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NUTRITION *is Vital*

Making the FIFTH Vital
Assessment Easier: Techniques and
Tools for the Whole Clinic Team



Inside

To help you get started, this booklet provides:

- Insights on the need for nutritional assessments
- Outlines for evaluating each pet's nutrition and making confident recommendations
- Strategies for effective pet food conversations, even the sticky ones
- Resources to help you put these strategies to work in your own practice, including digital and tear-out resources you can provide to your team and your clients:

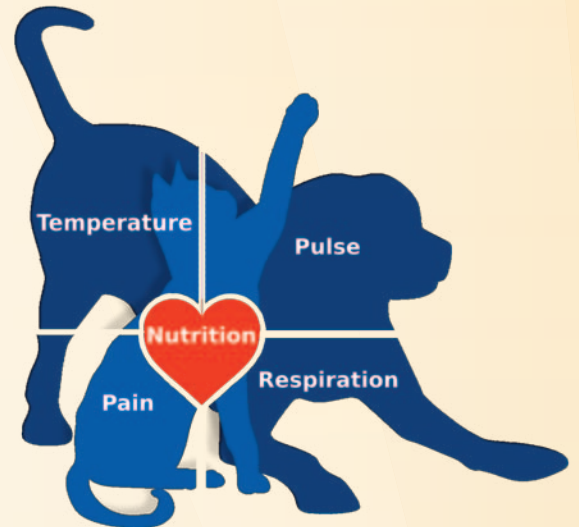


= Professional resource



= Pet Parent resource

Nutrition is Vital



Please see the **inside back cover** for a list of all resource links and QR codes.

You'll also find several shortened website addresses within these pages that look like this: bit.ly/3uy6fiv. Simply enter the characters into your browser and you'll be directed to that resource.

For your additional convenience, resource pages with QR codes in the upper right-hand corner can be accessed for in-office printing. The URLs are also noted on the bottom right of each page.

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EMPOWERING VETERINARY TEAMS FOR ESSENTIAL CONVERSATIONS

Most veterinary teams automatically perform the first four vital assessments in every physical exam (temperature, pulse, respiration, and pain), but what about the fifth? A nutritional assessment is another vital assessment that must be completed to provide the highest quality care to your patients.

Talking about nutrition doesn't have to be hard.

The challenges of treating nutrition as the fifth vital assessment stem from both overwhelmed clients and already-stretched veterinary teams doing their best to keep up. We've gathered key insights and resources in this booklet to support veterinary teams in their essential conversations with clients about pet foods to help you overcome these challenges.

Your clients want – and need – your expert advice.

Knowing what to feed pets and why gets harder for consumers all the time. What once required a decision from just a handful of choices now demands pet parents wade through a sea of pet food options and buzzwords to manage this foundational aspect of their pet's health. From maligned ingredients to increasingly exotic ones, people feel utterly overwhelmed and go looking for an expert to help them choose. We want that expert to be you.

That sounds like a lot, but we're here to help.

Routine nutritional recommendations for all pets serve as a cornerstone of lifelong wellness and allow veterinary professionals to provide leadership on this important topic. A consistent effort by your entire veterinary team to discuss pet food with clients equips them to make informed decisions and increases your opportunities to keep your patients healthy for as long as possible.



Five Basic Steps to Implement Nutritional Assessments and Recommendations

1. **Choose the brands to recommend** for both well and sick pets. That way you bring a reliable short list into conversations with clients. There's no need to start from scratch each time. Use both the World Small Animal Veterinary Association Nutrition Toolkit and the updated *2021 AAHA Nutrition and Weight Management Guidelines* (aaha.org/nutrition) as the foundations for making your choices.
2. **Ask targeted questions** to open the door to nutrition conversations and to determine what and how the pet currently eats. 🍴

3. **Make a nutritional recommendation** followed by the brand, formula and amount that achieves that goal. Recommending a specific diet increases the chances that your suggestion will be followed. Be sure to tell the client what the diet will do for their pet and how it could improve or protect their pet's health.

4. **Establish a whole-team approach** to encouraging these conversations, supporting the recommendations, and helping clients comply and succeed at home with detailed instruction on:

- Brand
- Formula
- Amount 🍴

5. **Provide timely and supportive follow-up** contacts and recheck visits.



SIX REASONS TO IMPLEMENT NUTRITIONAL ASSESSMENTS FOR EVERY PATIENT NOW

1. Make nutrition the foundation of pet health

Feeding is the one thing that every pet caregiver does every day for their pets. Implementing nutritional assessments gives you the chance to build the foundation of their pet's health by providing your expertise and recommendations.

2. Support clients' needs

Clients genuinely want your expert input. In one recent study, most veterinary clients (93%) "were at least somewhat willing to change their pet's diet on the basis of a veterinarian's recommendation . . . especially when the recommendation is made in the context of a pet's health."^{*}

3. Prevent common mistakes and risks

Pet owners easily make assumptions, harbor simple misunderstandings, and even develop at-home habits that put pets at risk. By taking the time to assess the patient's nutrition, the veterinary healthcare team can uncover and address these common mistakes.

EXAMPLES:

- Overfeeding
- Unbalanced diets
- Mismatched foods

4. Stay up to date

By discussing nutrition at every visit, you can stay current with any changes in the pet's diet, treat intake, and

supplements since their last visit, and see how that might affect any current clinical concerns.

