

10 Secrets Pet Food Companies Don't Want You to Know

1. Pet food is NEVER mostly meat. Many ads suggest that it is. In order to list a meat source first on the bag label pet food companies resort to a variety of gimmicks.

Here are a few to get you thinking: 1st, listing a "wet" ingredient in what ends up being an essentially dry finished product. Wet meat gets a lot lighter when the moisture is cooked out. This labeling loophole is blatantly deceptive to the general public. All ingredients should be weighed and listed in dry weight equivalents for you to know truly how much of each makes up the ration. If the label lists, "chicken" it means chicken weighed when wet. Drop 75% of the value. If, on the other hand, it says, "chicken meal" they play fairly. If it says, "meat (any type by-product meal" or "meat (any type) by-products" it was never meat to begin with. Find another food.

Another gimmick is to "split carbohydrates"(grains) into multiple parts to get the "meat" to list first. Label ingredients are listed in descending order by weight. So, If you have 10 lbs. of chicken meal and 25 lbs. of rice, which should appear first on the label? Chicken of course! (if you want people to buy the stuff).

Here's how it's done:

1st- CHICKEN MEAL

2nd- GROUND RICE

3rd- RICE BRAN

4th- RICE GLUTEN

Pretty sneaky and obviously deceptive unless you know the trick. Rice Flour, Brewer's Rice and Rice ala Ronny could also have been listed if they really wanted to be fancy. A related tactic is to use a variety of grains with different names to get meat listed first. This is slightly more valid since they have different amino acid profiles and are truly different ingredients. Grains cost a lot less than meat. Meat "by-products" cost a lot less than meat. Both also have considerably less food value.

The last gimmick for now is the campaign to convince the public that meat by-products and meat are just about the same thing. Hmm... "Honey, I'm having a rib eye steak tonight and you're having a nice pile of by-products, ok?" "Would you like the chicken breast or the intestine-cartilage-beak medley with your rice, Bob?" "Well gee Dear, doesn't really make any difference to me, they all sound equally delicious, nutritious and healthy!"

By definition, by-products may contain anything from the specified animal except, (in the case of chicken), feathers and feces and, (in the case of beef), hoof, hide and feces. Meat and fat are separated out first because they are costlier and are therefore not present in any appreciable quantity. What's left is the bones, tendons, cartilage, beaks, feet and innards. Proudly displayed and masqueraded as meat.

A pet food bag is not a place for dumping stuff of unknown nutritional value. Some foods even use the term, "SELECT by-products". All these contortions serve one purpose; To make you think that you're getting more meat than you really are in your bag of pet food. After all, who'd pay \$35 for a bushel of corn?!

Well, keep reading!

2. The cooking process used in pet foods KILLS off a vital component: enzymes. In order to eliminate bacteria and make cutesy shapes that pets care nothing about, processing temperatures in excess of 160 degrees F are used to extrude or bake your pet's food.

So what? Well, glad you asked. This places the entire burden for digestion on your pet's pancreas to supply the enzymes necessary for breaking down nutrients for absorption. In nature, this is far from the case. Animals naturally follow the path of "least digestive resistance" in the wild.

Consider the fox who catches a rabbit. First item on the menu is the contents of the gut. Let the rabbit do the digesting and enjoy! The rabbit spent hours nibbling grasses and grains readying them for the fox's easy absorption of carbohydrates. Quick and cheap fuel.

Next the fox buries or hides the rest to stew a spell. What we call, "turning rancid" the fox calls, "just getting better". In a couple days, the live enzymes in the rabbit meat have broken it down into easily digested protein. Notice how no fire was used in this process? For dessert, a little bone gnawing for the marrow, the calcium, and the teeth cleaning, and it's naptime. Left for the lower animals in the hierarchy are most of the by-products and the hide.

Let's get back to your pet.

In puppies and kittens, the pancreas is usually robust and up to the task of supplying sufficient digestive enzymes to make dead food somewhat useable and fulfill it's other vital functions. With age, however, pancreatic function is weakened and often can't keep up with this undue burden. If the pet food fed day in and day out is of low nutritional value to begin with, the taxing effect on the system will be all the greater and the pancreas will most likely give up that much sooner. The consequences to your pet's health are too broad in scope to cover here.

