

TREATS FOR FIDO

A Short Guide to Choosing Healthy Dog Treats

By

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Introduction

I read somewhere that those of us who treat our dogs as family members “want Lassie to eat as well as Timmy.” If you didn’t grow up on a television diet of Lassie, the amazing Collie who always saved the day for his human pal Timmy, that may go right over your head. The point is that we who love our dogs want the best for them, and that extends to the food they eat.

Pet owners are increasingly health conscious when it comes to their beloved pets, with the movement toward healthy, all-natural, holistic foods. This concern extends to treats, as well as regular pet food.

In 2008, as part of my job, I spent many months researching pet food manufacturers and the food they produce. What I learned was at once, confusing and disgusting. This led me to the realization that my dogs and cats deserve better. As I researched food choices, I centered on treats for my two dogs and found that many brands of treats on the market contain ingredients that I do not want my dogs to eat.

For a more in-depth look at the pet food industry, I suggest you read my book, [Feeding Fido: How to Choose the Perfect Dog Food](#). In it, you will learn how to recognize good and bad ingredients and how to understand the confusing pet food labels. That information will assist you in choosing treats for your pet.

As co-founder of Seniors for Pets, Inc., I am concerned with the care that older pets receive. A healthy diet, including treats, is an important part of their care. In my job, I am frequently faced with senior citizens who have difficulty affording healthy food for their pets in today’s economy, and our organization seeks to help them by educating and funding such needs. Diet is the key to a pet’s overall well-being, and education is the way to achieve success.

My husband and I share our lives with Gator, an oversized Weimaraner, and Maggie, a miniature English Bulldog who outgrew her miniature description. We and the dogs are ruled by 4 cats who share our domain. Our animals are all

rescues and began their lives with very different diets. Today, we make sure they all eat a healthy diet and that includes their treats.

This booklet will lead you through the world of choosing commercial dog treats and help you get your 4-legged best friend on the way to a healthier life. Much of the information contained here can be found on the Internet, and you will find a source list in the Appendix. I have also included a glossary to explain the unfamiliar terms associated with the pet food industry.

Many thanks to my talented friend and photographer, Bobbi Austin, for her contributions to this booklet.

Happy reading and woofs and barks to your dogs who will benefit from the knowledge you gain.

Carol North



Chapter 1

Are Treats Necessary?

Why give treats to your dog? Aren't his regular meals enough food for him? Yes, they probably are enough, but treats serve entirely different purposes. Your dog adores you. It is unconditional love and in his eyes, you are perfect. That kind of devotion deserves more than just the basic food, water and shelter. He deserves special attention. Giving your best friend an occasional treat for no special reason should be a positive part of your relationship.

Treats are a good way to hide and administer oral medication, should your pet require it. You can purchase a product called "Pill Pockets," which are little chewy treats with pockets to hold a pill or capsule. My dogs love the taste of Pill Pockets and will down any drug they contain just to get the treat. Of course, you can hide pills in other pieces of food, such as wrapped in a piece of deli turkey or cheese. Just try to make it seem like a wonderful treat to your dog, so he will look forward to taking his medicine.

Treats are a wonderful training tool for dogs. When Gator went through his obedience course, we were instructed to bring small treats with us to class to use as rewards when he completed an exercise properly. I now carry them with me whenever I take my dogs out, just in case they forget they are obedience-trained.

Chapter 2

What to Look For in Dog Treats

High-quality ingredients are essential. The treats should contain a good source of protein. Dogs are carnivorous animals and do best on a diet containing real meat. That goes for treats, as well. The treat should be made with all-natural preservatives and flavorings and should be grain-free or contain only healthy grains, such as oats, rice or barley. Vegetables, fruits and peanut butter are healthy additions often used in commercial treats.

There are dental treats on the market with a tarter-preventative claim to help prevent gum disease. These are ok if the other ingredients are healthy ones.

Finally, choose a flavor that is pleasing to your dog. If he doesn't like it, it won't matter how healthy it is.



photo by Bobbi Austin

Chapter 3

Don't Eat That!

Many commercial dog treats contain ingredients that you don't want your dog to eat. Treats that are made of dry ingredients – think kibble – often consist of rendered material. The rendering process takes parts of dead animals that are really not edible and cooks them at high temperatures, grinds them into a powdery form and adds all sorts of unmentionables to turn them into dry pet food and treats. I won't go into great detail here, as I did in my book, [Feeding Fido: How to Choose the Perfect Food for your Dog](#), but suffice it to say that rendered food contains animal parts that you do not want your pet to eat.

