

## Medical Notes

### Pet Food Recall - What do I Need to Know?

Below are some of the most commonly asked questions regarding the recent pet food recall.

**To summarize:** In mid-March 2007 Menu Foods, a large supplier of pet food products in the U.S., announced that it was voluntarily recalling pet foods manufactured under multiple labels. The recall was initiated as a result of concerns raised in the United States on the impact to the renal health of pets consuming pet food manufactured since early December.

A preliminary finding by the FDA showed a melamine contamination in both the wheat gluten used in the food and in the tissues of impacted animals they analyzed. Melamine is an industrial fertilizer used in other parts of the world, but not in the US. Rumors of rat poison (aminopterin) in the recalled food have not been substantiated by any FDA test and they have ruled this out completely.

While melamine has not yet been definitively identified as the contaminant, it has been identified in the kidneys and urine of deceased cats used during a taste test study, as well as in some of the recalled foods and in the wheat gluten used in some of the recalled foods.



To date there have been fewer than 20 confirmed deaths as a result of exposure to the recalled foods, although there have been over 10,000 complaints.

This story is continuing to unfold, you may wish to monitor the situation by checking [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov) for the most up-to-date information on the recall.

#### How will I know if my pet is sick?

Pets that have become sick because of recalled food developed acute renal failure (ARF). ARF affects cats and dogs similarly: most animals experience a dramatic increase in thirst and urination, are lethargic, have a decreased appetite, and may experience vomiting.

#### How can I check to see if my pet's food has been recalled?

Go to [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov) and click on "Pet Food Recall" in the "Hot Topics" section in the right margin of the website.

Menu Foods' website, [www.menufoods.com](http://www.menufoods.com) also offers a list of foods that have been recalled.

#### What should I do if my pet was exposed to the recalled food?

The American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine (ACVIM) has recommended that all pets - whether showing signs of illness or not - be evaluated by their veterinarian, and have baseline bloodwork and a urinalysis run to evaluate renal (kidney) function.

InTown Veterinary Group is dedicated to providing our clients with an unparalleled range of veterinary care options.

The doctors at Bulger Animal Hospital & Essex County Veterinary Emergency Hospital are always on hand no matter how seemingly small the question. We care about you and your animals. No question is too small. If you're worried, call us.

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#### Bulger Animal Hospital:

247 Chickering Road,  
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# Medical Notes

## Helping us Help you - Making the Most of your Veterinary Visit

When you bring your pet to the vet, we make every effort to fully address your concerns while assessing him or her for any identifiable problems. Despite our best attempts, there may be times when circumstances interfere with this goal. To ensure your needs are fully met, we recommend taking some of the following steps:

**1. Be on time:** By arriving to your appointment on time the full amount of scheduled time can be dedicated to your pet and answering your questions.

**2. Have a carrier or leash for all pets:** No matter how nice or calm your pet is, the environment in the waiting room can be overwhelming. Your pet may be startled or scared by the various stimuli or other pets in the area. By keeping your pet's mobility limited you will ensure proper safety of both your pets and the other animals around you.

**3. Bring medical records:** If you are a current client, we have all your records and there is no need for concern. If you are coming to our hospital as a referral, on an emergency basis, or are seeing us for the first time, medical records are essential for appropriate case management. Absence of a medical record may result in an incomplete diagnosis or a repetition of tests that have already been run, adding to pet stress and expense.

**4. Notify us of any dietary supplements, diet changes or medications (including aspirin & other over-the-counter drugs):** Drugs or diet changes can affect blood chemistry, your pet's digestive system and physical appearance. A list of all the medications or supplements your pet is taking will help us identify any adverse drug interactions (especially where this is responsible for any presenting signs), and ensure safety of additional prescribed medications.

**5. Bring appropriate samples:** Many appointments are scheduled to address concerns about changes in urine or stool habits. If your pet has any excretory changes, bring a sample to your appointment. Ailments involving parasites or infections can be identified with these samples. If you obtain a urine sample, it may be stored in your refrigerator in a clean, dry container for up to 8 hours before the appointment. Stool samples should however be obtained the day of the appointment to ensure freshness. Sample sizes need not be very large: urine volumes of two tablespoons are sufficient. Stool samples can be the size of a quarter.

