

## LIFE-STAGE NUTRITION

A high-quality nutritional program for your pet keeps it happy, healthy, and in peak condition throughout its life. Proper nutrition is essential for its long-term health and happiness. Other than proper veterinary care, it is the single most important consideration you can give to your pet.

### **LIFE-STAGE NUTRITION:**

It is important to regularly review your pet's current nutritional requirements. Your pet's nutritional needs change with each life stage. The nutritional requirements for a growing puppy or kitten are very different from those of a normal, active adult pet. The same holds true for major differences in mid-life adult pets and senior pets. Also, the lifestyle of your pet will dictate its needs. A working dog, pregnant pet, and less active pet all have very different nutritional requirements.

### **ALL PET FOODS ARE NOT THE SAME:**

Pet foods vary in their quality and ability to meet the needs of your pet. There are three classes of food from a quality perspective, generic brands, standard formulations, and premium formulations. Premium diets use the highest quality ingredients, are the most digestible, have greater nutritional utilization, and are the costliest. Standard formulations would include the better brands of food available at the grocery store. Generic foods are sold on a basis of cheap price only. In pet foods, you really do usually get what you pay for!

With premium diets, most of the food eaten is digested with less excreted from the body as waste. Because of this increased digestibility, if you feed according to the label, the premium diet can cost less than the lesser expensive pet foods. Pets fed a premium diet typically have a shinier hair coat, more sparkle in their eyes, a moist nose, smaller & firmer stools, and overall better health.

Quality nutrition also maintains a stronger immune system more capable of resisting disease. It also allows the pet to make quicker recoveries from illness, accidents, and surgical procedures. A proper balance of vitamins and minerals enhances tissue repair and organ maintenance.

### **READING THE PET FOOD LABEL:**

There are major differences in pet foods. The label can provide you with important information about the quality of the food you are buying. For proper nutrition, the diet must provide the proper balance of the five basic nutrient categories: protein, fat, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals. The label will list all ingredients in descending order by weight. The protein source will probably be the first ingredient listed and is an important indicator as to the overall quality of the diet. Higher-quality pet foods will have animal meat as the major protein source. Quality protein sources include chicken, meat meal, fishmeal, and/or dried whole egg. Lesser-quality pet foods often use plant-origin proteins, such as soybeans. Your pet's digestive system can absorb meat proteins much more efficiently than plant-origin proteins. You

want to feed a high-quality protein because it is highly digestible and provides your pet with the nutrients it needs to carry out normal body functions and to produce a strong-boned, well-toned and muscled body, along with a healthy, shiny coat.

In addition to the label listing all the ingredients, you will also see a listing of the guaranteed analysis. This is the percentage of crude protein, crude fat, fiber, and moisture that are present in the diet. These percentages will change significantly with each life stage and your pet's lifestyle. It is important to feed the right food for each life stage of your pet.

Evaluation of the pet's stools is another indication of pet food quality. Stool quality is an indication of how well your pet is digesting the diet you are feeding. When all the right factors are present, your pet should have a low stool volume, be firm and dark, and have a reduced odor. If stools are soft, loose, watery, light-colored, or smelly, this can be an indication that you are feeding a lower quality diet that is not meeting your pet's nutritional needs.

#### **Water is also an essential nutrient that must be available to the pet:**

Fresh, clean water should always be available. Canned foods contain about 80% water whereas dry foods contain about 10% moisture. Pets eating canned food therefore get more of their water requirements from the food than those fed dry foods.

#### **TASTE IS IMPORTANT TO YOUR PET:**

Some less nutritious diets are very bland tasting...much like chewing on cardboard. To increase palatability and entice your pet to eat these less nutritious diets, some manufacturers add flavor enhancers. Better quality diets using high-quality protein sources in combination with high-quality fats, provide a diet formulation that has a very appetizing taste and smell for your pet.

#### **PETS DON'T NEED A VARIABLE DIET:**

Switching brands of pet foods frequently will make your pet a much more finicky eater as well as lead to many more digestive upsets. Vomiting and/or diarrhea are common consequences of abrupt changes in the pet's diet. If you do change diets, it is important to do it SLOWLY over a 5-10 day period. Begin by adding a small amount of the new food and gradually increasing its proportion in the total diet while decreasing the proportion of the diet being replaced.