Avoid chemical preservatives and artificial flavorings and dyes. These are often found in pet treats and are not good for your dog and have been suspected of causing certain cancers in pets. Common chemical preservatives found in



MAGGIE

treats are BHA (butylated hydroxyanisole), BHT (butylated hydroxytolulene), ethoxyquin, propyl gallate and propyl glycol.

Be sure the treat does not contain by-products. By-products are often found as a main protein source in pet food and contain parts of animals that are not healthy. Avoid animal digest. It is made from such goodies as brains, lungs, intestines, blood and organs from dead animals. And be sure the treats don't include fillers, such as wheat or corn. They only add calories and don't contribute anything to the dog's well-being. Many dogs are allergic to wheat and corn.

I also recommend avoiding the rawhide bones and similar hard treats. Most contain ingredients that are not healthy and they pose a choking hazard. If you do give those to your dog, be sure to stick around and make sure he doesn't choke on small pieces he is able to break off.



photo by Bobbi Austin

Chapter 4

Homemade Treats for Dogs

For people who have time to make their dogs' treats, this is a great idea. You can accurately control what goes into the treats, and you will know the origin of each ingredient. But making treats can be time-consuming. The Internet is full of recipes for making your own treats, and I have included a few of my favorites here. These are not original recipes, although I do "doctor" them from time to time to vary the flavors. I've had them – or some version of them for many years, so I no longer recall their origin.

Chicken Balls

6 oz. chicken chunks, fully cooked
4-5 crackers (unsalted is best)
1 egg
Whole wheat flour

Mix the first 3 ingredients in a bowl and form into bite-sized balls. Roll the balls in the flour and place on a baking sheet. Bake for 10-12 minutes at 350 degrees and allow to cool. Store in refrigerator.

Dog Cookies

2 jars (6-oz) of meat and vegetable baby food (Could be beef, chicken, turkey?)
1 cup wheat germ
2 cups nonfat dry milk

Mix all ingredients in a bowls with a fork. Drop by teaspoonfuls onto a greased pan. Flatten slightly with the back of the fork or cut into shapes with a cookie cutter. Bake 10-15 minutes until slightly browned at the edges in a 350 degree oven. Store in refrigerator. This recipe was given to me by a former co-worker, and I have made it numerous times using baby food liver with vegetables. My dogs love it!

Peanut Butter Cookies

- 2 Cups Whole-wheat flour
- 1 tbsp baking powder
- 1 Cup peanut butter
- 1 Cup Milk

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Combine flour and baking powder. In separate bowl, combine peanut butter and milk. Add the dry ingredients and mix well. Place dough on a lightly floured surface and knead until fairly smooth. Roll out the dough with a rolling pin to $\frac{1}{4}$ " thickness and cut in shapes. Bake for 20 minutes on a greased cookie sheet until lightly browned. Cool and then store in an airtight container.



photo by Bobbi Austin

Chapter 5

People Snacks for Dogs

My dogs love people snacks. Crunchy baby carrots that come in a plastic bag in the produce section of the grocery make wonderful dog treats. Broccoli, cauliflower and green beans are also healthy. These vegetables are high in vitamins and fiber, as well as being low in calories. Dogs like the crunchy texture.

Many years ago, we owned Great Danes. The breeder told me to add cottage cheese to their diet once a day for a healthy coat. While cottage cheese is a bit messy for a treat, it would certainly work if you put a dab in their food bowl.

Eggs make good dog treats. I keep a supply of boiled eggs in the refrigerator and if I want a snack, I cut half of a boiled egg for myself and divide the other half between the two dogs.



Chapter 6

Happy, Healthy Pets

Choosing healthy dog snacks is not difficult, once you know what is good and what to avoid. Go to any retail pet store and browse through their treat selections. Read the ingredients labels and find ones that fit your requirements. Or make your own using one of the recipes in this booklet. You can find many more by cruising the Internet. There are published books of dog food recipes in book stores. It isn't difficult, just time consuming.

Whatever route you choose, your dog will thank you for your efforts with a healthy body. Your budget will also thank you because a healthier dog means lower veterinary expenses.



Chapter 7

Comparing Treats

There are many choices in treats, so you will have to read the labels. Below are two commercial dog treats with their ingredients. The bad ingredients are found in red.