**6. Bring a list of questions:** Keep an ongoing list of questions between vet visits. This will help address all of your concerns.

**7. Have the primary caregiver come with the pet:** This may sound obvious, but ideally, the person who provides most of the care for the pet should come to the exam. We realize this is not always possible; however, a person who is not directly involved with care may not have the answers to questions we need to ask.

**8. Keep a journal of medical issues including vomiting, diarrhea, behavioral changes, seizures, or changes in appetite:** The first step in uncovering a problem is to have a clear picture of what has been happening and when it started. Most pets come in for their physical and do not display the unusual behaviors that you may be asking us to evaluate.

To remedy this start a journal as soon as you notice changes, even if you feel that they are minor. Abnormal behaviors, inappropriate elimination, changes in appetite, vomiting, diarrhea, shaking and anxiety are areas that may be of interest and may be time sensitive. When episodes occur, their frequency, duration, and surrounding environment may provide us with a better picture as to why they occur.

As much detail as you can remember would be very helpful for us to identify any trends in behaviors and may even reveal their causes. Video-taping behaviors can also be helpful for your veterinarian to visualize physical changes and will allow for evaluation of changes that you describe when your pet may not exhibit them during an examination.

**9. Make your primary concerns clear:** If you have an important concern, make it clear to the vet. During the course of your conversation, many potential issues are often discussed and the vet can't always pick out those that you feel are the most important. Clearly communicating your needs helps us to prioritize diagnostics and treatments. In addition, clearly stating issues you are not concerned about helps us to avoid wasting time and money addressing concerns you do not feel are pressing. Don't worry: if your vet notices something that he or she feels should be handled, they will let you know.

*Continued on page 4*

# Choosing a Pet Food - Interpreting Pet Food Labels

It was a confusing experience choosing a pet food even before the recent pet food recalls. There are so many different brands and formulations to choose from on the shelves - how do you know which one is best for your pet? If you know how to interpret them, pet food labels contain a wealth of information. Here are a few guidelines on how to decipher these labels so that you can make the best food choice for your pet.

## Nutritional Adequacy

One of the most important aspects of a pet food label is a nutritional adequacy statement ensuring that the product meets all of a pet's nutritional needs. The Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) is a group that develops standards for the nutrient content of dog and cat foods, and determines the protocols by which pet foods are tested. A food can meet these standards for nutritional adequacy by calculations or by feeding trials. When reading a pet food label, look for one of these two statements:

*"(Name of product) is formulated to meet the nutritional levels established by AAFCO (Dog or Cat) Food nutrient Profiles for (specific life stage)."*

or

*"Animal feeding tests using AAFCO procedures substantiate that (name of product) provides complete and balanced nutrition for (specific life state)."*

Snacks and treats are not required to include a nutritional adequacy statement, but they must meet FDA and state regulations for pet food labeling by providing a list of ingredients and supplying the manufacturer's name and address.

## Guaranteed Analysis

Each pet food must have a guaranteed analysis, which specifies the product's minimum percentage of crude protein and crude fat, as well as the maximum percentages of crude fiber and moisture. Crude in this context refers to the specific method of measuring the nutrient and is not an indication of quality. Other nutrient percentages are not required, but may be included on the label. Canned foods typically have about 75 percent water (vs. about 10 percent in dry food), and therefore will appear to have fewer nutrients than dry food. To make a rough comparison of nutrient levels between canned and dry food, multiply the guarantees for the canned food by four.

## Ingredients

Pet and human foods are regulated by the FDA. They must

# Medical Notes

be pure, wholesome, may not contain harmful substances, and must be truthfully labeled. Pet food ingredients must be listed on the label in descending order by weight. It is important to note that the weight includes the moisture in the ingredient, even if the dry ingredients actually contribute more solids to the diet. In addition, similar materials listed as separate ingredients may outweigh other ingredients that precede them on the list. For example, wheat products may be listed separately as wheat flour, ground wheat, and wheat middlings. Individually these ingredients may weigh less than the chicken listed as the first ingredient, but when added together they weigh more than the chicken.

