

HOT TOPIC

Homemade pet foods



In focus

Homemade diets are perceived as healthier to some pet owners, but despite their draw, they may not be complete and balanced for healthy pets.

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What is a complete and balanced diet?

A diet is considered complete and balanced when it meets government nutritional requirements which ensure safe and proper nutrition for healthy pets. The Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) and the European Pet Food Industry (FEDIAF) are the main authorities that define 'complete and balanced diets' and 'complete pet foods', in the U.S. and Europe respectively. These authorities define complete and balanced pet foods as being formulated to provide sufficient daily levels of essential nutrients for pets' at their particular life stage.^{2,3}

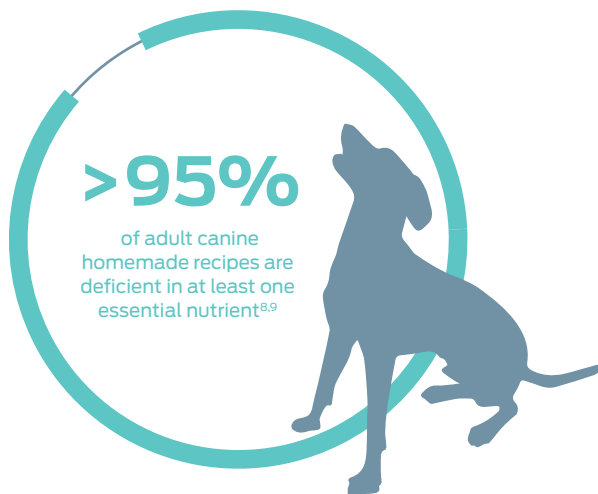
Why should I look for 'Complete and Balanced' or 'Complete Pet Food' on my pet food label?

Feeding a complete and balanced diet assures owners that they are meeting the nutritional needs of their pet for their particular life stage,^{2,3} without the need for additional supplementation. Pet food labels that do not state they are 'complete and balanced' or 'complete pet food' may not meet adequate or safe nutrient standards of a properly formulated diet under government regulations. This includes both under- and over-feeding of essential nutrients.



Why isn't a homemade diet healthier for my pet?

Recipes for homemade pet foods are readily accessible to pet owners via many sources. While nutritional balance can be achieved in a homemade diet with specific formulation by a veterinary nutritionist, it is often unrealistic for most pet owners to achieve. Often, nutritional balance of homemade diets is compromised by compliance to the recipe by the pet owner,⁴ a supply of consistent ingredients with *known* nutritional composition, and/or access to laboratory analyses that ensure adequate delivery of nutrients. As a result of these complexities, homemade diets often have nutrient deficiencies, even with vitamin and mineral supplementation.⁵⁻⁶

The vast majority of homemade recipes are lacking in essential nutrients⁷ with studies showing >95% of adult canine recipes^{8,9} and 100% of adult feline recipes¹⁰ deficient in at least one essential nutrient. This is especially concerning because pets' bodies cannot synthesize required essential nutrients on their own. Therefore, they must be provided by their diet to meet pets' nutritional needs.



Most prevalent nutrient deficiencies in homemade pet recipes (in descending order)

 8	 10
Zinc	Choline
Choline	Iron
Vitamin D	Thiamine
Copper	Zinc
EPA + DHA	Manganese
Vitamin E	Vitamin E
Calcium	Copper
	Folic Acid
	Calcium
	Vitamin D



Vitamin D is essential:

Dogs and cats cannot synthesize Vitamin D from UV exposure like humans. It must be provided by the diet.¹¹

Do I have to worry about my pet's treats being 'complete and balanced'?

Some pet foods and other items for pets, such as treats, are not intended to be a pet's only source of nutrition.² As such, they may not be labeled 'complete and balanced.' These products are intended to be complementary to a complete and balanced diet¹³ and not the sole source of nutrition for a pet. Limiting food items that are not complete and balanced to less than 10% of a pet's total caloric intake will help them maintain a healthy weight.¹²

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