Mount Vernon Animal Hospital

703-360-6600

**How to Choose the Best Food Option for Your Dog!**

There are lots of different brands and varieties of dog food, and choosing what to give your dog can seem overwhelming. This basic guideline is here to help make your selection process easier and smoother. If you ever have a question about a specific food, please feel free to ask us about that diet and we will be happy to evaluate it. Some dogs will do well on one food and not on another. There is individual variation and some trial and error to find the best food for your dog may be required. There is no best food for every dog!

**Any Specific Brand?**

We don’t tend to recommend specific brands due to the fact that formulations do change from time to time. Because of this, we have always recommended looking at the ingredient list when deciding what food to get your pup. It is also a good idea to evaluate the brand by the care they take in sourcing their ingredients, if they make the food themselves or contract to large feed meals, and how committed they are to best manufacturing practices. This can be difficult to figure out. Most pet food companies outsource manufacturing. Some brands also employ nutritionists and do research. Additionally, you can assess how the company has responded to any problems or recalls in the past, or how many problems they have had. Consider rotating between brands and types of diets so if there is any issue with a specific formulation it’s not the only thing your pet eats.

 **What should you be looking for in the ingredients?**

We recommend that the protein sources in dog foods come from meat and fish, not legumes (peas, chickpeas, lentils) or plant proteins (corn gluten, wheat gluten, soy). What about “chicken meal” vs plain chicken? This is not as important, as dogs in the wild will eat all the parts of the chicken (or other animal), not just muscle meat. Make sure the food says it is appropriate for the stage of life of your dog (puppy vs adult, large breed, etc). It is ideal to have AAFCO approval, and even better to have AAFCO feeding trials done on the food. This ensures the food meets the requirements.

 **What should you be avoiding?**

We suggest avoiding vegetable and grain sources of protein. The way to tell if the ingredient is used as a protein source is if there is a vegetable name followed by the word protein like “pea protein” or a grain followed by the word gluten like “corn gluten meal” (gluten is the part of the grain that contains protein). Foods can contain vegetables and grains for other nutrient qualities like fiber and vitamins, but we prefer if the protein doesn’t come from these sources. Especially avoid legumes (peas, chickpeas, lentils), as they are anti-nutrients in dogs and can contribute to many health problems.

**What about Grain-free diets?**

We are not currently recommending grain-free and other non-traditional diets. The reason behind this is that in recent years there has been some reports and an FDA investigation into these diets causing DCM (Dilated CardioMyopathy) in dogs. DCM is a serious, often fatal heart disease. The exact reason is still currently unknown, but evidence shows that diets high in legumes (peas, chickpeas, lentils) or potatoes/sweet potatoes are the main ones we see causing this issue, so we recommend avoiding foods containing these ingredients.