Plus, routine nutritional assessments give you the opportunity to:

- Monitor body condition scores and muscle condition scores, as well as weight and mobility
- Work through differentials for diagnoses
- Prevent or manage conditions that are diet-responsive

5. Keep lines of communication open

By helping clients understand what defines quality pet food, how to see through marketing hype, and what pet food regulations, terms, and packaging

^{*}Alvarez EE, Schultz KK. Effect of personal, food manufacturer, and pet health statements made by a veterinarian during a pet wellness appointment on a dog or cat owner's decision to consider changing their pet's diet. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2021;259:644-651

information really mean, you will build stronger alliances and bonds that provide a cornerstone for future conversations and recommendations about their pet's health.

6. Share your expertise

Providing sound nutritional advice is an important service that veterinarians can provide their patients and clients.

This service is less about people purchasing pet food (or you selling it) and is more about sharing your expertise on nutrition, just as you provide your diagnostic, surgical, and pharmaceutical expertise.

As you get more confident and efficient with providing nutrition recommendations, you can expand conversations to include additional points if needed or appropriate for that case.



EXAMPLES:

- Advice that keeps a pet's treat allowance below 10% of their daily allotment of calories
- A discussion of appropriate supplements, if applicable
- Instructions on slowly switching foods, including palatability advice for picky feline and canine patients
- Advice on feeding and environmental factors at home, such as other pets and other family members that could potentially hamper efforts



We have a resource for you about pet food myths at this end of this document.

ELEMENTS OF A NUTRITIONAL ASSESSMENT

A nutritional assessment begins with the physical exam and screening questions about the pet's current nutrition and lifestyle. You are likely conducting much of this assessment already, so this won't take much additional time in the exam room. If risk factors are identified related to the animal's health, the diet, or the way the pet is fed, then more discussion with the owner is needed, including a clear recommendation for nutrition going forward.



The basic assessment should include the following:

- Physical exam and diagnostic testing (as appropriate for the pet's life stage)
- Complete food history, documenting everything the pet eats from the time it wakes up to the time it goes to bed, including any snacks or treats used in training
- Eating enthusiasm or changes in eating habits
- Daily/weekly exercise levels and activities
- Information on home environment factors
 - o Assessment of the availability of appropriate housing, shelter, and enrichment
 - o How food gets served (as meals or free feeding and if it's dry food, wet food, or a combination of both)
 - o Possible confounding factors related to other pets or people in the home
- Body weight, looking for stability or trends up or down that may indicate clinical concerns
- Body condition score
- Muscle condition score
- Calculation of pet's specific maintenance energy requirement (MER) (Download at bit.ly/3mgxZVe)



See the resource "Anatomy of a Nutritional Recommendation"



Check out the pet parents' resource on healthy treats

NUTRITIONAL RISK FACTORS

If your assessment reveals any of the following risk factors, a change in diet may be needed:

- Life stage of pet doesn't match the current diet
- Medical issues
- Non-ideal body condition
- Too many calories from treats or unbalanced food
- Unconventional diets

Even if you don't identify risk factors, if you believe there is a better food for the pet's needs than what is currently being fed, that should be part of your recommendation. In this way you can lay the foundation for better long-term health for the pet.



ELEMENTS OF A CONFIDENT PET FOOD RECOMMENDATION

When a particular case requires a switch in pet food to address a pet's life stage or clinical needs, a confident, clear recommendation is necessary. Such a recommendation features several key elements:

- **WHAT TO FEED**—Studies show clients are much more likely to follow your recommendation when you suggest a specific brand, formula, and/or type (dry, canned purée, canned stew, etc.).
- **HOW MUCH TO FEED**—Include detailed measuring using units that the client understands such as cups, tablespoons, or ounces
- **HOW OFTEN TO FEED**—For example, suggesting smaller meals more often

- **HOW LONG TO FEED**—Provide guidance, particularly for therapeutic diets that require long-term or lifelong use for specific cases
- **HOW TO ACCESS FOOD**—Inform clients about home delivery/autoship options to support ongoing compliance.

“Keep up the good work” is still a recommendation.

In some cases, the information gathered in a routine nutritional assessment reveals diet and feeding amounts the practitioner agrees are appropriate for a specific patient's life stage and other clinical needs. In that case, your pet food recommendation may simply be to keep up the good work. That is still a recommendation, even if no change is made. It is important to have these conversations and to work through the process before drawing clinical conclusions. Plus, the repetition over time establishes a foundation for if/when a different pet food recommendation is required.



Check out the Resource Section for a ready-made prescreening form and tips to transitioning.

HOW TO SAVE TIME AND ENERGY USING A TEAM APPROACH TO PET FOOD CONVERSATIONS

Often the veterinary practitioner is the sole person engaging in nutrition conversations. However, practitioners also have to contend with time pressure and the consequences for everyone when exam-room time runs long.

Instead, save time and effort by sharing the responsibility. Team members in different roles can talk to clients about pet food, supporting the importance of nutrition in pets' wellness. A whole-team approach takes pressure off the veterinarian, reinforces the team's collective expertise, and demonstrates that the whole team is motivated to recommend what's best for each patient's health.

You'll avoid miscommunication and accidental contradictions when everyone on the practice team understands and communicates the same key messages to clients about pet nutrition.

Avoid undermining your recommendations by actions, such as making off-the-cuff suggestions for substitutions to the recommended food.

