



**Allison Peters, DVM - Cobb Animal Clinic, PA** - Dr. Peters grew up in Vermont, as well as Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. She earned a Bachelors of Science in Zoology from North Carolina State University, and her Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from North Carolina State University in 2014. During her years in veterinary school, she was involved with research in diseases of the gallbladder and immune mediated blood disorders, and worked in the clinical pathology lab. In her senior year, she received the Donald R. Howard Award for Surgical Excellence, as well as the Companion Animal Faculty Award for Clinical Proficiency. She is a member of Phi Zeta, the National Veterinary Honor Society. Dr. Peters is excited to begin her career in small animal veterinary medicine at Cobb Animal Clinic. Her areas of interest include dermatology, dentistry and internal medicine.

She and her husband Kenneth were married in 2012, and their family includes Piper, a Scottish terrier, and their cats, Molly and Huck. They look forward to getting to know the Greensboro area.

## Nutrition Basics: What Does a Pet Food Label Mean?

Choosing a food for your dog or cat can be challenging due to the many choices available today. Many pet owners wonder which is the best food to feed their beloved family member. Unfortunately, there is no perfect answer, because it depends on many factors. What is your pet's age? What is your pet's activity level? Do they have any medical conditions? In addition to the hundreds of traditional commercial pet foods available, an increasing number of pet owners choose to feed non-traditional diets, including raw food and home made diets.

With all of the options, how should you choose? First, let's discuss how commercial pet food is labeled. The Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) and National Research Council (NRC) have created guidelines for the minimum and maximum amounts of protein, carbohydrates, fat, vitamins and minerals for pets. These numbers have been determined through years of research. Every bag of pet food requires a nutritional adequacy statement, the most important part of a label. ***This statement includes if the diet is complete and balanced, what life stage the diet is suitable for, and if animal feeding trials were performed.*** Animal feeding tests mean pets were fed the diet exclusively for an extended period of time, and their health status was evaluated extensively during and after the trial. ***Many commercial diets today are not fed to any animals before they are sold and fed to your pet.***

Keep in mind that diets are sold as complete and balanced, which means that when food is added it can alter the balance of your pet's diet. If more than 10% of your pet's calories come from treats or even home cooked food, the diet is no longer balanced.

Non-traditional diets have been gaining in popularity for various reasons, including safety concerns from pet food recalls. Pet food recalls are occurring more frequently than a decade ago; however, the FDA and pet food companies have increased monitoring for the safety of our pets, and the recalls are frequently proactive, rather than a consequence of pets becoming sick after eating a food. Some owners have felt feeding a home cooked diet is a safer choice. A recent study evaluated over 200 home cooked diet recipes that were found in books and online, and found that only 3% were nutritionally adequate. A majority of home cooked diets contain excessively high levels of protein and fat. If you feel that you should feed your pet a home cooked diet, your veterinarian or a board certified veterinary nutritionist could help formulate a recipe for a complete and balanced diet. The most important time to feed a pet a balanced diet is during the growth phase. Keep in mind that for large and giant breed dogs, this could last up to two years! Mineral and vitamin deficiencies during the demanding growth phase can lead to life long health consequences. Speak to your vet before feeding a non-

traditional raw food diet, as there are both nutritional and public health concerns that should be discussed.

Veterinary therapeutic diets can be a powerful tool used to treat conditions such as arthritis, urinary issues and kidney disease. Prescription diets undergo testing for efficacy, but must be sold by your vet because they have nutrient profiles that do not meet the AAFCO guidelines. For example, feeding a low protein diet to pets with chronic kidney failure has proven to slow the progression of the disease. However, the protein level falls below the AAFCO minimum standard for a healthy adult pet, and cannot be sold over the counter.

***Two of the most common health conditions which diet can play an important role are obesity and allergies.*** The incidence of pet obesity has been sharply increasing in recent years, and the most common reason is over feeding. Your vet can determine the number of calories your pet should eat based on their body condition, and then recommend the amount of food to feed based on the diet you select.

Allergies in pets are secondary to either environmental allergens such as grasses and pollen, or to food. The most common allergens are beef, dairy, chicken, lamb and egg, which comprise 95% of food allergens. Food allergies are diagnosed by a response to a food trial, which means a diet should be fed exclusively for six weeks. The diet used should contain only one protein source and one carbohydrate source. The label should be read closely, as diets labeled for allergies and as limited ingredients can contain numerous protein and carbohydrate sources. Veterinary diets are the most effective way to rule out food allergies, as they are the least likely to be cross contaminated with other protein sources. The protein and carbohydrate should be new to your pet, or not have been fed for a significant period of time. It's best to feed your pet foods that contain only single, common meat as the protein source such as beef or chicken. That way you will have more options for a food trial if your dog develops allergies.

Discuss your pet's diet during your next wellness visit. We want our pets to live long and healthy lives, and nutrition is an aspect that should be considered as important as vaccines and parasite preventatives.



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