Are you giving your pet a wholesome diet?

Whether you are giving your pet dry food, canned food, raw food or a home-cooked meal, it is important that they are getting a diet which will benefit their health. Unfortunately, the pet food industry in Australia is not well regulated and there are many pet foods advertised in pet shops, supermarkets and on TV which can in fact be harmful to your pet. I will try to point out the main things to be aware of, but please consider coming in to chat to one of our vets about your pet's diet.

"Complete and Balanced" – what does it mean?

These are 2 very important words which you need to look for if you are feeding your dog or cat a commercial food product. "Complete" means that the food contains all the essential nutrients that your pet needs. "Balanced" means that the nutrients are in the right proportion – there is not too much or too little. There is a huge amount of nutritional research that goes into creating a "complete and balanced" diet for our pets and you will notice that there are different foods for small breed puppies, large breed puppies, adults and geriatric animals because they each have different nutritional requirements.

Grain free food – You could be causing harm to your dog!

Grain free foods became very popular among humans and to keep up with the trends, the pet food industry decided that they could increase their sales by making grain-free diets for dogs. How many of you as pet owners eat a gluten free diet who are not intolerant to gluten or coeliac? Probably very few…so why are we choosing to feed our dogs these diets? In fact, in the past couple of years since they have become popular, there has been a proven link (in numerous scientific studies) between grain free diets and heart disease in dogs. So even though pet stores are still heavily promoting grain free diets as healthy, please stop feeding these to you dogs. You could save them from developing heart disease.

What about treats?

Treats are great for dogs and cats to help with training. We have however, even in the past 4 months, seen 2 cases where dog treats bought at pet stores have caused kidney disease. Our recommendation is to buy Australian-made treats as overseas treats are even less regulated and sometimes undergo irradiation procedures through quarantine. Australia has seen a large number of pets die as a result of jerky treats imported from China and despite the deaths, the treats are sold widely in pet stores. A good quality, safe company is Fit N Flash which are Australian made and come in a variety of different flavours.

Pet Meat, Mince and Meat rolls

If you are going to feed meat, whether you will give it raw or cook it, please use human-grade meat rather than pet meat. Again, because it's an unregulated industry, most of them (particularly kangaroo meat) have excessive levels of sulphur dioxide preservatives. These make them last longer and look fresher, but high levels of sulphur containing preservatives causes a thiamine deficiency which can lead to severe neurological symptoms and death.

What about cats?

Diets for cats are unique because cats have a special requirement for an amino acid called Taurine. Good quality commercial cat foods contain sufficient taurine. It's important that you don't feed cats "dog food" because this won't contain enough taurine for a cat. Taurine is found almost exclusively in animal-based sources of protein so vegetarian or vegan diets place cats at a dangerously high risk of a deficiency. If you are feeding a home prepared meal, consultation with a vet is highly recommended as a taurine deficiency can cause eye disease, heart disease, altered blood cell function and abnormal growth and development.

Raw diets

We have no problems with you feeding your pet a raw diet so long as it is complete and balanced and you are storing them correctly. However, there has been an increase in gastrointestinal diseases since raw feeding became more popular, for example, Salmonella.

Home Prepared Meals

If you have the time to cook up something delicious for your pets, I'm sure they would love your cooking. However, it's difficult to make up a good diet for your pet which contains everything they need. Giving them some chicken and veges isn't a complete diet for them.
With our goal to provide your pets with the best health care, we have started consulting with a specialist veterinary nutritionist, Dr Merideth Wall, who is creating complete and balanced diets for some of our patients. She can do this for a healthy animal or one with a medical condition and she tailors it for your pet's tastes, the meats they enjoy eating, and owner preferences of which foods to include. By looking at her reports, it reinforces the thought and research that goes into creating a healthy diet for them, down to the specific oils you use to cook, the multivitamins which need to be added to the foods and the specific proportions of calcium and other nutrients which they each contain.

I asked her to do a quick analysis of what most people would think is a very healthy diet for a dog.

-350 grams skinless and boneless cooked chicken thighs
-2 raw chicken wings
-150 grams cooked potato
-150 grams cooked sweet potato
-120 grams cooked green beans
-120 grams cooked carrot
-60 grams cooked spinach

You can see from the table below, that even this diet is missing key essential nutrients with the worst deficiencies being vitamin B12, vitamin E, calcium, vitamin D, copper, iodine and zinc.

