

What's in my dog or cat's food? Pet Food Ingredients

The best way to really know what your dog is eating is to read the label. The label is not as hard to read as one might think.

Things to look for on the label are the first three ingredients. These first three make up 75% of the [contents](#) of the food you are feeding. The first three items listed are usually easy to read, easy to understand, and common words we all might know. The FDA reports that 25% of the product would be listed as the third or fourth ingredient.

Dog Food Ingredients and Cat Food Ingredients

The pet food maker may have thrown in a couple of tricky words for you so I'll try and help you with those.

- **Animal Digest.** Means manure. Someone has collected the manure from another animal and put it in the pet food your are feeding your pet.

AAFCO: Material which results from chemical and/or enzymatic hydrolysis of clean and undecomposed animal tissue. The animal tissues used shall be exclusive of hair, horns, teeth, hooves and feathers, except in such trace amounts as might occur unavoidably in good factory practice and shall be suitable for animal feed.

A cooked-down broth made from specified, or worse, unspecified parts of specified or unspecified animals (depending on the type of digest used). If the source is unspecified (e.g. "Animal" or "Poultry", the animals used can be obtained from any source, so there is no control over quality or contamination. Any kind of animal can be included: "4-D animals" (dead, diseased, disabled, or dying prior to slaughter), goats, pigs, horses, rats, misc. roadkill, animals euthanized at shelters, restaurant and supermarket refuse and so on.

AAFCO doesn't care that manure is included in the pet food as long as the temperature at the time of cooking is brought to a certain degree. Is the dry or liquid by-product of the meat rendering process.

Now there are those people out there who simply refuse to believe a pet food company would use manure in their pet's foods. Let me ask you to think on this issue for just a minute and then see what you decide. Let's take a person, for instance, when a person begins the "digestion" process food is placed in the mouth for chewing. Digestion continues as the food passes to the stomach and is broken down to pass into the intestines for further digestion. Digestion is complete once the person has had a bowel movement and fully evacuated the food from the human body. Why would obtaining animal digest be any different from human digest?

FDA: Digests, which are materials treated with heat, enzymes and/or acids to form concentrated natural flavors. Only a small amount of a "chicken digest" is needed to produce a "Chicken Flavored Cat Food," even though no actual chicken is added to the food. - FDA <http://www.fda.gov/cvm/petlabel.htm>

- **Animal and Poultry Fat -**

There's a unique, pungent odor to a new bag of dry pet food - what is the source of that smell? It is most often rendered animal fat, or vegetable fats and oils deemed inedible for humans. For example, used restaurant grease was rendered and routed to pet foods for several years, but a more lucrative market is now in biodiesel fuel production. These fats are sprayed directly onto extruded kibbles and pellets to make an otherwise bland or distasteful product palatable. The fat also acts as a binding agent to which manufacturers add other flavor enhancers such as "animal digests" made from processed by-products. Pet food scientists have discovered that animals love the taste of these sprayed fats. Manufacturers are masters at getting a dog or a cat to eat something she would normally turn up her nose at.

- **By-Products** may include but are not limited to: spines, hair, hooves, feet, heads, euthanized dogs and cats from veterinarian offices and animal shelters, roadkill, zoo animals, dead animals and those declared unfit for human consumption due to disease and illness are also placed in the mix, pentobarbital, rancid restaurant grease, toxic chemicals and additives.
- **Corn.** Corn meal or any variation of corn is CORN. Dogs have a hard time digesting corn. Several dogs develop skin allergies after eating corn over a long period of time. You will notice corn allergies by head shaking, butt biting, and endless scratching, tumors, moles, warts, blindness, deafness, bloating, ear aches, ear infections, inflamed kidneys, inflamed liver, heart conditions, and death.
- **Gluten.** Allergies and inability to digest. Wheat gluten was named as the reason for the recent Pet Food Recall. Maybe, I should include Rat Poison in this list of contents???
- **Meal.** Concentrate of what the meal is made from. Meaning = more of the "made from" ingredient than if it were not in meal form.
- **Meat.** Any left over [animal parts](#) including cats and dogs. Yes, it's hard to believe but many pet food makers actually use dead (I hope they were dead) dogs and cats in the making of the pet foods for dogs and cats. EPA :[Provides information about meat rendering plants.](#)"
- **Mechanically Processed.** Means ground up "stuff". Who knows what all "stuff" is. Most times the "stuff" are anything from feathers to toe nails.
- **Pentobarbital.** This is the drug used to euthanize dogs, cats, etc.
- **Soy, Soybean Hulls.** Junk left over after the good stuff is removed. This is just a filler dogs are allergic to soy and can't digest it. You will notice soy allergies by a dog licking his paws. (soy has the same effects as feeding corn) * See **Corn**
- **Wheat middlings.** Junk that is left over after all the good stuff is removed from the wheat. (Wheat has the same effects as feeding corn) * See **Corn**

