight or obese, feed less. Most dog food labels include the metabolized energy content of the food measured in kilocalories. For Example: Metabolized Energy = 3,600 kcal/kg; 410 kcal/cup. So according to the chart on the left, if you had a 15 lb dog that was at it's ideal weight, you should be feeding a little less than 1 cup a day.

What is the best dog food on the market? **There is no one best food for all dogs.** The very fact that there are so many types and brands on the market shows that there are hundreds of options and opinions. Some dogs need higher fat and protein than others; some prefer canned over dry. Feed what is appropriate for your pet: dogs need dog food, and puppies need puppy food.