

# Dog food & dog nutrition

## Shopping for quality commercial dog food

Reading dog food labels is something of an exercise in futility unless you know the arcane rules governing what they can say, but here are a few guidelines.

- **Ingredients must be listed by amount in descending order.** So if meat is the first ingredient (the ideal to strive for), technically the food contains more of that ingredient--chicken, say--than any other ingredient. In reality, chicken is a heavy ingredient because it contains a lot of water, so it's easy for manufacturers to manipulate the label by listing chicken first and following it with various grains, such as wheat meal, wheat middlings, wheat flour, and so on. It's all wheat, though, and if you were to put it on a scale with the chicken, it would probably outweigh the fowl.
- **The first ingredient on the label should always be meat with a name--**such as chicken, lamb, or beef--as opposed to the generic "meat," which could be anything.
- **A food should have more meat protein than grain protein.** Unfortunately there's really no way to tell that from the label.
- **One or more types of meat, or high-quality dairy products such as eggs, should be listed among the first three to five ingredients.** If the first ingredient is a meat, followed by only grains, or if the first ingredient is a grain, check some other brands before buying.
- **Marketing terms such as natural or premium have no official legal definition.** If you want to know what the manufacturer means by "human-grade ingredients" or "70-percent organic," give the company a call and get some answers. Every can or bag of dog food must list contact information for the manufacturer on the label.