

INGREDIENTS

you

NEVER

want to see

in your

PET FOOD



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If you're reading *Dogs Naturally*, you're likely familiar with every list of dangerous ingredients commonly found in dog food. You probably already know that preservatives like ethoxyquin and BHT are bad news, though they can still be found in some formulas, believe it or not.

In fact, most educated consumers have figured out that eating chemicals is not conducive to good health. But there's the rub; those savvy marketing people are also aware of what you're trying to avoid! They know that you read labels, they know what key words you've been googling, and they've figured out ways to disguise unwanted ingredients on the packaging.

I don't mean to pick on pet food companies. In the last 25 years I've founded two of them myself and I know some of my colleagues are doing a great job informing their customers. The sad reality is that merchants of all kinds dress up the label in cosmetics, soft drinks, breakfast cereal, cookies, even clothing – to make it palatable to the current zeitgeist of consumer no-no's, yet they still continue to use similar ingredients, or the same ones under different names, to keep their costs down.

The whole point of putting anything but real, whole food into commercial pet food is to keep the price down. Unadulterated food is expensive to produce, package, transport and present on a shelf and consumers don't want to pay the full cost - so the cost-cutting game begins.

Since we're going to explore ingredient lists, first, a note about carbohydrates....

Grains and carbohydrates in general have been put on the naughty list because cheap, poorly stored, fungus laden corn and wheat have been used for years as a protein source and bulk filler, displacing more appropriate nutrient sources, especially meat. Typically, in grain-laden formulas, the product is then uber-processed via extrusion, leaving nothing of value in the product. It goes without saying that grain is not an appropriate protein source, since dogs metabolize their protein from amino acids in meat.

However, whole grains in small amounts, and I do mean small, added to a mostly meat diet can provide key phytonutrients, including gamma-oryzanol and polyphenols (tannins, anthocyanins, and simple phenolics); antioxidants that are super important for reducing inflammation. Moreover, wild dogs and other facultative carnivores have been known to forage for grasses like rice and oats. Is it really worth the higher price to buy a food just because it's grain free, when grasses like rice and oats are replaced with other sketchy ingredients like pea protein or soy protein isolate? So long as the manufacturer isn't replacing meat protein with vegetable protein (which means the grain is not the first or second ingredient), and the rice or oat is in its whole form so as to be a true phytonutrient source, grains may not be that inappropriate on the label.

Putting the carbohydrate debate aside now, let's focus on some points on which we should all agree. The following ten or so ingredients should never be on the ingredient list of your dog's food, in any quantity or under any assumed name.

Meals

This includes chicken, lamb, salmon, fish, poultry – any kind of meal. Some marketer brilliantly created the justification for meal with the argument that it's just plain ol' dehydrated meat. I cannot tell you how many times I've been informed by retailers and consumers alike that chicken meal is "just fresh chicken with all the water taken out" thus making it a supposedly super protein source.

Meat meal, (and by this I mean meal made from any flesh food), is made by boiling leftover animal by-products. These include meat or fish trimmings, carcasses, inedible parts and fetuses cooked for hours, at temperatures so high that "4D" animals (dead, dying, diseased or disabled) are allowable meal ingredients because even bacteria don't survive the process. The resulting

mixture is a heap of decomposed dust. Sure it has a high protein level, but so does shoe leather.

Meat meal doesn't have all the nutrients contained in meats, by any stretch of a marketer's imagination. If it's simply healthy dehydrated meat, why is it illegal to use in human food? Meals are used to dress the label by pushing the protein up and the cost of the product down, while leaving a legitimate meat ingredient word on the label. Avoid them like the plague.

Wheat, Rye and Corn

Wheat and corn were the first to go on the naughty list years ago, so if the manufacturer is still adding these ingredients to your pet's food he doesn't care what you think. Further, to my knowledge wheat and corn are now mostly found in extruded products, the discussion of which belongs to a whole other article on foods to avoid!

As discussed above, dogs derive their protein from amino acids found in meat, so these old style protein replacements are some of the least beneficial foods for your pet, especially if they're in the top half of the ingredient list. The low quality of the parts of the plants used (middlings, bran, shorts and meal) is often the source of toxins including mycotoxins and mold, which cause damage to your pet's liver and kidneys as well as being the reason for way too many pet food recalls.

In addition to having very little nutritional value, corn especially can contribute to the many diseases linked to high sugar diets,



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including obesity, chronic inflammation, diabetes and cancer. Don't be fooled: maize is corn, and maize gluten meal is derived from the making of corn syrup.