Appoint an in-house nutritional "go-to" person

Also consider appointing a veterinary technician on your team as the go-to nutritional counselor for everything clients need once practitioners give nutritional recommendations. This person can use telecommunication to help the practice save even more time and effort in maintaining frequent contact with clients:

- With client permission, set up home delivery/auto-ship of the recommended diet to support compliance long term
- Answer questions that come up with fellow team members and clients
- Work through any needed nutritional calculations (calories, costs, etc.)
- Coach clients on making the food transition
- Serve as cheerleader and point of contact



- Provide follow-up services:
 - Within the first week: "How is the transition going?"
 - Two weeks: Check in with how the patient is doing after fully transitioning.
 - Two months: Follow up and recheck pet.

Normalize nutrition conversations

By laying the groundwork through previewing conversations and assigning clients with information-gathering tasks, veterinary teams begin to normalize conversations about nutrition and prepare people for imminent or future pet food recommendations.

Keep in mind that nutritional assessments are an iterative process. Each conversation builds upon prior conversations, leading to increased understanding from both the client's and veterinary team's points of view. Instead of an all-or-nothing mindset, recognize that tiny shifts over time lead to improved, case-specific nutritional recommendations. This includes how each patient's nutritional needs may change, sometimes dramatically and sometimes slowly, between appointments.



See the resource section for team roles and actions and check list



Check out "Your Pet's Nutrition, Count on Us!" form at the end of this booklet.



- Improving stool quality
- Strengthening immune function

Uncovering common barriers. In many cases, clients resist changing foods because they fear they will fail at making the switch. For example, the logistics of making sure each pet eats the right food and doesn't sneak food from others in multipet households may require creative solutions and brainstorming. The resistance might not be an objection to the food itself, so use questions that acknowledge or probe for perceived barriers about how things might go at home or if the pet will like the new food. Asking questions gives people permission to admit and share their concerns. This allows practitioners the opportunity to offer workable solutions based on their clinical expertise and experience.

Questions like these move the conversation through perceived barriers:

- What do you think about making this recommended change?
- Does it feel doable, with realities at home?
- What concerns do you have about making this change?



See additional resource on page 14 [“Understanding & Addressing Barriers to Nutritional Recommendations”](#)



Context matters. Remember that in some cases a “no” answer doesn't mean never. It might simply be that the family member bringing the pet in for today's appointment is not the one who buys, feeds, and bears responsibility for pet food in the home. Or it might be that on this given day the client's concerns fall elsewhere and talking about food seems irrelevant or overwhelming.

Focus by prescreening. Prescreening saves time by pinpointing clients who are ready and excited to talk about nutrition, as well as situations when it would be better to have the conversation later. Even when the client is not prepared to discuss the pet's feeding plan in detail, the veterinary team still has a chance to reiterate that they are there to give expert advice about nutrition when needed.

Prescreening forms can include a “yes/no” question about whether someone wants to discuss food with the practitioner. Alternatively, practitioners and veterinary technicians can ask permission-granting questions such as “I'd like to have a conversation about the role of nutrition in [insert pet's name]'s health today. Would that be okay with you?”

Concentrate on individual pet health. Clients may not make the leap from a recommended food to that food's benefits to a pet's health without a veterinary team's help. This may be true when the recommended diet is therapeutic and can also be true for diets designed to be eaten at a particular life stage for well pets. Even when people say they like their current food and feel satisfied with how their pet is doing on that food, most owners remain open to changing to a different food, if they understand why the change is needed and what difference it will make for their pet's health. Interestingly, personal statements from the veterinarian such as “this is what I feed” may not be influential. Instead, phrase your recommendation in terms of how the food will help that individual pet.

Help dispel beliefs — among fellow veterinary team members and clients, alike — that if the pet is not sick, any food will do. Explain the benefits of a recommended food and explain the connections to better health, including visible and vital outcomes such as:

- Maintaining a healthy weight
- Maintaining healthy skin and coat

Assumptions. Also, don't assume comments about food costs equal a real objection or a refusal. Many people relying upon subscriptions or auto-refills for their pet foods may simply not know how much their current food costs. Thus, any number they hear at checkout may prompt a comment without it truly reflecting a significant difference in cost.

In most cases, conversations about cost turn around quickly when you provide the client with:

- Information on the health benefits and value of the recommended diet
- An apples-to-apples comparison such as the cost-per-day of the current diet vs. the recommended diet. Such comparisons often reveal a very small increase or even a decrease.

FINE TUNING YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Rather than providing nutritional recommendations in a fashion akin to heaving a shot put of information into a client's lap, strive to make conversations more like tossing a tennis ball back and forth in ways that build mutual understanding and client relationships.

When you ask better questions, you give clients permission to provide better (more complete) answers and show that you want to understand their views about pet food. All this establishes a framework for sharing your expertise in ways clients can better understand. Namely, that's being crystal clear about how what you're recommending will help their specific pet in this exact moment in life.

Along with all the other clinical conversations you have with clients in their pets' lifetimes, conversations about nutrition are

vital. Communicating well results in better outcomes for patients and veterinary team members, alike. For decades, evidence has accumulated revealing that good communication improves:

- Efficiency and accuracy in understanding, diagnosing, and treating cases
- Recall of conversations and recommendations as well as comprehension among clients
- Satisfaction for practitioners, healthcare teams, and the people they serve
- Adherence to clinical recommendations
- Patient health

*Adams CL, Kurtz SA. Skills for Communicating in Veterinary Medicine. Parsippany, USA: Dewpoint Publishing, 2017.