3. Giving "real food" aka "table scraps" is the RIGHT thing to do! Stepping on a lot of toes here to smash the myth that you should only feed the stuff from the bag and nothing else ever, PERIOD. What is it they are afraid of anyway? That your pet will learn to beg? Unlearn that. That your pet won't eat the chaff they call "food" after tasting the real deal? Probably. Or that it will throw the delicate balance of their finely tuned "nutrition" out of whack somehow? He He Hoo, hardly.

Here's the scoop...

Providing real food (not potato chips or other junk food) in its raw form counteracts some of the deficit that can be caused by only feeding commercially prepared pet food. It can provide the living enzymes to make digestion an easy rather than burdensome process.

But, don't just go wild and throw everything in the feeding trough. Good bets for pets are raw carrots, broccoli, yogurt, cheese, garlic and meats. Cooked oatmeal, rice, corn, squash and the like are fine too. Don't feed raw grains, legumes, potatoes, onions, celery or chocolate which are either unusable or unhealthy. If you aren't comfortable with raw meat and fish, don't do it. Keep in mind, they aren't people and have an entirely different gastro-intestinal system than we do.

Introduce new foods a little at a time about three times a week to start and give your pet's pancreas a much needed break.

4. Most "vet recommended" foods pay mightily for the "honor". Does it matter that the majority of vets know very little about pet nutrition? The public is told to, "Ask your vet". The vet is told by the pet food companies, "we'll send you to Hawaii for a week of golf if you sell and endorse XYZ brand pet food". In school, vets-to-be could ELECT to take an overview course in animal nutrition. Or not. There have been changes of late to make this required study. AS IT WELL SHOULD BE!

You are miles ahead if you understand the pet food label yourself and take the time to learn some basic nutritional concepts. It's not that complicated! Find out for yourself, trust your own judgement and ignore what people say who are getting paid to say it.

5. The #1 vet recommended brand is probably the #1 worst pet food value. Without mentioning any names, if it lists corn as the first ingredient on the label and gets blasted by the competition for it, you know the company.

Read the label! Compare it to the cheapest stuff you can find. There isn't a dime's worth of difference in most cases. How much does it cost them to make a 40 lb. bag of this stuff you may wonder? Right? Sit down. How about less than \$3 including the cost of the bag? How much does the duped public shell out for the bushel of corn and peanut shells most recommended by vets? About \$35. "Have a nice flight to Maui, Dr. Cutter and thanks again for your support".

6. Feeding "Soft-Moist" diets will cut your pet's life expectancy in half. Thankfully, these foods are on the steep decline but aren't gone yet. Perhaps killing your customers isn't a good way to develop long term brand loyalty. These toxic morsels are so loaded with chemicals to stay soft and prevent molding and so laden with sugar to cover the harsh chemical taste, they rip a pet's insides out. The sweetness is addictive and you'll hear owners say, "Fifi just

won't eat anything else". Well, then better buy the small bag because who knows how long Fifi will be eating at all? Anybody feeding this garbage should stop at once and the manufacturers of it should be faced with a class action.

7. Many companies have "slithered" away from using ETHOXYQUIN. The once popular, and staunchly defended as safe, preservative (antioxidant) called "Ethoxyquin" has been mostly abandoned because of "hushed" litigation and settlements with professional breeders. It formerly was championed by pet food manufacturers (and others) as an advance and healthy inclusion in pet food in an attempt to hide the fact that it was never intended to be eaten, much less on a daily basis. It was originally formulated as a rubber stabilizer and a color retention agent. Tires stayed pliable and spices stayed red.

Despite efforts to get it approved as a food stabilizing agent in people food, it is only allowed for extremely limited application with colored spices. The people who know the devastating truth about this ingredient when eaten daily by pets have been paid off and forced to never tell their stories. There are innumerable instances of stillbirth, sudden liver failure, kidney dysfunction, permanent pigment changes, tumors and death thought to be caused by the addition of this wonder substance to pet food starting in about 1987. Much of the talk about ethoxyquin has quieted since the major pet food companies jumped off the bandwagon and switched to safer (and less legally troublesome) preservatives like forms of vitamins E and C. If they want the trust of the public, they should own up to their mistakes and come clean. Fat chance. All you'll get is denial.

