

Pet Food: The Lowdown on Labels

* **Guaranteed Analysis**- *What is “Crude” Protein?* The guaranteed analysis specifies the product’s minimum percentages of **crude protein** and **crude fat**. It also gives the maximum percentages of **crude fiber** and **moisture**.

“Crude” refers to a specific method of measuring the nutrient, and is not an indication of quality. Although not required, some manufacturers also specify the percentages of other nutrients, such as ash, and taurine in cat food, and calcium and phosphorus in dog food.

* **Two Nutrient Profiles**- AAFCO has established two nutrient profiles each for dogs and cats- **growth/lactation** and **maintenance** - to fit their life stages.

Every product must meet at least one of these two profiles. A product intended for growing kittens and puppies, or for pregnant or lactating females, must meet AAFCO’s nutrient profile for **growth/lactation**. Products that meet AAFCO’s profile for **maintenance** are suitable for an adult, non-reproducing dog or cat of normal activity level, but may not be adequate for an immature, reproducing, or hard-working animal. A product may claim that it is for “all life stages” if it is suitable for adult maintenance and meets the more stringent nutritional needs for growth and reproduction.

Growth/lactation and **maintenance** are the only two nutrient profiles authorized by AAFCO and CVM, so **terms like “Senior” or “Formulated for large breed adults” mean the food meets the requirements for adult maintenance- and nothing more.**

NOTE: A product that does not meet either of these methods must state that “this product is intended for intermittent or supplemental feeding,” except if it is conspicuously identified as a snack or treat.

* **Pet Food Ingredients** must be listed on the label in descending order by weight. However, the weight includes the moisture in the ingredient, which makes it tricky to interpret. “A moist ingredient, such as chicken, which may be 70 percent water, may be listed ahead of a dry ingredient, such as a soybean meal, which is only 10 percent water- yet the soy actually contributes more solids to the diet,” says Susan Donoghue, V.M.D., owner of Nutrition Support Services, Inc., and past president of the American Academy of Veterinary Nutrition.

Similar materials listed as separate ingredients may outweigh other ingredients that precede them on the list of ingredients. For example, **chicken may be listed as the first ingredient, then ground barley, ground oats, and oatmeal. The consumer may believe that chicken is the predominant ingredient, but the three grain products- when added together- weigh more than the chicken.**