See the "Asking Better Questions" resource page.





Team Roles and Actions

CLIENT SERVICES: Pre-appointment

- At the time of scheduling, sends nutritional prescreening form or link to online form and stresses the importance of providing detailed information for discussion at the appointment
- Suggests client photograph pet food packaging

VETERINARY TECHNICIAN/NURSE

Before the veterinarian:

- Confirms nutritional information is ready for the practitioner
- Asks additional prescreening questions such as what they like about the current diet, which provides advance intel for the practitioner to consider
- Gathers any other relevant or missing information

After the veterinarian:

- Works through any needed calculations and determine feeding amount (e.g., calories, costs)
- Coaches clients on making the food transition

Follow-up services:

- Within the first week: How is the transition going?
- Two weeks: Check in with how the patient is doing after fully transitioning.
- Two months: Follow up and recheck pet.

VETERINARIAN

- Reviews nutritional information provided by client(s)
- Completes nutritional assessment
- Opens a dialogue about food
- Makes pet food recommendation, including if appropriate for clients to continue feeding what they're feeding
- Determines feeding amount

CLIENT SERVICES: Check-out

- Ensures clients go home with recommended diets, as applicable
- Encourages clients to set up home delivery/ autoship so that they never run out of food
- Redirects any objections or questions back to practitioner or nutritional counselor
- Makes appointment for nutritional reassessment





Veterinarian's Checklist for Making Nutritional Recommendations

The primary role of veterinarians in nutritional assessments and recommendations is to explain the “what” and “why” behind the food-related elements of wellness and treatment plans for each patient.

Exam Room Actions

- ❑ Request permission to discuss nutrition with a focus on case-specific needs and/or proactive wellness
- ❑ Review nutritional history already collected and ask open-ended questions to fill any gaps
- ❑ Assess the patient's current nutrition, along with PE and medical history
- ❑ Discuss nutritional options and their benefits
- ❑ Make a specific nutritional recommendation, including why you recommend that for the specific pet's needs
- ❑ Answer clients questions and offer solutions to at-home challenges
- ❑ Connect clients with the practice's designated go-to nutrition advice team member for coaching and follow-up



Maintenance Actions

- ❑ Meet with vendors to stay informed on products
- ❑ Augment nutrition knowledge through CE, journals, and professional sites
- ❑ Lead a whole-team approach with clinic staff, emphasizing the importance of the topic and the clinic's protocol toward nutrition



Veterinary Technician's Checklist for Supporting Nutritional Recommendations

The primary role of veterinary technicians in supporting nutritional assessments and recommendations is to gather initial input from the client at the start of the visit, and then provide practical advice at the end of the visit to succeed at home. It's being a combination of expert, cheerleader, listener, and problem-solver for clients.

Exam Room Actions

- ❑ Gather or confirm nutritional history input from the client
- ❑ Once veterinarian recommendation is made, support recommendation by sharing amount to feed, how long a bag or case of food will likely last, cost per day, and how to purchase
- ❑ Offer advice on transitioning to new food
- ❑ Reinforce the duration of feeding of the recommended diet
- ❑ Answer client questions before they leave the visit
- ❑ Follow up on progress through check-ins after the visit

Maintenance Actions

- ❑ Meet with vendors to stay informed on products
- ❑ Augment nutrition knowledge through CE, journals, and professional sites
- ❑ Participate in a whole team approach, assisting to implement clinic's protocol toward nutrition

BONUS: Access a library of on-demand CE for veterinary professionals, by veterinary professionals.

hillsnorthamerica.com





Ready-Made Social Media Posts



The Savvy Dog Owner's Guide to Nutrition on the Internet
bit.ly/2Yfnl3f



The Savvy Cat Owner's Guide to Nutrition on the Internet
bit.ly/3B6614t

Suggested text for the above social posts: *With access to so much pet food information online, it can be a challenge to know what's accurate and what's not. Our friends from the Small World Animal Veterinary Association created this resource to help you assess the quality of the information and sources you find online.*



Suggested text for this social post:
How much do you know about who makes your pets' food? Ask these five questions to learn more:

1. *Does the pet food brand employ a nutritionist on staff (not just a consultant)?*
2. *Who formulates the diet? And what are their qualifications?*
3. *Is nutrient data — not just guaranteed analysis — available for the food?*
4. *What kind of research has been conducted to support claims?*
5. *What is the quality control process for ingredients and finished products?*



Guidelines on Selecting Pet Foods
bit.ly/3mfhKrk



Ready-Made Social Media Posts



Check out the latest posts on Petfoodology for information on pet nutrition science written by veterinary nutrition specialists and experts. bit.ly/3B74sn3

Q: Why do we ask what your pet eats?

A: Because nutrition is a keystone of lifelong wellness.



Learn More About the Science of Pet Nutrition From Tuft's Petfoodology website bit.ly/2Y6Lr5E

Good quality nutrition, matched to your pet's life stage and health status, is a keystone to lifelong wellness. Plus, even the most experienced pet lovers can easily make assumptions, harbor simple misunderstandings, and even develop at-home habits that put pets at risk. Let's talk about nutrition in detail at your pet's next appointment.



