**Nutrition for Your Pet**

Nutrition for your pet is very important and there are *many* pet food options out there, which can get confusing. Current regulations require pet food manufacturers to make sure at least the minimum nutrient requirements are in the pet food, so most pet food is adequately balanced for your pet…… as long as your pet doesn’t have any special nutrition requirements.

The main thing is to make sure that your pet is in the “*life stage*” that the pet food label says it is formulated for. For instance, many pet foods say “formulated for all life stages”, which means you can feed it to your pet at any age of its life. Some may say “formulated for puppies or kittens and growth”, and others may say “formulated for dogs older than 7 years”.

**When to Transition from Puppy or Kitten to Adult Dog or Cat Food**

* Small breed puppies should be fed puppy food until they are about 5-7 months of age, and then they can be transitioned to adult food.
* Large breed puppies should be fed “large breed puppy food”. If they are not fed puppy food specifically for large breed puppies, then they should be transitioned to regular adult dog food at 3-4 months of age. If they grow too fast or get over-conditioned, they can develop bone and joint abnormalities.
* Kittens can be transitioned to adult cat food when they are 3-4 months of age.

**Feline Nutrition**

Cats need to be fed a *meat-based* diet. They are **strict carnivores**, and if they are fed a vegan or vegetarian diet, they will develop severe malnutrition, growth deformities, and can get very sick or even die.

It is okay to feed them some canned tuna every now and then, but it should not be their sole source of food. For cats to be healthy, they need to be fed a food manufactured specifically for cats.

**Changing from One Food to Another**

If you are in the process of transitioning your pet to a new food for one reason or another, it is best to do a gradual transition over the duration of 1-2 weeks to decrease the risk of nausea and diarrhea. You can do this by decreasing the amount of the original food and increasing the amount of the new food in their bowl each day, until you are only feeding the new food.

**Should I Give My Pet Table Scraps?**

Even though it may be fun and bonding to give your pet food scraps from your plate, or share your food with your pet, it is not healthy for their bodies or their behavior. Not only can our food cause them to become overweight, but if it is a food high in fat, it can cause severe inflammation in their gut and they may get sick and need to be hospitalized. It can also predispose them to diabetes and bowel disorders. In addition to health concerns, it can cause them to develop negative behaviors that are difficult to break, such as begging for food or stealing food from your plate or the table.

**What About Grain-Free Food?**

For the most part, dogs & cats do just fine eating grains. If they have a food allergy, it is usually to the protein source in the food (chicken, beef, etc.). However, some dogs & cats can be allergic to the carbohydrate source, such as corn. There is actually only just a small percentage of dogs & cats with a true grain allergy. However, as long as the “grain-free” food is still well-balanced for dogs & cats, it is fine to feed…. although it may not do anything to change their allergy problems if they have an allergy.

***For More Information on Nutrition, please visit:***

<http://petnutritionalliance.org>

<http://www.petfoodnutrition.com>