## Manufacturer Contact Information

Each pet food should have the manufacturer's name and contact information, such as a telephone number and/or Web site address in case people have questions about their products. Most pet food labels do not provide caloric content, but you can obtain this information by contacting the manufacturer. Consult your veterinarian to determine your pet's caloric needs.

## So Which Food Is Best For My Pet?

In addition to the above specifications, a certain amount of personal preference comes into play, especially in terms of the ingredients list. Some people prefer not to feed animal by-products or "meal". Synthetic preservatives may not be desirable to certain consumers, although it is important to know that products preserved with naturally occurring compounds have a much shorter shelf life (especially when a bag of food is opened). Above all, a pet should like the food that it is being fed.

## A Quick Note On Homemade Diets

Many owners have inquired about homemade diets in response to the pet food recall. There are several facts that owners should know about homemade diets before attempting to feed them to their own pets. First, and most importantly, homemade recipes for dogs and cats have been found to be almost uniformly unbalanced, and may lead to nutrient deficiencies or excesses. No human daily vitamin and nutrient supplements can be made "complete and balanced" for pet homemade recipes. In addition, home-cooked foods are more expensive, inconvenient, and require a major time investment. If you do wish to feed your pet a homemade diet, please consult your veterinarian or a veterinary nutritionist to ensure your pet receives complete and balanced nutrition.

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# Cat Corner

## Choosing the Right Cat Food

With the pet food recall on everyone's mind, choosing the right cat food for your pet seems more daunting than ever. If nothing else, the recall has taught us to review our pets' needs, to look at food labels, and to learn about what should and should not be in there.

The first step in selecting the appropriate diet is understanding a cat's specific nutritional needs for their life stage. Cats have a higher protein requirement than other species and require specific nutrients such as taurine, an essential amino acid. Kittens require a more calories and protein than an adult cat; whereas elderly cats do not require the same balance of nutrition as younger cats. For this reason, the same food is not appropriate for all age ranges.



Next, comes the decision over whether to feed dry food, canned food, or a combination of both. There are no steadfast rules here. Dry food may be more convenient in that it can be left out for a longer period of time. Canned food has more water content and therefore may benefit cats that do not drink as much water on their own. Medical needs may also govern the choice of dry versus canned food. Your veterinarian may be helpful in guiding this decision if medical needs are a factor.

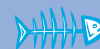
Reviewing the ingredients is the next essential step in choosing the right food. High quality ingredients with the proper distribution of protein, carbohydrates, fiber and fats must be present. Descriptions such as "By-products", "meat and/or bone meal", "animal digest", or "fillers" should be avoided.

A chosen food should also include an Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) statement. This means that the food has passed a nutritional profile or feeding trial standard and has earned the AAFCO label designation of "Complete and Balanced". All foods should have an expiration date to ensure freshness.

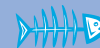
Once you have chosen your food, monitor your cat for how well it is working. Your cat should be of good body condition, have a good coat and an appropriate energy level. Most of all, you cat should be enjoying the food!

### Things to Remember:

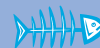
Be sure there are cool places for your cat to lounge when it gets hot



If your cat will be boarding, check that vaccines are up to date. If they are not, allow ample time to update them.



If you have an outdoors cat, watch for predatory animals such as coyotes, fishercats, and stray domestic cats. Check your cat daily for wounds.



### Helping us Help you - cont. from page 2

**10. Tell us all of your pet's concerns when scheduling:** When appointments are scheduled, a different length of time is allotted for wellness visits than for "sick" visits. If you call to schedule an appointment for a physical examination and vaccines, but your cat also has a chronic vomiting problem you would like to discuss, let the receptionist know. This will allow us to schedule you with enough time for more lengthy conversations and possible testing.

For more information, feel free to use the medical index on our website. [www.InTownBulger.com](http://www.InTownBulger.com), then click "Medical Index".

