

Advice from Most Veterinarians About This Stinks

Most likely you've received inaccurate and even harmful advice from your traditional vet on this topic that is essential to your pet's well-being. Be aware, it's an atrocious and well-hidden dark truth in the conventional pet care community.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- In their ongoing "food as medicine" push, big pet food and many in the conventional veterinary profession are recommending processed therapeutic/prescription diets to pet parents
- This is an example of the processed pet food industry exercising its enormous and dangerous influence over the conventional veterinary community
- Processed therapeutic diets are no more species-appropriate or high quality than regular processed pet food; both should be avoided for the health and longevity of your pet
- Despite what they would have you believe, neither the pet food industry nor most veterinarians are good sources of information or advice on how to best nourish your pet
- Your best source for this information is an integrative or holistic veterinarian who has independently studied animal nutrition and creates customized nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate diets for pets

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Both the mainstream pet food industry and many in the conventional veterinary community are working hard to convince pet parents that processed so-called therapeutic or prescription diets are "food as medicine" and the wave of the future.¹ For those of you who may not be familiar with these diets, they're formulated to address specific conditions in dogs and cats, for example, obesity, kidney disease, digestive issues, food allergies and more.

But here's what's not being said: Highly processed diets made with feed-grade ingredients are the root cause of many of the diseases pets acquire today.

It's really a disgrace that when dogs and cats become sick with degenerative diseases after years of eating processed, biologically inappropriate food, their owners are then encouraged to buy a more expensive version of a similar food and consider it "medicine."

'Therapeutic' Diets — Another Example of Big Pet Food's Huge Influence on the Veterinary Profession

The push to promote so-called therapeutic processed pet food began in earnest six to eight years ago when the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) added a fifth "vital health assessment" — nutrition — for veterinarians in determining the health status of their cat and dog patients. (The first four health assessments are temperature,

cardio function, respiratory health and pain.)

In theory, this was an encouraging development. Integrative and holistically oriented veterinarians have always done nutritional assessments on our patients. In fact, nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate nutrition is the first and most influential of the three pillars of health. However, here is how the AAHA introduced their new "5th Vital Assessment" initiative:

"DENVER — Nutrition is integral to optimal pet care. However, the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) found through its Compliance Study that only seven percent of pets that could benefit from a therapeutic food were actually on such a regimen.

The compliance discrepancy along with the many factors considered in assessing the nutritional needs of a healthy dog or cat, as well as the pet with one or more medical conditions, led to the development the AAHA Nutritional Assessment Guidelines."²

There's that phrase "therapeutic food" again, and — no surprise — a major manufacturer of therapeutic pet food (Hill's Pet Nutrition) provided an educational grant to print the AAHA Nutritional Assessment Guidelines for Dogs and Cats in several languages.

One Example of Bad Food as Bad Medicine

Around the same time as the AAHA's nutrition initiative, an article in a pet food industry journal also revealed that Hill's Pet Nutrition "... will make regular visits to more than 22,000 veterinary hospitals and clinics to help build support for and implement nutritional recommendations as the '5th Vital Assessment' in pet healthcare."³

To accomplish this, Hill's planned, among other things, to add sales staff to call more frequently on veterinary clinics across the country to sell more therapeutic pet foods. Another news item in the same journal announced that a pet health insurance provider was adding coverage for therapeutic pet food.⁴

This is a clear-cut case of a pet food company wielding significant influence over both the veterinary and pet health insurance industries.

Now let's take a look at just one of the formulas the Hill's reps are selling to veterinarians. Below is a comparison of the first 10 ingredients in a regular Hill's diet and a Prescription diet. The non-prescription diet on the left claims to improve skin and coat in 30 days. The prescription diet on the right is marketed as for dogs with skin and food sensitivities.