See the inside back cover for a link to all of social media images, as well as all other resource links.



Anatomy of a Nutritional Recommendation



1: Gather a comprehensive history.

What to say:

"Tell me everything [pet's name] eats throughout the day, starting first thing in the morning on through bedtime including meals, treats, supplements, and people food."

Why it works:

This type of question elicits more complete information, provides a structure to answers, and sets a clear expectation for the detail you want and need.

2: Acknowledge the range of options and make a specific recommendation for what to feed and why.

What to say:

"There are a variety of food options available for [pet's name]. Let's talk about your options and which of those options I believe is the best fit for [pet's name]."

Why it works:

Consumers want to be involved in decisions about their pet's health and know the best options for their pet's age and prognosis as well as the pros/cons and costs/value of each option.

3: Educate pet owners on the value and benefits of feeding the recommended diet for their pet.

What to say:

"There are a variety of food options. Let's talk about the benefits and value of the different food options for your pet."

Why it works:

Pet owners may not make the leap from what a specific pet food — therapeutic or otherwise — does and its benefits to their pet. By clearly communicating the benefits and value of different options, you will empower the client to make the right choice for their pet.

4: Make a clear recommendation.

What to say:

"I recommend [pet food] because it provides our best opportunity to get [pet's name] on track medically speaking/to keep [pet's name] as healthy as possible for as long as possible."

Why it works:

Clients really do want to know what you think and recommend. Be straightforward. Say what you think is best for their pet and why.

5: Check in with clients to see what they really think of your recommendation and if it's doable.

What to say:

"What do you think about making this recommended change? Does it feel doable with realities at home? What concerns do you have?"

Why it works:

It lets clients know that these are continuing conversations, and you genuinely want to address their concerns and help them be successful in implementing your pet nutrition recommendations.



The Anatomy of an Effective Nutrition Recommendation

To learn more, watch this free, one-hour webinar hosted by Jason Coe, DVM, PhD.

<https://bit.ly/2YLB73a>





Asking Better Questions



Veterinary teams often use rapid-fire questions that elicit short answers from clients because they feel it allows them to gather medical history quickly. However, research shows that open-ended questions prompt more complete and helpful responses.*

Asking structured questions and open-ended questions:

- ❑ Gives people permission to admit to or describe realities at home
- ❑ Steers replies toward actionable information
- ❑ Sets expectations for the level of detail needed for you to comprehend the full nutritional and environmental situation at home

It takes time to form new habits when asking questions. Start by practicing these easy swaps.



Closed Questions
{Provides less helpful information}

Open Questions
{Provides more complete responses}

Any concerns about [pet's name]'s appetite, mobility, energy, or behavior?

Tell me about any changes you've noticed.

What do you feed [pet's name]?

Tell me everything [pet's name] eats throughout the day, starting first thing in the morning on through to bedtime

Do you give treats, too?

What are [pet's name]'s favorite snacks?

Is [pet's name] a slow or picky eater?

Talk me through [pet's name]'s eating process from the time food is offered through when the bowl is empty or [pet's name] walks away.

Does [pet's name] have access to your other pets' food?

What challenges do you face at home limiting access to your other pets' food?

Does [pet's name] beg for your food?

Name everyone in your home or in your life who sneaks [pet's name] people food.

Are you happy with [pet's name]'s current food?

What do you like (and not like, if anything) about what you're currently feeding?

Why do you feed that?

That's interesting. Tell me more.

Are you open to my pet food recommendation?

I'd like to go through all the benefits of switching [pet's name] to a different food. Before we do that, though, tell me about any concerns you have about considering a new pet food.


*Coe JB, O'Connor R, MacMartin C, et al. Effects of Three Diet History Questions on the Amount of Information Gained from a Sample of Pet Owners in Ontario, Canada. J Am Vet Med Assoc 2020;256:469-78.





Understanding & Addressing Barriers to Nutritional Recommendations

It's easier to feel confident making nutritional recommendations if you are ready for possible barriers. Here are some tips to address these in conversation:

Sticking Point	Possible Solution
Picky eater	<p>Determine why the client thinks their pet is picky, including understanding what the pet currently eats (wet, dry, combination, toppers, etc.). Then, offer advice on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow transitions to the new diet • Environmental factors to prevent food aversions (especially in cats) such as food temperature and texture • Using suitable meal enhancers such as wet toppers, if needed • 100% money-back guarantees (if offered by the company) if the pet truly will not eat the recommended diet
	
Difficulties limiting food access in homes with multiple pets	<p>Suggest practical strategies for reworking mealtime at home:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeding pets in crates or in different rooms until everyone is done eating • Using devices that limit which pets can access which food sources
Client feels they're already addressing the health concern in other ways	<p>Avoid an all-or-nothing approach by acknowledging their efforts and explaining the value and benefits of the recommended food</p>
Reach an impasse on client's current food choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check for any recalls or FDA alerts on the specific food and share results, if applicable. • Recommend increased/more frequent monitoring
Pet doing well on current diet	<p>If no nutritional change is needed, recommendation can still be to "keep up the good work" and continue feeding current food</p>
Cost concerns	<p>Calculate actual costs per day of current food and compare to cost of recommended food, based on the pet's specific Maintenance Energy Requirement (MER)</p>
Objections to specific ingredients or types of foods or concerns over food allergies	<p>Offer resources that explain the nutritional benefits and functionality of certain ingredients such as corn or chicken and prevalence data on pet food allergies and top allergens</p>



