

Obesity is not just a human issue. In the animal world, it is a true epidemic. There are hundreds of diet foods and gimmicks to help pets lose weight. Opinions about weight loss are diverse just like the food choices our pets are offered. Why is it so confusing to come up with a healthy diet that won't cause your pet to get fat? The reason is this. Most people do not understand nutrition at all, especially the veterinary community which has largely misinformed the public. There has been a betrayal of trust starting with many of the major pet food companies and continued by a largely ignorant veterinary establishment. This has allowed misinformation to dictate nutrition. This trend started after World War 2 when factory farms started taking over supplying the food for our people and animals. Pets went from home cooked diets to a bag of industrialized corn, wheat, and animal by-products. Industrialized food is cheap and convenient, tastes good enough, and is well advertised. The problem is that dogs and cats are carnivores. Take a look at their teeth which are clearly designed for shredding flesh and their digestive tracts which are designed for digesting meat. The guidelines for a healthy diet for our dogs and cats are simple and easy to understand. You can simplify all the confusion into one clear sentence...are you ready for it?

Dogs and cats need a meat based and minimally processed diet.

Where are the veterinarians out there who will say that it is absurd feed your pet for pennies a day with a corn and wheat based processed kibble? Many veterinarians have turned to "scientifically formulated diets" like Hills Science Diet. Science Diet? Please! It is just about the same combination of non-meat ingredients as many of the foods we can find in our local supermarkets.

For example, **Science Diet® Adult Active.**

Ingredients:

Ground Whole Grain Corn, Chicken By-Product Meal, Animal Fat (preserved with mixed tocopherols and citric acid), Dried Beet Pulp, Soybean Oil, Dried Egg Product, Flaxseed, Potassium Chloride, Iodized Salt, Choline Chloride, vitamins (L-Ascorbyl-2-Polyphosphate (source of vitamin C), Vitamin E Supplement, Niacin, Thiamine Mononitrate, Vitamin A Supplement, Calcium Pantothenate, Biotin, Vitamin B12 Supplement, Pyridoxine Hydrochloride, Riboflavin, Folic Acid, Vitamin D3 Supplement), Vitamin E Supplement, minerals (Ferrous Sulfate, Zinc Oxide, Copper Sulfate, Manganous Oxide, Calcium Iodate, Sodium Selenite), preserved with Mixed Tocopherols and Citric Acid, Beta-Carotene, Rosemary Extract.



Why am I picking on Science Diet? This company has single-handedly infiltrated the veterinary schools like no other company, wooed the future veterinarians across the country, and led to a generation of misinformed veterinarians. When I was in veterinary school at the University of Pennsylvania, Hills was embedded into the veterinary hospital and school. They sponsored happy hours and professional lectures. The school received their food either free or at a major discount. I believed the Hills representatives who told me how good their food was because all of my teachers thought it was fine also; or they did not speak up about it. The University of Pennsylvania was typical of many veterinary schools in this regard. When I think about the number of well-intentioned primary care veterinarians across the country that were led to believe this misinformation about nutrition, I begin to understand the reason why there is so much feeding confusion.

How is all this related to obesity? We have been feeding industrialized, highly processed corn and grain to our carnivorous cats and dogs for a long time. When humans wanted to study their obesity epidemic they used dogs as a model to do it by feeding energy rich grain-based processed diets to consistently make obese animals. Corn and wheat are the energy rich materials which effectively caused obesity. The obesity-causing effect of grain is augmented by processing. Processing in the form of cooking, chemically preserving, or canning is most common. Processing prevents foods from spoiling so they can stay on the shelf for long periods and still be edible. Processing as well as grain ingredients lead to a metabolic shift in the body which often leads to obesity.

This shift causes the food eaten to be stored as fat. Animals evolved to be hunters having periods of time where there would be shortages of food. During this time, they would live off their fat stores. When there was a kill (meat), they gorged themselves in case there was a shortage again. Feast or famine was how they evolved. Enter the grain based diet. This diet functionally shuts off the fat burning systems of the body. All food then gets stored as fat and no carbohydrate diet can reverse the process. This is why fat dogs and cats dieting on grain based kibbles can be eating less than their caloric daily requirements and still gain weight. Their body's metabolism is shutting down to conserve energy so they require less food. Their fat burning metabolism can not turn back on until they get back to a minimally processed, meat based diet which will allow fat burning to begin.

Minimally processed, meat based food. What does this look like? Lets look at the ingredient list of a common commercially prepared raw frozen chicken diet.

Chicken, Raw Ground Chicken Bone, Turkey, Turkey Liver, Turkey Heart, Apples, Carrots, Butternut Squash, Ground Flaxseeds, Montmorillonite Clay, Chicken Eggs, Broccoli, Lettuce, Spinach, Dried Kelp, Apple Cider Vinegar, Parsley, Honey, Salmon Oil, Olive Oil, Blueberries, Alfalfa Sprouts, Persimmons, Duck Eggs, Pheasant Eggs, Quail Eggs, Inulin, Rosemary, Sage, Clove.

A raw frozen is about as close to a fresh kill as our pets can get. This is minimally processed. The ingredients are listed in order of most to least in amount. This is clearly meat-based. When fed in proper amounts, cats and dogs can lose weight and lean up. Inflammatory problems often improve like dermatitis, diarrhea, other digestive problems, bladder stones, and infections. And no grains. Small animals have no biologic need for grain whatsoever. The only times I ever recommend grain is when a patient cannot keep their weight without it. This is uncommon. When I recommend grain, it is whole, unprocessed grain.

There seems to be so much confusion for owners trying to sort out what to feed their dogs and cats. Remember the rule of thumb:

Dogs and cats need a meat based and minimally processed diet.

Remember to consult a professional if you have any concerns about changing diets for your animal. **Be particularly careful with changing cat's diets too quickly.** Fat cats that decide they do not like a new diet can be in extreme danger if they stop eating. So make changes carefully with cats! Call my office to discuss your pet's nutrition before trying it alone. We can often make the process as safe and easy as possible.