## Feeding your Dog - Tips & Help

### How Much to Feed:

Dog's caloric needs can vary considerably based on their age, health, and lifestyle. An active dog will normally require more food than a couch potato; a female dog will require more calories while pregnant or lactating. Even dogs with similar activity levels may metabolize their food differently and thus have different caloric requirements. A good starting point is to feed the amount recommended by the pet food manufacturer based on the dog's weight. In general, it is better to round down when choosing the exact amount. For example, if your dog is 55lbs and there are amounts given for a 50lb dog and a 60lb dog, feed the amount recommended for the 50lb dog. If after 1- 2 weeks your dog appears to be gaining or losing weight, decrease or increase the amount being fed by 25%. Please contact your veterinarian about special caloric requirements if your dog is ill, pregnant or lactating.

### When and How to Feed:

Most healthy, adult dogs can be fed either once or twice a day. Large breed dogs who consume a large amount of food should be fed twice daily. Adult toy breed dogs have very small energy reserves and should be fed twice daily as well. Puppies less than 3 months old should be fed at least 4 times a day once they are eating solid food. Puppies 3-5 months old should eat three times daily. Again, toy breed puppies may require more frequent feeding.

Generally, meal feeding is preferred to availability of dry kibble throughout the day ("free feeding"). It is very difficult to maintain your dog at a healthy weight with free feeding. Dogs with health problems requiring medication to be administered with meals (ie diabetic dogs) should be encouraged to eat at regular intervals. Older dogs with arthritis and other dogs with specific medical conditions like megaesophagus may benefit from eating from a raised bowl.

### Diet Change:

Once you have found the appropriate food for your dog (see tips on choosing food also in this newsletter) continue to feed that

food consistently. There is no need to change food monthly since dogs have fewer taste buds than humans and do not get "bored" with their food. If, however, you do need to change your dog's diet, do it gradually over 7 days. Mix a small amount of the new diet with a majority of the old diet, gradually increasing the amount of the new food with subsequent feedings.

### Supplements:

Healthy dogs being fed a commercial AAFCO (The Association of American Feed Control Officials) approved food (check food label - will say AAFCO approved) should not require dietary supplementation. Dogs with specific health issues like arthritis or skin conditions may benefit greatly from the appropriate nutraceutical or vitamin/mineral supplements. Inappropriate use of supplements can be dangerous, however, so ALWAYS check with your veterinarian before adding supplements to your dog's diet.

### Treats:

It is almost impossible to resist feeding our dogs treats. Most commercial treats are fine to feed in moderate amounts like 1-2 treats daily. Vegetables like carrots are safe, low calorie snacks and may work for dogs with food allergies that cannot eat most commercial treats. Rawhides are always controversial. In general, most dogs enjoy chewing rawhides and their teeth can benefit from the scraping action. Problems arise when the piece of rawhide becomes small enough for the dog to swallow whole. These pieces can potentially get stuck in the esophagus, stomach or intestinal tract. Many owners avoid this potential problem by taking the chew away from their dog when it becomes small enough to swallow. Rawhides do have calories and should be fed in moderation like other treats.

### Obesity:

Obesity affects at least 25% of dogs and represents a significant health problem. A dog is considered clinically obese if he weighs 15% greater than his ideal body weight. If your dog is minimally overweight and otherwise healthy, increasing his activity level may be sufficient for him to shed the extra weight. If he is significantly overweight, gradually increase his exercise level and decrease his caloric intake by 25% initially. No treats! If your dog does not lose weight with increased exercise and decreased calories, please contact your veterinarian as there could be an underlying medical condition contributing to the obesity.

### Things to Remember:

Make sure your dog has a cool place to rest this summer to avoid heat stroke



During grilling season, keep your dog away from the trash to avoid ingestion of foreign materials and spoiled food.



Continue flea, tick, and heartworm medications every month.



