MaKs Dog Training

Connection - Not Correction

Choosing Good Dog Food

Fewer, simpler ingredients - and what to look for in dry and wet food

The short version: The best everyday foods usually have the shortest, clearest ingredient lists. Look for a named animal protein first, a short list you can actually recognize, and the words "complete and balanced" for your dog's life stage. If a label needs a long list of fillers, colors, and sweeteners to look appealing, it is appealing to people - not to dogs.

Good ingredients to look for

- **A named protein first** - chicken, beef, salmon, lamb, or turkey, or a named meal such as chicken meal or salmon meal. Named means you know what animal it came from.
- **Named fats** - chicken fat or salmon oil, a good source of energy and omega fatty acids for skin and coat.
- **Whole foods you recognize** - sweet potato, pumpkin, carrots, peas, blueberries, and whole grains such as brown rice or oatmeal.
- **Added vitamins and minerals** - a short list near the end is normal and needed.

Limit or avoid these

- **Vague words** - "meat," "animal fat," or "meat by-products" with no animal named.
- **Fillers first** - corn, wheat, or soy making up the first several ingredients instead of protein.
- **Added sugar** - sugar, corn syrup, or molasses. Dogs do not need sweetened food.
- **Artificial colors and flavors** - dogs do not care what color their food is.
- **A very long chemical list** - the longer and harder to pronounce, the more questions to ask.

Dry food (kibble)

- Convenient, easy to measure, and usually the most affordable per meal.
- Look for the same rules: named protein first, short clear list, complete and balanced.
- Store it sealed, cool, and dry, ideally in its original bag, and use within about a month of opening.

Wet food

- Higher moisture helps with hydration, and most dogs find it tastier - helpful for picky or older dogs.
- Look for a named protein first and a short list, not mostly water, gravy, or gelling agents.
- Refrigerate after opening and use within a few days; do not leave it sitting out.

Either one can be a good complete diet, and many owners feed a mix of both. What matters most is the ingredient list and that the food is labeled **complete and balanced** - look for an AAFCO statement on the bag or can, matched to your dog's life stage: puppy, adult, or all life stages.

Feeding in general - six steady habits

- **Feed meals during training:** It is best to feed your dog's meals during training - use their regular food as the reward instead of extra treats on top. It keeps them keen to work, helps keep their weight steady, and makes mealtime count.
- **Measure, do not guess:** start with the guide on the bag, then adjust to keep a healthy weight - you should feel the ribs under a thin layer, not see them.
- **Change foods slowly:** mix the new food in over about 7 days, a little more each day, to avoid an upset stomach.
- **Keep a routine:** most adult dogs do well on two meals a day at steady times; puppies need smaller, more frequent meals - ask your vet.
- **Count the treats:** treats and chews are food too. Keep them to about 10% of the day's food, and take the rest out of the bowl.
- **Fresh water, always:** a clean bowl of fresh water available all day, washed and refilled daily.

General information only - please talk to your vet first: This handout is general information only. It is not veterinary advice and is not a note from a vet. Please talk to your veterinarian before changing your dog's food - especially if your dog has allergies, a health condition, or is a puppy, elderly, or pregnant. If your dog refuses food, keeps vomiting, or has ongoing diarrhea after a food change, contact your veterinarian rather than waiting it out.

MaKs Dog Training - Private, Individualized In-Home Dog Training
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