Use of corn, wheat, or soy which cause skin irritation, hair loss, fever, ear infections, kidney failure, liver failure, dental disease, obesity, chronic digestive problems, bloat, heart disease, IBD, Cushings Syndrome, and hyperthyroidism.

Because manufacturers need to ensure that dry foods have a long shelf life (typically 12 months) to remain edible through shipping and storage, fats used in pet foods are preserved with either synthetic or "natural" preservatives. Synthetic preservatives include butylated hydroxyanisole (BHA) and butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT), propyl gallate, propylene glycol (also used as a less-toxic version of automotive antifreeze), and ethoxyquin.

Use of by-products. By-products are ingredients used which are not fit for human consumption. By-products are often floor sweepings from a rendering plant. "Animal by-product" is rendered product from animal tissues, exclusive of any added blood, hair, hoof, horn, hide trimmings, manure, stomach and rumen contents except in such amounts as may occur unavoidably in good processing practices." Pet food labels contain the words "meal" or "byproduct" on the ingredient label. Inedible byproducts such as bone, fat, heads, hair, feet and condemned offal are used in commercial pet food. These materials are sent to a rendering plant for processing into pet food products.

"Meat" is often rendered dogs and cats as well as other animals such as road-kill. When the source of the meat is known it will be listed as beef, poultry, chicken, turkey, etc. If the source of the meat is not known it is simply called "meat."

Rather than the wholesome pictures shown on the pet [food packaging](#), rendering companies dispose of millions pounds of inedible waste each day including, heads, feet, stomachs, intestines, spinal cords, tails, restaurant grease, feathers, bones and dead or diseased animals rejected from slaughterhouses for use in manufacturing pet food. Amazingly, animals from research laboratories may be rendered into pet food as well. The life span of your pet should be at least 20 years. Your pet's diet strongly influences your pet's life expectancy. Always look for a quality pet food which scores 10 out of 10.

Independent plants obtain animal by-product materials, including grease, blood, feathers, offal, and entire animal carcasses, from the following sources: [butcher shops](#), [supermarkets](#), [restaurants](#), [fast-food chains](#), [poultry processors](#), [slaughterhouses](#), [farms](#), [ranches](#), [feedlots](#), and [animal shelters](#).

AAFCO = Association of American Feed Control Officials.

This organization is a private organization made up of members of state and federal officers of agricultural departments and the FDA. They have no Regulatory Authority and Do Not Monitor or Test Pet Food. AAFCO's purpose is "to establish and maintain an association through which officials of any state, dominion, federal and other governmental agency charged with a responsibility in enforcing the laws regulating the production, labeling, distribution, or sale of pet food may unite to explore the problems encountered in administering such laws. AAFCO does not perform any analytical testing on pet food nor does it issue and certificate that the pet food is balanced and complete.

The only real requirement is that the manufacturer comply with an extensive list of ingredient definitions, which means that a manufacturer could use old tires and an ingredient as the main source of protein for pet food as long as the ingredient met one of the approved definitions.

Should you suspect pet food as the cause of your pet's illness or death be sure to:

- retain food samples for analysis
- save all packaging and receipts, and document the product name, type of product, date codes and/or production lot numbers
- document the dates that the product was fed to your pet, how much was eaten, and the time when you first noticed symptoms

For more information, please visit ASPCA.org. Helpful tips for veterinarians and pet parents may also be found at the American Veterinary Medical Association online.