# Pocket Pet Pen



Feeding your pet rabbit, guinea pig, ferret, hedgehog, or rodent is very different than feeding a pet dog or cat. For one thing, their requirements cannot always be met by a simple pelleted or canned food. In addition, their foods are not regulated by an agency such as AAFCO (Association of American

Feed Control Officials). AAFCO standards are used to establish that pet foods are safe and effective; however, this organization does not have guidelines for exotic pet foods.

Proper nutrition of pocket pets requires doing lots of homework to determine the best mix of food. Below are brief guidelines and pointers to help you in that homework. This is meant to be a starting point, but there is much more to the nutrition of each species. Talk to your veterinarian during your next wellness visit to ensure your pet's nutritional needs are being met.

**Ferrets are carnivores.** Their nutrition is most like that of dogs and cats, but it is not recommended that you feed them dog or cat food. Some ferret owners choose to feed whole-prey (disease-free chicks, mice, and rats) or freeze-dried carnivore diets. However, for most households a good pellet food designed for ferrets is recommended. Ferret foods should contain at least 30% - 35% protein from high-quality meat sources (not grain), and 15 - 20% fat. Fruits, yogurt treats, honey-coated treats and most other formulated ferret treats should be avoided.

**Hedgehogs are insectivores.** In nature, they forage many miles each day in search of insects. The commercially available insects are typically not as nutritious as what would be found in the wild, so feeding a diet strictly of crickets and mealworms is not recommended. There are now many hedgehog foods available formulated specifically for the needs of pet hedgehogs. Feeding 1-2 tablespoons of pellets per day along with a few crickets or mealworms and some other fresh food such as canned cat food, meat, cheese, or eggs is recommended. To keep them fit and healthy, it is also recommended that their food be "hidden" in their cage rather than placed in a bowl to force them to forage as they would in nature.

**Rabbits are herbivores.** A pelleted rabbit food meets only a very small portion of their total nutrition (1/8 to 1/4 cup daily). Good quality grass hay (such as timothy) should be made available. A selection of fresh green leafy vegetables should also be fed daily. Rabbits fed exclusively or mostly pellets will develop serious (often fatal) gastrointestinal

# Pocket Pet Feeding Guide

disease, dental disease and obesity. For a more complete discussion of rabbit nutrition, please refer to the Spring 2007 newsletter (in our online archive).

**Guinea Pigs are also herbivores,** and the feeding guidelines for rabbits can generally also be used for guinea pigs. One major difference is that guinea pigs (like humans) need vitamin C supplements. The most important mistake many guinea pig owners make is to assume the foods they are feeding contain enough vitamin C. This vitamin is extremely fragile and usually has completely broken down by the time you purchase food off the shelf. All guinea pig owners should assume that boxed food contains NO vitamin C. Adding vitamin C to water is problematic because it is light sensitive so the water must be changed daily - if you are willing to do this, it will work. Otherwise, feeding small amounts of vitamin C-rich foods such as oranges (including orange peels) and peppers will provide all that they need. In addition to vitamin C, guinea pigs also require access to grass hay, fresh green leafy vegetables, and a small amount of pellets daily.



**Chinchillas are herbivores.** Their nutritional requirements are very similar to rabbits and guinea pigs. They do not require vitamin C supplementation, but do require a varied diet of hay, greens, and pelleted foods. Treats should be limited to no more than one tablespoon of "extras" (such as cereal, dried fruits, nuts, and seeds) per day.

**Rodents such as hamsters, gerbils, mice, and rats are omnivores** (like humans, they eat meat and vegetables) **or herbivores.** They are typically fed mostly a pre-formulated pelleted diet. Seed mixtures should be avoided: the food you choose should be a uniform, pellet diet. Seed mixtures can be fed occasionally as a treat, making up no more than a teaspoon per day. Most fatty treats should be avoided.

**For all species,** do not feed a diet consisting of a seed mixture. Seed mixtures (whether or not they also contain some pellets) are not nutritionally complete. The problems with these diets are many:

1. They are very high in fat
2. Vitamins are typically sprinkled on top; when the pet opens shells to get seeds inside, all the vitamins are left on the bottom of the cage
3. Pets prefer the tasty seeds and will leave the more balanced pellets behind.