



Nicole Paley

Guest columnist

Nicole Paley from the Pet Food Manufacturers' Association (PFMA) gives her guide to the different types of dog food available, to help you read the labels on the packet correctly and, crucially, find the right food to suit your four-legged friend.

Dog owners today have no shortage of choice when it comes to buying their dog's dinner, but to the uninitiated it can seem a dizzying selection.

### Complete dog food

This is probably the most important term you need to be familiar with. The term 'complete' is in fact a legal definition and it means the product must contain (as required by law) all the nutrients your dog needs for healthy body function. So feeding your dog a complete diet means you don't need to provide any other food for him. Members of the PFMA ([www.pfma.org.uk/members-of-pfma](http://www.pfma.org.uk/members-of-pfma)) follow European nutritional guidelines when cooking up their doggie cuisine. These guidelines are approved by veterinary nutrition experts across Europe to give you that extra reassurance.

### Complementary dog food

The term complementary means that the product isn't nutritionally complete, so it needs to be fed alongside something else. Dog treats, for instance, are a complementary pet food. If you're feeding your dog treats, don't forget to take these into consideration when measuring his overall daily consumption. You should also aim to keep treats to a minimum to avoid disrupting the nutritional balance of mealtimes.

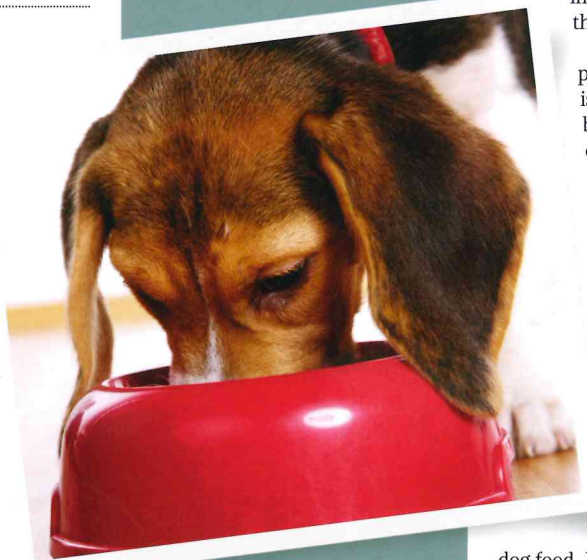
### Organic dog food

The question of whether organic food is better for us has been circulating without a clear answer for many years, but for some people buying organic food is the ethos they choose to live by. While there is no specific organic standard for pet food, companies making an organic claim will still need to be approved by an accreditation agency, such as the Soil Association. Organic standards include:

- 95% of ingredients must be certified organic (the remaining 5% must be from a permitted list)
- Cleaning materials and pest control methods are restricted
- Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) are strictly prohibited
- Flavourings must be either naturally or organically produced

### Natural ingredients

In the dictionary, natural is defined as 'present in or produced by nature' or 'conforming to the usual course of nature'. But what exactly does natural mean, when it comes to dog food? There is no legal definition of 'natural' for pet food, however, the European Pet Food Federation has set a standard which requires that all pet foods marketed as 'natural'



*"You'll know if your dog isn't getting the nutrition he needs by his physical appearance"*

must only be made with natural ingredients and the food must not contain any chemically synthesised ingredients. Additionally, 'they should only be subjected to such physical processing as to make them suitable for pet food production and maintaining the natural composition.'

### Raw dog food

Nowadays, you can find a wide range of commercially produced raw products for your dog: from complete raw foods to freeze-dried treats. If feeding a raw diet, our advice is to ensure you provide a complete and balanced diet – and to be even more diligent with your hygiene practices when handling raw food. Safety is key, and raw pet foods produced in Europe must comply with strict legislation. These set strict limits for microbiological testing – for instance, a zero tolerance for salmonella – for the safety of you and your canine companion.

You may also have heard about dehydrated pet foods – if not, expect to do so soon! This is a relatively new type of dog food, which is becoming popular in the US. The dehydration process provides a slow, gentle method of processing the food to take away the moisture from the raw ingredients. Dehydration takes several hours, and uses warm air to 'blow away' the moisture while preserving the nutrients. Pet owners then add warm water to serve the dish to their dog. These foods should be handled in the same way as other raw pet foods.

### How can I tell if I'm feeding my dog the right diet?

The most important thing you can do is provide your dog with a good quality, nutritionally complete and balanced dog food. You'll know if your dog isn't getting the nutrition he needs, as it will be apparent in his physical appearance – as it does if we eat one too many takeaways!

- Key signs that your dog is healthy and thriving are:
- A clean and shiny coat
  - Clear, bright eyes
  - A good weight
  - Mouth should smell fresh and gums should be pink

Of course if you are in doubt, don't hesitate to speak to your vet.

### Look out for the happy dance!

If you search on YouTube you'll find no shortage of videos showing the 'happy dance': a dog's jumping, tail-wagging wiggle in anticipation of an imminent meal. It's hugely satisfying for any dog owner to see and a clear sign that your dog is enjoying his food.

For more information on pet food, ingredients, understanding pet food labels and a downloadable Healthy Pet kit, visit [www.pfma.org.uk](http://www.pfma.org.uk)