Rye and triticale are both wheat. Rye also contains a compound called alkyl resorcinol, which at high levels can irritate the lining of the intestines and mouth. There are far better sources for the phytonutrients contained in these grains and there's no excuse for including them in a quality commercial diet.

Rendered fats of any kind

Usually rendered fats are identified as poultry fat but they could be from other farm animals. Animal fats get rendered in the high heating process of making meal from meat packing waste, and then get further cooked and refined.

Extreme processing makes these lipid heavy substances inherently unstable and therefore they go rancid very quickly. To be stored and used as pet food ingredients, they must contain heavy doses of chemical preservatives that are often not disclosed on the pet food label because they're added by the renderer before delivery. Rendered fat is a Trojan horse for chemical preservatives including ethoxyquin.

I don't know which is worse, the chemicals or rancid fat, which is full of free radicals. Both wreak havoc on your dog's immune system. And just like meat meals, rendered fats can't be used for human food production. No wonder!

Some companies use synthetic antioxidants such as mixed tocopherols to reassure you that the fat is "naturally preserved" but these are still just chemicals. The kicker is that the synthetic antioxidant used as a preservative gets all used up in the oxidation process after manufacturing, so it does your dog no good at all, just in case you were thinking that all that extra synthetic vitamin E might be beneficial.

Due to the same problem with rancidity, be careful of vegetable oils too. The canola, sunflower and other vegetable oils added to pet food must be preserved too, same as animal fats. Cottonseed oil may be labeled as vegetable oil. Cotton also happens to be one of the most heavily sprayed crops in the world. Providing your pet with good quality fats including omega-3 fatty acids is easy: just feed fresh or gently processed meats, spoonfuls of fish oil, or sprouted seeds.

Synthetic vitamins and minerals

These are also known as the premix in most pet foods. I've given entire lectures on the difference between synthetic nutrients vs real food nutrients but here is the summary: the list of hard-to-pronounce chemical names at the end of 99% of ingredient panels are as unnatural as they sound.

Almost none of the vitamins and minerals contained in the "sourced in America" premixes are actually manufactured in North America. Most are manufactured in China or India.

Just as with the foods we eat, vitamins and minerals provide true benefits for us when they're consumed in their native form, that is, when they are consumed in the foods that naturally contain them. Nutrients found in whole foods are highly complex structures that combine a variety of enzymes, coenzymes, antioxidants, trace elements and many other known or undiscovered

factors, all working together synergistically to enable the vitamin complex to do its job properly. Synthetic nutrients, on the other hand, are adulterated, isolated compounds completely lacking in all of the other vital components that are normally part of vitamin complexes in foods.

With prolonged exposure to one dimensional synthetics, the body's supply of the other nutrients is depleted and a nutrient imbalance is created. The highly concentrated doses of synthetic vitamins used in pet foods containing premix hastens the development of nutrient imbalance in your pet, ultimately leading to poor health. A pet food containing premix does not contain enough real food to provide adequate nutrition without it. There is a time and a place for vitamin supplementation, but it's not in the daily diet we feed our animals their whole lives.

Soy

Also disguised as protein concentrate, vegetable broth, textured vegetable protein, or hydrolyzed vegetable protein. Soy is so much cheaper than meat, making it a common protein booster. Besides being an incomplete protein, and its well known ability to create food allergies in both humans and dogs, soy has really high concentrations of phytoestrogens (enough to disrupt hormonal balance causing all kinds of mayhem) and anti-nutrients (natural toxins that inhibit enzymes needed for protein digestion). Soy has been linked to deadly bloat in dogs and promotes the formation of urinary stones. And it makes the dog gassy, so if the health risks of soy didn't concern you, perhaps consider your indoor air quality!

Digest

Sometimes listed as natural flavor, digest is a cooked-down liquid of by-products of unspecified animals which can include 4D goats, pigs, horses, rats, road kill, and even euthanized cats and dogs from shelters. None of the dead animals thrown into large vats and cooked in a mixture of acid and water need to be from USDA inspected facilities. They can come from anywhere.

Digest is often sprayed on to pet food, especially cat food, to make it palatable. If your dog's food is full of wholesome meat and vegetables, she'll love the taste. So besides the fact that animal digest is disgusting, maybe even immoral, what does it say about the quality of the product if it needs to be there in the first place?

Yes, the list above looks pretty grim, especially that meal and digest stuff, but don't despair. There are excellent foods out there from reputable companies that will help you transition your pet to a whole foods diet whether you choose baked, dehydrated or raw. Just keep reading those labels and stay one step ahead of the marketers. 🐾



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