8. Nature didn't intend for pets to eat dry food devoid of enzymes. Convenience is paid for in reduced pet health. Where is it written that your pet's bowl has to be filled with chalk dry nuggets of quasi-nutritious ground up brown stuff? We've been sold on a bad idea. We bought it because it made life easier. Until the real bill comes, that is.

But doesn't kibbled food make their teeth shiny and their breath fresh? Won't their teeth fall out if they eat soft stuff? Yeah, right. Ever watch your dog eat? Does it look like some kind of teeth cleaning exercise? How about the cat? Really getting the old gum line clean huh? The truth about teeth cleaning is this... sticks, rocks, yarn, bones, toys and saliva primarily accomplish this task, not food. Commercial pet food has to be flavor enhanced with digest and sprayed-on fat to be even remotely attractive to your pet. Without these palatability modifications, the old dry kibble would just sit there and get dusty.

People get paid big money to invent coatings to make your pet dive headfirst into the food bowl. Because then you smile and feel like it must be healthy and that Fifi loves the food and you too so you'll buy it again. Right? Remember, the fox didn't go in search of a crunchy rabbit. It ate the soft one and it has a dazzling smile and a fully charged pancreas.

9. Some companies sneak sugar into pet food to hook your pet. Watch out for these guys! They call it other things of course... (cane molasses, corn syrup) but it absolutely does not belong in your pet's food bowl. Processed sugars are foreign to dogs and cats and over the long term can result in obesity, tooth decay and diabetes (along with other maladies). Until 2 years ago, propylene glycol was being used as a sweet tasting preservative by those who must have cared much more about shelf life than about pet health. Thankfully, it has finally been banned.

Pet food companies will tell you that the industry is tightly regulated and that your pet's health is being fastidiously protected. Do you buy that one? The FDA can't even keep up with human food and didn't lift a finger on behalf of the pet owners during the ethoxyquin debate.

The regulating body for pet food ingredients is AAFCO. The American Association of Feed Control Officials. The rules and definitions they adopt are made by those with vested interests and are enforced through "voluntary compliance". The fox guards the rabbit hutch here.

10. Almost all manufacturers use stool hardening agents in pet food. Convenience again triumphs over pet health. Stool modifiers make clean up easier and mask the effects of nutrient malabsorption. Who's going to buy a pet food if you've got to SCRAPE up after your dog? It's easier to just stack those little bricks into a pile or kick them elsewhere. Consider however the strain on your pet's innards. Would you put concrete mix in your pancake batter? How about sawdust? If you were dieting, would you mix ground peanut shells into your breakfast cereal? Well, they do all that and more for your beloved pet.

See if any of these made it into your pet food bag: sodium bentonite, powdered cellulose, tomato (or any other)

pomace, ground peanut shells. The explanation for including these usually is that they are fiber sources for your pet's well being. Maybe a little truth there but not the real reason they are added. Whole grains provide great fiber content. A bit of bran would do well too. The real goal is to make you buy the food again because clean up time is so easy and enjoyable with brand XYZ's designer stools. Before you do this to your pet, try it yourself for a few days.

One question to ask a company representative is this, "Aren't there times when my pet needs to evacuate it's system rapidly such as when a toxin is ingested or when the kitty or doggy flu comes around? Is having a cork in there at all times really a good idea? You'll then likely hear mumbling about "Our research..." and "regulating intestinal transit time for optimal nutrient absorption". Do you buy that one? If the food is good and fed properly, stools will be fine without forcing your pet to work a brick through their digestive and excretory systems.

End note:

The opinions of this author were formed over a period of 15 years inside the pet food industry. It was written because it needed to be said to enlighten and alert the pet loving public and to act as a minute counterbalance to the daily barrage of pet food hype foisted on us.

Your pets depend on you to make the right choice when it comes to feeding them a nutritious diet. Their quality of life is at stake. Become a label reader! Take the time to bone up on nutrition. Call the Company if you have questions. Most have a toll free number on their bag. Ask to speak to a Nutritionist or the person who formulated the food you are using. Dig until you are satisfied or until you know it's time to switch to another food (or manner of feeding).

For your pet's sake, don't be content with the miserable status quo. Not all currently available pet foods are totally rotten and not all companies engage in the above practices. Some are much better and more ethical than others. You are the boss. Now, you're the boss with the inside track on what to watch out for. Please take your pet's diet seriously. It's the right thing to do.

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