RELIABLE PET NUTRITION WEBSITES AND RESOURCES

World Small Animal Veterinary Association Nutrition Toolkit:

Nutritional recommendations for every life stage bit.ly/3mflp3l

Pet Nutrition Alliance

Online dog and cat calorie calculators and other tools and resources on pet nutrition. bit.ly/2Yk4Nof

WSAVA Global Nutrition Committee: Guidelines on Selecting Pet Foods

One-page resource outlining the most important things to know and consider when choosing a pet's food bit.ly/3uEIQx6

American College of Veterinary Nutrition

FAQs on pet nutrition and tools to find board-certified veterinary nutritionists for case consults acvn.org/

The Savvy Cat Owner's Guide to Nutrition on the Internet

Two-page resource on how to read and assess cat nutrition information found online. bit.ly/3uu51Pt

The Savvy Dog Owner's Guide to Nutrition on the Internet

Two-page resource on how to read and assess dog nutrition information found online. bit.ly/3uEIQx6

Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO)

Pet food industry and regulatory information aaafco.org/

United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

Up-to-date information on pet food recalls and advisories bit.ly/3ou8278

Petfoodology

Easy-to-understand perspectives on pet nutrition science written by veterinary nutrition specialists and experts bit.ly/2Y6Lr5E



EDUCATIONAL VIDEOS ON COMMON NUTRITION TOPICS



"Carbs Aim for Balance"
<http://hills.us/pns-cab>



"Ingredients VS Nutrients"
<http://hills.us/pns-ivsn>



"Understanding Antioxidants"
<http://hills.us/pns-ua>



"Energy Giving Nutrients"
<http://hills.us/pns-egn>



"Why Balanced Minerals Matter"
<http://hills.us/pns-wbm>



"The Importance of Vitamins"
<http://hills.us/pns-iv>



"Understanding Healthy Fats"
<http://hills.us/pns-uhf>



"The Importance of Proteins"
<http://hills.us/pns-tip>



"Water & Core Nutrients"
<http://hills.us/pns-wcn>



Healthy and Low-Calorie Snacks for Pets

Unless they are on a restricted diet, pets can have small snacks or treats on occasion. Just be sure they don't make up more than 10% of your pet's total calorie intake for the day. Remember, our pets are usually smaller than us, so those extra calories add up much more quickly than they do for people. We can calculate the number of calories your pet needs each day and the number of calories provided by your pet's current diet.

Be Calorie-Wise for Your Pet's Health

Treat	Calories
1-inch cube of cheddar cheese	68
1 slice of bacon	43
1 TBL peanut butter	94
1 oz of tuna packed in water	116
1/2 oz of deli turkey	52

When buying prepackaged treats for dogs and cats, look for low-calorie treats and make sure you are counting those calories in their total daily intake.

For Dogs

- Green beans (raw or cooked)
- Carrot sticks (raw)
- Cucumber slices (raw)
- Zucchini slices (raw)
- Apple slices (no seeds)
- Banana slices
- Small slices of cantaloupe or watermelon
- Cooked and cooled lean meats (such as skinless chicken breast)
- Small pieces of cooked pasta
- Plain O-type cereal

For Cats

- Shredded/boiled chicken*
- Cooked ground turkey*
- Reduced-sodium lunch meat*
- Plain O-type cereal
- Cooked egg
- Corn flakes
- Cooked carrot slices
- Zucchini (shredded or bite-sized pieces)
- Alfalfa sprouts
- Steamed and cooled broccoli
- Steamed and cooled asparagus
- Steamed and cooled green beans
- Small slices of cantaloupe
- Small amounts of cooked fish

* Small amounts



Palatability Tips

Add low-salt flavored broth.

- For dogs: low-salt chicken or beef broth
- For cats: low-salt tuna, clam, or chicken broth

Or add a small amount of:

- Honey
- Unsweetened applesauce
- Low-fat plain or vanilla yogurt (including Greek), but avoid any yogurt that uses artificial sweeteners
- Liquid smoke (2 to 3 drops), but make sure there are no additives

- Small amount of oregano, except with a novel protein or hydrolyzed protein diet—especially if being used for food allergies
- For dogs only, add a tiny amount of corn syrup, but only if the dog is not diabetic

Warm the food.

For cats, feed in a wide bowl to prevent the whiskers touching the side of the bowl.

Put current and new foods in side-by-side dishes.





Nutritional Prescreening Form



Date: _____

Pet's Name: _____ Pet's Age: _____

Species/breed: _____ Male Female Spay/Neuter Y N

Nutrition plays an important role in your pet's health, and providing the following information is vital in helping us understand your pet's unique needs as well as your perspectives. We're so grateful for your help and your partnership. Thank you for taking the time to share this information, which we will discuss at your next visit.

Please tell us everything your pet eats throughout the day, starting first thing in the morning through to bedtime, including food to administer medications, etc. Please provide package photos of everything your pet eats.

Commercial Food: Brand	Formula	Form (dry, wet, treats)	Amount (per day)
EXAMPLE: Hill's Science Diet	Adult 6+ Large Breed	Dry	4 Cups

People Food: Raw or Cooked	Frequency	Amount (per day)

What do you use to measure your pet's food? _____

Pet supplements and frequency: _____

The right nutrition is vital to your pet's health. Can we discuss your pet's nutrition at your next visit? Y N

If so, are you interested in having us make a pet food recommendation for your pet's unique life stage, risks, and other medical needs? Y N What's most important to you when it comes to your pet's unique needs?