Nutrients Show All	% of Requirement		Amount (per Mcal)		Requirement Range
[203] Protein	215.9%	97.150	g	(45 to [*no max*] g)
[511] Arginine	507.2%	6.492	g	(1.28 to [*no max*] g)
[512] Histidine	581.5%	2.791	g	(0.48 to [*no max*] g)
[503] Isoleucine	483.5%	4.593	g	(0.95 to [*no max*] g)
[504] Leucine	461.1%	7.839	g	(1.7 to [*no max*] g)
[505] Lysine	538.6%	8.509	g	(1.58 to [*no max*] g)
[506] Methionine	313.7%	2.604	g	(0.83 to [*no max*] g)
[1001013] Methionine-cystine	236.5%	3.855	g	(1.63 to [*no max*] g)
[508] Phenylalanine	346.6%	3.916	g	(1.13 to [*no max*] g)
[1001017] Phenylalanine-tyrosine	399.0%	7.382	g	(1.85 to [*no max*] g)
[502] Threonine	381.9%	4.583	g	(1.2 to [*no max*] g)
[501] Tryptophan	279.5%	1.118	g	(0.4 to [*no max*] g)
[510] Valine	388.0%	4.772	g	(1.23 to [*no max*] g)
[204] Total lipid (fat)	230.6%	31.822	g	(13.8 to [*no max*] g)
[618] 18:2 undifferentiated	209.6%	5.868	g	(2.8 to 21 g)
[205] Carbohydrate, by difference	100.0%	79.971	g	(0 to [*no max*] g)
[421] Choline, total	98.6%	328.662	mg	(333.348 to [*no max*] mg)
[435] Folate, DFE	349.4%	188.682	mcg_DFE	(54 to [*no max*] mcg_DFE)
[406] Niacin	900.8%	30.627	mg	(3.4 to [*no max*] mg)
[410] Pantothenic acid	240.1%	7.203	mg	(3 to [*no max*] mg)
[405] Riboflavin	87.8%	1.141	mg	(1.3 to [*no max*] mg)
[404] Thiamin	149.4%	0.837	mg	(0.56 to [*no max*] mg)
[320] Vitamin A, RAE	716.7%	2687.629	mcg_RAE	(375 to 18750 mcg_RAE)
[418] Vitamin B-12	37.3%	0.003	mg	(0.007 to [*no max*] mg)
[415] Vitamin B-6	793.6%	3.016	mg	(0.38 to [*no max*] mg)
[323] Vitamin E (alpha-tocopherol)	44.0%	5.497	IU, Vit E	(12.5 to [*no max*] IU, Vit E)
[301] Calcium, Ca	21.8%	0.272	g	(1.25 to 6.25 g)
[1000000] Chloride	0.0%	0.000	g	(0.3 to [*no max*] g)
[312] Copper, Cu	45.9%	0.840	mg	(1.83 to [*no max*] mg)
[1000001] Iodine	2.1%	0.005	mg	(0.25 to 2.75 mg)
[303] Iron, Fe	88.0%	8.805	mg	(10 to [*no max*] mg)
[304] Magnesium, Mg	164.3%	0.246	g	(0.15 to [*no max*] g)
[315] Manganese, Mn	145.0%	1.813	mg	(1.25 to [*no max*] mg)
[305] Phosphorus, P	101.9%	1.019	g	(1 to 4 g)
[306] Potassium, K	176.3%	2.644	g	(1.5 to [*no max*] g)
[317] Selenium, Se	123.8%	0.099	mg	(0.08 to 0.5 mg)
[307] Sodium, Na	278.0%	0.556	g	(0.2 to [*no max*] g)
[309] Zinc, Zn	42.6%	8.517	mg	(20 to [*no max*] mg)
[1000021] Ca:P ratio	100.0%	0.267	n/a	(0 to 2 n/a)
[1000002] EPA + DHA	100.0%	0.086	g	(0 to 10.53 g)
[328] Vitamin D (D2 + D3)	6.1%	7.591	IU, Vit D	(125 to 750 IU, Vit D)
[255] Water	100.0%	858.118	g	(0 to [*no max*] g)

If you are currently concerned that your dog or cat is not getting everything it needs in it's diet, please let us know and we can organise a nutrition consultation.

Many people as me what I feed my dogs.

I feed my two miniature schnauzers Hills Science Diet because I know it's complete and balanced, I don't have time to cook for them and they both have some medical conditions which the prescription diets cater for. However, this is my decision for my dogs and I completely respect that people prefer to feed their pet's differently to me. None of our vets have any objection if you choose to give your pet dry food, canned food, raw food or cooked food but it's essential that you follow the above guidelines to make sure that in an unregulated industry, you are still giving your pet the best nutrition.

We encourage you to chat to us about your pet's individual diet.

Regards,
Dr Nicky Goldberg BVSc MANZCVS (medicine)