



Choosing a Pet Food

DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS REGARDING COMMERCIAL PET FOODS

Adult maintenance diets

These diets are formulated to be complete and balanced for adult dogs and cats that have stopped growing and whose skeletons have reached full maturity. Generally, these diets are lower in energy and nutrient levels compared to growth diets. However, diets that are suitable for all life stages may be sold as adult maintenance diets.

All life stage diets

These diets meet the minimum requirements for complete nutrition for all of a pet's life stages, including gestation/lactation, growth and adult maintenance. All life stage diets can be fed to animals in any life stage.

Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO)

AAFCO is a voluntary group of local, state and federal government officials who are responsible for regulating the sale and distribution of animal feeds, including pet foods. AAFCO members work together to provide model legislation regarding pet food and treats for states to adopt, establish the nutritional standards for complete and balanced pet foods, provide pet food labeling information, establish guidelines for feeding trials, and determine feed/food ingredient definitions.

Complementary foods

These foods do not provide complete nutrition so generally must be used in combination with other pet foods or specific supplements to satisfy the daily nutritional requirements of a pet. There are exceptions among some therapeutic diets that should be fed only under a veterinarian's direction.

Complete and balanced diets

These diets are designed to meet the nutritional needs of pets when fed as their sole source of nutrition. They contain all the essential nutrients required to support a pet's health and energy needs. "Complete" means that the diet contains all the required nutrients, and "balanced" means that the nutrients are present in the correct proportions to each other and to the dietary calories.

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FEDIAF (Fédération Européenne de l'Industrie des Aliments pour Animaux Familiers or European Pet Food Industry Federation)

This organization represents the pet food industry in Europe with members from 18 countries and five pet food companies. While it is not a regulatory body, it does seek to influence European Union laws and regulations. The association works closely with recognized authorities to provide guidance on complete and complementary pet foods for cats and dogs, good manufacturing practices for safe pet foods and good practices for pet food communication.

Growth diets

(i.e., puppy or kitten food) The nutrient and energy levels in these complete and balanced diets are specifically formulated to meet the needs of a growing pet.

Senior diets

These diets are intended for healthy aging senior and/or geriatric pets. Currently, senior, geriatric or mature dog or cat food nutrient profiles are not recognized by the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) or FEDIAF (European Pet Food Industry Federation). Since there are no standards, “senior” diets can vary considerably from one another. To be considered a complete pet food, a senior diet will be formulated to meet adult maintenance or growth and reproduction nutrient guidelines or pass a feeding trial using AAFCO procedures.

Additional Resources

Association of American Feed Control Officials. (2020). 2020 *Official publication*. <https://aaafco.org/publications>

Case, L. P., Daristotle, L., Hayek, M. G., & Raasch, M. F. (2011). *Canine and feline nutrition: A resource for companion animal professionals* (3rd ed.). Mosby Elsevier.

FEDIAF. (2020). *Nutritional guidelines for complete and complementary pet food for cats and dogs*. http://www.fediaf.org/images/FEDIAF_Nutritional_Guidelines_2020_20200917.pdf

Linder, D. E. (2017). Diets for each life stage. *Clinician's Brief*. <https://www.cliniciansbrief.com/article/diets-each-life-stage>

The Purina Institute aims to help put nutrition at the forefront of pet health discussions by providing user-friendly, science-based information that helps pets live longer, healthier lives.