The right diet can sometimes help in managing health conditions. Do you have concerns about your pet's:

- Stool quality
- Water intake
- Urination
- Weight
- Skin and Coat
- Mobility

Circle the image that most closely matches your pet's shape/weight.



On a scale of 1 to 4 (4 being high), rate your pet's:

Appetite _____ Activity Level _____

Please let us know if you have noticed any changes in your pet's weight or behavior.

To be 100% sure we're talking about the correct food, treats, and supplements, it helps when you provide photos of the packaging of everything your pet eats. For the primary food(s), please also take a close-up photo of the nutritional panel.



Myths About Pets and Pet Foods

MYTH: Dogs are carnivores

TRUTH: Taxonomic Order Carnivora, in name only

Dietary Classification Omnivore

- ✓ Anatomy
- ✓ Behavior
- ✓ Feeding preference
- ✓ Ability to eat/remain healthy on a diet consisting of both plant and animal foods

MYTH: Cats should not eat carbohydrates because they are carnivores.

TRUTH: Taxonomic Order Carnivora
✓ High dietary protein requirements

Nutritional Requirements

- ✓ Many studies have proven cats can readily digest and use carbohydrates

MYTH: Cats should not eat carbohydrates because of the risk for diabetes.

TRUTH: Currently no evidence of direct cause and effect between carbohydrate intake and diabetes in cats. Studies have shown that some of the risks for feline diabetes include having an inactive lifestyle and being overweight.

In fact, because of relatively increased amounts of protein, phosphorus, and fat, some low-carbohydrate foods may not be ideal for diabetic cats with other health concerns such as kidney disease, and liver disease.

MYTH: Natural means organic.


TRUTH: Natural and organic are not interchangeable. Use of the term "natural" requires a pet food to consist of only natural ingredients without chemical alterations.

MYTH:

Corn is a filler, is hard to digest, and is a major cause of allergies in pets.

<TRUTH >

Essential Nutrients	Highly Digestible	Not a Top Allergen
Fillers add no nutrients. Corn provides pets with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protein • Carbohydrates • Essential fatty acids • Antioxidants 	Grinding and cooking can increase corn's digestibility so that pets can easily absorb key nutrients.	True food allergies are quite rare in pets. Yet, corn has been implicated in fewer food allergy cases than other common protein sources such as beef, dairy products, wheat, chicken, egg, lamb, or soy.



MYTH: Grain-free food is better than foods containing grains.

TRUTH: Grain-free foods are not necessarily better than foods containing grains. Discuss your preference with your veterinary team to learn more about whether this an appropriate food option for your unique pet.

- These are by-products:
 - Organs
 - Beet pulp (dried sugar beet residue)
 - Tomato pomace (skin, seeds, pulp)

Many by-products such as meat by-products provide excellent nutritional value compared to non-by-product counterparts.

MYTH:

Pet foods containing ingredients listed as "by-products" are inferior.

TRUTH:

- A by-product is simply something produced in the making of something else. For example, when you boil chicken, the leftover broth could be considered a by-product.

MYTH: Reading the ingredient list is the best way to assess the suitability of a pet food.

TRUTH: Appropriate amounts of precisely formulated nutrients are just as important as ingredients. In fact, focusing on ingredients alone puts all the attention on before the pet food gets made, not after. Pet food ingredients are listed in descending order, based upon their weight prior to processing. Thus, relying on an ingredient list does not provide an accurate representation of how much of an ingredient your pet is actually consuming.



Tips and Timelines for Transitioning Your Pet to a New Food



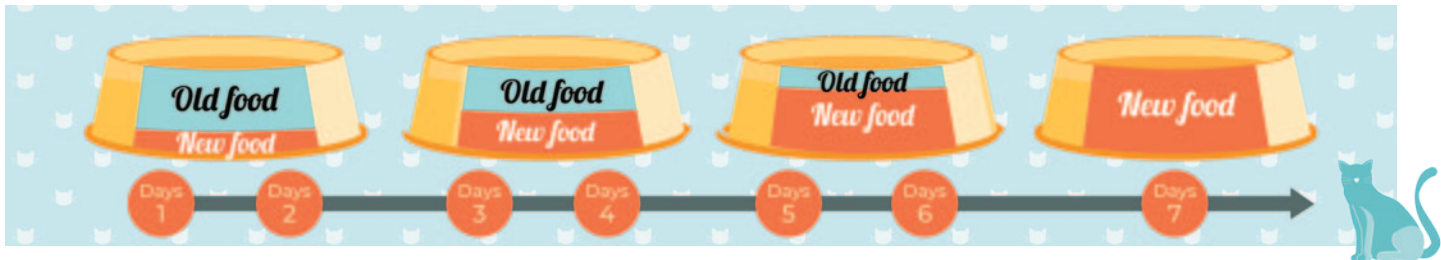
Take it slowly when transitioning your pet to a new food! A sudden switch may cause digestive upset and food aversion – especially in cats.

Dogs should transition to a new food over seven days.



Initially replace 25% of the old food with the new food. Continue to gradually increase the proportion of the new food offered based on your pet's acceptance.

