

Percentages & Labelling

NUTRIENCE

No by-products. No fillers. No added glutens.
No bad anything.



Introduction

In order for your pet to get the best nutrition possible, you need to appreciate and understand the specific terms used in the ingredients panel of most pet foods. Since the entire industry uses generic terms such as 'by-product' and 'balanced', many pet owners are confused and don't really understand these terms.

The Percentages Panel

This is the section on the bag that tells us how much of each 'category' of nutrient is provided. Each basic nutritional component is listed here as a percentage of the total diet. If we use the TV dinner analogy, this panel allows us to visualize the size of each section of the tray.

As an example, a typical product may have a percentage panel that reads as follows:

Crude protein min 25.0 %
Crude fat min 14.0 %
Crude fibre 3.0 %
Moisture max. 10.0 %
Ash max. 8.0 %
Calcium 1.6 %
Phosphorus 1.1 %



What information do we get from this list? The only useful data here is purely quantitative in nature - as we said earlier - 'the size of each section of the tray'. To make things easy, let's apply these percentages to 100 kilograms of food.

In 100kg of this particular formula, there would be:

25 kg of protein
14 kg of fat
3 kg of fibre
10 kg of water and
8 kg of minerals or ash

The percentages of the listed minerals, in this case Calcium and Phosphorus, are already included in the 'Ash' or 'total mineral' percentages. Due to their nutritional significance, the actual amount of certain individual minerals are often listed outside of the mineral total. In our case, the other minerals (magnesium, zinc, copper, iron, etc.) would represent the remaining 5.3 kilos needed to add up to the 8% total.



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There is one obvious problem with the information provided by this percentages panel - it doesn't add up to 100%. Part of the recipe is missing:

$$25 + 14 + 3 + 10 + 8 = 60\%$$

Forty percent of the food is unaccounted for.

So what's missing?

Carbohydrate levels are not specifically indicated on pet food labels, at least not in North America. Other countries require manufacturers to calculate and list the percentage of carbohydrates in each formula, but the U.S. and Canada do not. As you can may know, there is almost always more carbohydrate than protein in any given pet product. Don't be alarmed as carbohydrates are the most important source of energy to fuel muscles.

The Ingredients Panel

As a pet owner, you should pay close attention to this section on the pet food bag - just as you should with the food you are consuming. Using this section exclusively, however, leaves a great deal of potentially significant information wanting. Combining the data from both panels is essential.

The 'ingredients panel' properly combined with the 'percentages panel' allows you to properly visualise the exact meal each company is providing for your pet. Again, we will use a reasonable bag representation to help make things real.

Here is an example ingredients panel:

chicken, animal fat, corn, rice, wheat, chicken by-product meal, barley, corn gluten meal, beet pulp and multiple vitamins and minerals.

Many pet owners are concerned about the scientific and artificial sounding names that follow the real food components of a diet. These are mostly the scientific names for various vitamins and minerals. Thiamine Mononitrate for instance is Vitamin B1 and Pyridoxine Hydrochloride is Vitamin B6. These terms might seem intimidating, but they are an essential and important part of your pet's nutritional requirements.

The ingredients panel is formatted by listing all the raw materials in descending order of quantity.

Most ingredients used in pet foods are actually pre-cooked and pre-dried. This feature is indicated by the term 'meal'. Chicken meal, for instance, is pre-cooked, pre-dried and pre-ground chicken meat and skin and is an excellent source of protein. All **Nutrience** formulas (except for Adult Dog Lamb & Rice) uses chicken meal as the meat source.

In many pet foods, some raw materials are added in their natural state. This is the case when the label reads 'Chicken', for example. For these ingredients, the weight of the naturally retained water, which is lost during the cooking process, is still available at the time the labels are being formatted. As a result, they are artificially listed higher in the ingredients panel and without putting this into proper perspective, can be credited with more significance than their actual nutritional impact.

In fact, five kilos of fresh chicken reduces to about one kilo of dried chicken meal after processing. This should not detract from the overall value of fresh ingredients as they do provide an excellent source of nutrition. However, as 'fresh' ingredients are never used exclusively, a proper evaluation involves analysing all of the raw materials and how they interact. Stopping at the first ingredient just isn't enough.

Back to the example, if we use our previous percentages panel, we calculated the formula to be 25% protein and 40% carbohydrates.

From our ingredients panel we also note that 'chicken' is the first ingredient. How is this possible?

Chicken becomes the first ingredient by simply using multiple and differing types of carbohydrates. Each individual carbohydrate type is added in a lesser amount than the intended amount of chicken. Chicken isn't included in carbohydrates, and there is no less total carbohydrate, there is simply less of one particular carbohydrate. This concept is known as 'ingredients splitting' and our example above contains four carbohydrate types: corn, rice, wheat and barley. Their combined weight is equal to 40% of the total, but each individually will be closer to 10%.

Applying this to the 100 kg recipe as an example 25% protein, 14% fat, 3% fibre, 10% moisture and 8% minerals - we still need to add 40 kilos of carbohydrates.

If in this formula we were to use only one type of carbohydrate, for instance corn, and one type of protein (say chicken meal), we would be obliged to use 40 kilos of corn and 25 kilos of protein coming from chicken meal. The resulting ingredients panel would read:

corn, chicken meal, animal fat, etc.

If we modified the recipe slightly and used 21 kilos of corn and 19 kilos of rice, the 25 kilos of chicken meal would become our first ingredient. The resulting ingredients panel would read:

chicken meal, corn, rice, animal fat etc.

Nutritionally there is little difference between the two formulas above, but few pet owners would even consider buying the first product over the second, due essentially to marketing vs. common sense and actual nutritional evaluation.

By using multiple types of raw materials in each nutritional category (e.g. different types of carbohydrates), the listed percentages of each is reduced and consequently pushed further down the list.

To conceptualise the importance of this, consider a food using ten principle ingredients. Theoretically, the first ingredient might only be 11% of the total. Alternatively, a product using only five primary ingredients requires that the first listed raw material is at least 20% of the total. Further, there is a good chance there is more of the fifth ingredient in the second recipe, than there is of the first ingredient in the initial example. These numbers are not going to be exact, but they provide a more visual representation of the concept and help provide a more meaningful interpretation of a pet food.



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If you think only in terms of the 'first ingredient', it is now mathematically easy to see how much of the nutritional reality is actually missed.

Hopefully you can analyse the information on a pet food bag a little more accurately now, but it is important to exactly know what you should be looking for in terms of nutritional specifics to provide your pet with the proper nutrients for health and happiness.
