

When Choosing a Commercial Dog Food

When choosing a commercial dog food, look for food with the first two or three ingredients all having come from something that once had a heartbeat. (Meat and/or meat meal, in other words, whether that's chicken or turkey or beef or whatever.)

Find three brands that meet your criteria (good quality ingredients, with meat as the main ingredient), and rotate them -- feeding one for 2-3 months, gradually sequencing into the next, and so on. No dog food (even home-cooked stuff!) can be "complete in one meal," every brand out there is deficient in something or other. The chances of all 3 of your choices being deficient in the same nutrients is fairly low, so over time you'll be covering all your dog's nutritional needs. Plus dogs that are used to variety tend to have less stomach upset over the long haul.

If you're feeding yourself and your family "right," with a bit more effort you can extend that to your furry family members as well, with home-prepared dog food. One reason vets hesitate to promote home-prepared diets for their clients' pets is that there are a lot of people out there who don't make the right nutritional choices for themselves -- relying on <insert brand name of fast food joint here> for too many of their meals -- so would be unlikely to make the right choices for their pets.

So if you decide to do some home cooking for your dog, make sure you do the research first! There are human foods that are bad for dogs (onions, grapes, and chocolate topping the list), and our pets have specific nutritional needs that need to be addressed (the right balance between calcium and phosphorous being a prime example). But if you have the time and energy and know-how to properly prepare your dogs' food, you can make a big difference in their health. For one thing you'll know exactly what they're eating, how it was prepared, and where it's been.

You can also make a difference by supplementing your high-quality commercial food with some home-prepared food. At the simplest level, assuming you're cooking healthy meals for yourself and your family, just cook some for the dogs, too -- giving them small portions of roughly 1/3 meat, 1/3 vegetables, 1/3 whole grains (or leave the grains out, many dogs are allergic to corn or wheat or other grains, or simply don't digest them well).

For more information, I suggest the following books:

Dr. Pitcairn's *Complete Guide to Natural Health for Dogs & Cats*. (A "classic," now in an updated edition, with good basic information on dog nutrition, home diets, home-prepared nutritional supplements, etc.)

The Veterinarian's Guide to Natural Remedies for Dogs (a number of holistic veterinarians discuss diets, providing a good range of opinions)

I also suggest the following websites:

<http://www.dog.com/vet/nutrition/01.html> (for a quick overview)

<http://www.volhard.com/holistic/artbywv.htm> (for a more comprehensive overview)

<http://www.doberdogs.com/menu.html> (dog food comparison charts, also lists of poisonous plants etc.)