Cats may need up to 40 days to transition, so be patient.



Initially replace 25% of the old food with the new food. Continue to gradually increase the proportion of the new food offered based on your pet's acceptance.

Keep these points in mind:

- Cats can be sensitive to the physical form, odor, and taste of foods.
- Cats accustomed to a specific texture or type of food (moist, dry, or semi-moist) may refuse foods with a different texture, so a longer transition timeline may be necessary (one to two months).
- Food temperature also influences food acceptance by cats. Cats do not accept food served at temperature extremes (too cold, too warm). They tend to prefer food when it's near body temperature.
- Cats with nausea may develop a learned aversion to certain foods. Often this happens when cats eat before an episode of nausea or vomiting. These aversions can

last up to 40 days in cats, so it's best to avoid accidentally causing aversions by feeding a desired long-term food to a cat who is nauseous.

Cats must eat adequate calories daily. Be patient and continue the transition until the cat is eating the new food.

If needed, easy, affordable flavor enhancers include:

- ✓ A small amount of canned pet food as a topper
- ✓ Low-salt flavored broth
 - For dogs: low-salt chicken or beef broth
 - For cats: low-salt tuna, clam, or chicken broth

If your pet needs additional encouragement flavor-wise, ask your veterinary team about other flavor enhancers you can add to encourage your pet to continue eating while transitioning to a new food.



When It Comes to Your Pet's Nutrition, Count on Us!

Nutrition is vital to your pet's health and wellness. That's why our entire team stands ready to help with answers, support, and personalized pet food recommendations throughout the life of your unique pet. No matter what comes up, you can count on us for expert insights and advice.

Nutrition is so important, in fact, that we named the following team member(s) as our official nutritional counselor(s).

Name	Title	Phone/Text	Email

Count on your pet's personal nutritional counselor to answer any questions as they come up and to help you understand the following:

- Why the recommended food is best for your unique pet's life stage , risks, and medical history
- How to make the transition from one food to another
- How much to feed each day to meet your pet's specific energy and nutrient needs
- How to manage appropriate treats
- How long to feed the recommended diet to your pet
- When to schedule follow-up visits to see how things are going

Thank you! From your team at _____

Resources

Access the following resources by snapping the QR code with your smart phone or by entering the shortened URL code into your browser.



2021 AAHA Nutrition and Weight Management Guidelines
aaha.org/nutrition



Asking Better Questions
<http://hills.us/vital-abq>



Five Pet Nutrition Myths
<http://hills.us/vital-sa>



Understanding & Addressing Barriers to Nutritional Recommendations
<http://hills.us/vital-u>



Hill's Quick Reco Tool: Save Time and Provide Personalized Feeding Plans
<http://hills.us/quick-reco>



Reliable Pet Nutrition Websites and Resources
<http://hills.us/vital-r>



Vet Tech/Veterinarian's Checklist for Making Nutritional Recommendations
<http://hills.us/vital-vckl>



Healthy and Low-Calorie Snacks for Pets
<http://hills.us/vital-h>



Ready-Made Social Media Posts 1
<http://hills.us/vital-media1>



Nutritional Prescreening Form
<http://hills.us/vital-f>



Ready-Made Social Media Posts 2
<http://hills.us/vital-media2>



Myths About Pets & Pet Foods
<http://hills.us/vital-m>



Social Media Images
bit.ly/3EGePiU



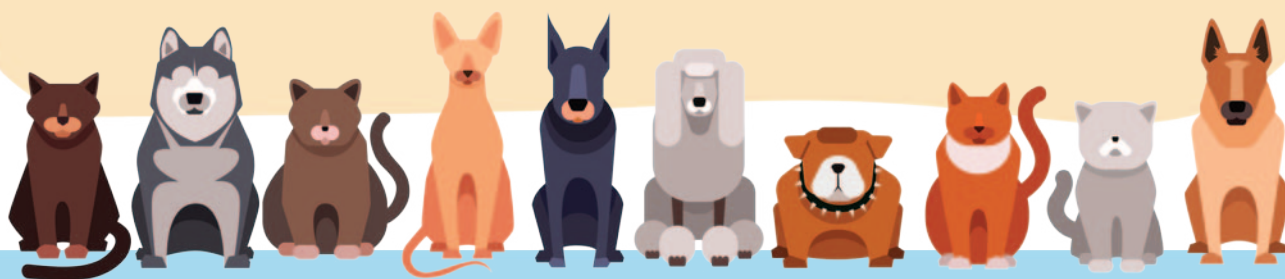
Tips and Timelines for Transitioning Your Pet to a New Food
<http://hills.us/vital-t>



Anatomy of a Nutritional Recommendation
<http://hills.us/vital-nr>



When It Comes to Your Pet's Nutrition, Count on Us!
<http://hills.us/vital-cu>





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AMERICAN ANIMAL HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION

Established in 1933 by leaders in the veterinary profession, AAHA is best known for its accreditation of companion animal veterinary practices. To become accredited, companion animal hospitals undergo regular comprehensive evaluations by AAHA veterinary experts who evaluate the practice on approximately 900 standards of veterinary care. AAHA also develops publications and educational programs and resources designed to help companion animal hospitals thrive. Today, more than 3,700 practice teams (15% of all veterinary practices in the United States and Canada) are AAHA accredited. For more information about AAHA, visit aaha.org.