PUP-PERONI ORIGINAL BEEF

(Del Monte Foods)

Beef, meat by-products, soy grits, sugar, liver salt, propylene glycol, garlic powder, caramel color, natural smoke flavor, potassium sorbate, sodium nitrite, Red 40, BHA, onion extract

The first item – beef – is good. However, it is followed by 7 ingredients that are bad for dogs. Notice all the chemical preservatives present in this treat. This is not a healthy choice for your pet.

ZUKE'S PEANUT BUTTER & BERRIES

Ground oats, rice bran, peanut butter, blueberries, potatoes, oat fiber, blackstrap molasses, oil blend (sunflower, olive & canola), natural vegetable flavors

ZUKE'S TURKEY 'N TATERZ

Ground oats, rice bran, turkey, potatoes, oat fiber, blackstrap molasses, oil blend (sunflower, olive & canola), natural vegetable flavors

All of the ingredients in the Zuke's treats are healthy and tasty and your dog should love them. Just read the ingredients, know what you do and don't want and then make the best choice.

GLOSSARY

Below are common terms that you might find on a package of dog treats. Take this list with you when you shop, so you will know what to buy and what to avoid.

AAFCO: American Association of Feed Control Officials whose job is to set the guidelines for production, labeling and sale of pet foods. Their guides show the minimum and maximum required of ingredients, but they are not exact. If a food meets AAFCO standards, it is considered nutritionally adequate, yet many such foods will fail a chemical analysis.

ANIMAL DIGEST: Think animal poop! The digest is the digested part of an animal. This is not what you want your dog to eat. It is legal with AAFCO, if the cooking temperature is high enough.

ANIMAL FAT OR TALLOW: This is made up of rendered animal fat, rancid restaurant grease or other oils considered inedible for humans. Tallow is low-quality, hard, white fat that most animals find hard to digest.

BEET PULP: This is the dried remains from sugar beet production which is extracted in the sugar manufacturing process. Some dog food manufacturers use it as a source of fiber. Others believe it holds waste in the body and because it is a sugar product, it can contribute to various medical conditions in the animal.

BREWER'S RICE: This refers to the tiny pieces of broken rice left over after the milling process is done. It is a product of the beer industry and is used as a filler in dog food. It has little or no nutritional value.

CHEMICAL PRESERVATIVES: Includes BHA (butylated hydroxyanisole), BHT (butylated hydroxytolulene), propyl gallate, propylene glycol (also used in antifreeze and is suspected of causing red blood cell damage), and

ethoxyquin. All of these are suspected cancer-causing agents and are used in food that pets eat daily.

CHICKEN BY-PRODUCTS: Ground chicken parts from poultry carcasses such as head, feet, beaks, feathers, intestines, and undeveloped eggs, as well as any rendered material.

CORN PRODUCTS: Includes corn meal, gluten, ground corn. Corn is a cheap filler that causes allergy problems in many animals. Corn can be difficult for a dog to digest. Corn is sometimes used as a cheap substitute for a protein source.

GROUND WHOLE GRAIN SORGHUM: Grown mainly as a feed grain for livestock, it has the same food value as corn products and is not particularly healthy for dogs.

MEAT AND BONE MEAL: This is an inexpensive source of animal protein. Companies are not required by AAFCO to identify the source of the meat. They are not human-grade meats.

MEAT BY-PRODUCTS: These consist of organs and parts of an animal not fit for human consumption and can include brains, feet, heads, intestines, blood and any internal part. By-products can also contain cancerous or diseased tissue containing parasites and euthanized animal parts.

POTASSIUM CHLORIDE: Is used to make fertilizer. Why use it in pet food?

SALT: Salt is unnecessary in a dog's diet. Make sure it is way down the list of ingredients. There usually will be a form of sodium in the vitamins added to the food, and you don't want your dog to ingest too much salt. It will cause him the same problems as it does humans.

SORBITOL: This is a gas-producing, alcohol-based sweetener found in sugar-free gum. In dog food, it is a humectant, used to hold in moisture. It also has a laxative effect.

SOY: Soy is used as a filler in pet food. Like corn, it is sometimes substituted for meat as a protein source. Dogs are not able to utilize proteins from plant sources, and some dogs are allergic to soy.

WHEAT PRODUCTS: Wheat only becomes an issue if your dog is allergic or sensitive to it. Watch out for manufacturers who use several different wheat ingredients in different locations on the ingredients label, so it appears there is less of it. When you add them all up, the total could be a larger percentage of the ingredients than is healthy.

