

How to read food labels and naturally instinctive foods

As a pet guardian you have a responsibility towards your furry friends to provide them with love, care, affection and most importantly – *healthy and nutritious food*. Walk into a pet aisle into your local supermarket and you will be astounded to witness a variety of dry and wet food brands and this question will instantly pop up in your mind – *which is the best choice for my pet?* If you learn how to decipher pet food labels, you can surely make an informed decision for your loyal companions' wellbeing.

Is the Product Registered?

Before you put a can or bag of pet food into your grocery basket check if it has a “V number”. As per the guidelines provided by Pet Food Industry Association of Southern Africa (PFI) having this product registration number on the packaging indicates that the product complies with minimum nutritional standards for pet food and is safe for consumption. The PFI's framework has been developed in alignment with the Association of American Feed Control Officials' (AAFCO) and the European Pet food Industry Federation (FEDIAF) guidelines.

Be wary of brands that do not have a V number!

A Closer Look into Ingredients

Flip the bag or can over and what do you see? That's right it is a list of ingredients that the pet food contains. These elements are listed in an ascending order by weight. Make sure that the top two components list a specific meat or meat meal. Your pets are carnivores which is why they have to fulfill their daily protein requirement. Ensure that the protein source is free from steroid hormones and antibiotics. The pet food must have greater protein content in comparison with carbohydrates because brands that are laden with the latter will not offer the desired nutritional value to your pet.

Watch out for foods that have propylene glycol as a listed component because that can contribute to anaemia in felines. Pet foods with Omega 3 derived from fish sources are highly recommended.

Deciphering 'Hidden' Codes

The composition of pet food ingredients is not as straightforward as it seems. “All chicken” does not mean that a pet food has 100% of the ingredient in fact; it stands for 65% and above. A brand with “chicken flavour” simply has traces of the meat and if a label reads “with chicken” this means that the food has more than 4% of the ingredient. If your furry friend is allergic to something that makes it even more vital to review the labels.

Beware of False Claims

Some brands tend to use labels such as “suitable for all life stages” and “vets recommended”. It is best to stay to be cautious of such phrases because they are simply false. Animals’ nutritional requirements tend to change during the course of their life which means that a food for kitties is not advisable for the consumption of senior cats. Accordingly, the sheer number of vets indicates that it is not possible for the veterinary community to ever reach a consensus on recommending a specific brand of pet food.