Hill's® Science Diet® Adult Advanced Fitness Original Dog Food⁵

- Chicken
- Whole grain wheat
- Cracked pearled barley
- Whole grain sorghum
- Whole grain corn

- Corn gluten meal
- Chicken meal
- Pork fat
- Chicken liver flavor
- Dried beet pulp

Hill's® Prescription Diet® d/d® Canine Skin Support Potato & Salmon Formula⁶

- Potatoes
- Potato starch
- Salmon
- Potato protein
- Pork fat
- Soybean oil
- Pork flavor
- Dicalcium phosphate
- Lactic acid
- Fish oil

Regular readers will immediately recognize the remarkably inferior, species-inappropriate ingredients in both these dog foods, such as multiple potato products, grains, corn and questionable fats and oils. The diet on the right, the so-called "food as medicine" diet, is what the pet food industry and many veterinarians would have you feed a dog dealing with skin problems and food sensitivities, both of which are often the result of eating a diet like the one on the left.

It's foolish to think we can feed pets biologically inappropriate convenience food every day for years and then when health problems arise, treat them with a different version of a similar poor-quality diet. None of the therapeutic diets currently on the market are made with human-grade ingredients nor contain any ingredients that qualify them as needing a prescription; it's a marketing gimmick.

Why Pet Parents Can't Depend on Veterinarians for Sound Nutrition Advice

If your veterinarian is in the habit of recommending therapeutic or prescription pet food for your dog or cat, ask for balanced, homemade recipes or see if Darwin's pet food makes a commercially available therapeutic diet from fresh, real food. Otherwise, you'll be spending a lot of money for poor-quality pet food that won't improve your furry family member's health in the long run.

Holistic and integrative veterinarians are often much more knowledgeable about the role nutrition plays in an animal's healing response than conventional practitioners who haven't studied the subject beyond what they learned in vet school (which was minimal, and typically taught by pet food industry reps).

Unfortunately, even the majority of board-certified veterinary nutritionists have also been schooled primarily about processed pet diets, and believe it or not, major pet food manufacturers frequently pay the tuition for DVMs studying to become veterinary nutritionists.

The ACVN (American College of Veterinary Nutrition) is the smallest of the veterinary colleges and there are relatively few veterinary nutritionists in the world. They work in veterinary schools, government agencies, pet drug companies, private animal hospitals, for themselves and very frequently, for pet food companies.

So when a veterinary nutritionist recommends X, Y or Z food — or discourages feeding raw or homemade diets, which is common — keep in mind that many practicing veterinary nutritionists are obligated in some way to a pet food manufacturer. This association creates an obvious conflict of interest when it comes to the advice they offer, which is typically to encourage pet owners to stick with big-name processed pet foods for the lifelong "health" of their four-legged family members.

Choosing the Right Nutrition for Your Dog or Cat

If you're wondering what diet would be best for your own pet and don't find your current veterinarian's suggestions helpful, try to find an integrative or holistic vet in your area who is knowledgeable about animal nutrition.

These vets, who've studied animal nutrition outside the conventional realm, can work with you to customize a balanced, species-appropriate diet to address the specific health needs of your pet. Alternatively, you might consider Darwin's Intelligent Design™ Veterinary Formulas that actually do contain beneficial nutraceuticals for specific medical conditions.

The goal is to create a diet and supplement protocol based on your pet's individual and dynamically changing needs — a diet that mimics your pet's ancestral diet as closely as possible, but also stays within your budget.

The standard recommendation is to feed your pet as much unprocessed, fresh food as you can afford. Depending on your financial means, this could be an all-fresh, living and raw food diet — or simply some fresh food snacks instead. Research shows that offering any amount of healthy foods is better than none.

Another approach could be to feed your pet two to four fresh food meals a week. Or do a 50/50 split, meaning one meal a day is a processed pet food, and the other is a fresh food meal. The important thing is to start taking small steps toward providing the best diet you can afford for your dog or cat.

Sources and References

¹ [Veterinary Practice News, August 25, 2017](#)

² [Nutrition Can Positively Impact Pet Wellness: AAHA Nutritional Assessment Guidelines for Dogs and Cats Now Available \(Archived\)](#)

³ [PetfoodIndustry.com January 13, 2012](#)

⁴ [PetfoodIndustry.com January 12, 2012](#)

⁵ [Hill's Science Diet](#)

⁶ [Hill's Prescription Diet](#)