

TALKING POINT



Pet food prices are measured next to the cost of human food

Pet food can vary in price massively however recent claims that it's less expensive to feed pets on human food have caused debate. With the cost of living on the rise, pet owners are always looking for a new way to save money. Pets can cost an owner £16,000 in a lifetime so any way to keep that cost down is a plus for owners. Is human food really suitable for pets though? Human foods are commonly eaten by pets either by mistake or as a treat. Most animal foods include some form of meat and vegetables, with some even being fit for human consumption. However does this also mean some human foods are suitable for pets? Pets cannot, of course, be fed burgers or pizza, but there are some foods which may be suitable. We ask industry experts for their opinions on the matter.

KELLIE CECCARELLI, VETERINARY TRAINING MANAGER AT EUKANUBA

"Providing a pet with a 'complete' pet food is akin to a person having their meals routinely put together by a human nutritionist. A more fair comparison would be to measure the cost of everything required in a complete diet, so protein sources plus starch, fats, vitamins and minerals and compare this with the daily cost of feeding a high quality, complete pet food.

"Eukanuba food is complete, meaning it includes all the nutrients a pet needs, not just protein.

"At Eukanuba we know very well about the effect of diet on longevity. Our observations over a ten plus year period* proved that the combination of Eukanuba's nutritional expertise, coupled with appropriate veterinary and husbandry care, show that longer than typical lifespans really are possible. There is no evidence at all that feeding a dog (or cat) a diet of human foods would result in such optimal health and longevity".

*Ten plus years of observations conducted at Pet Health & Nutrition Centre in Ohio, 2004-2014.



NICOLE PALEY, COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER AT PFMA

"Cats and dogs have different nutritional requirements to people and they need to be fed a specially formulated diet made up of all the right nutrients in the right proportions for healthy bodily function. PFMA members formulate their diets in line with the FEDIAF Nutritional Guidelines for cats and dogs. These guidelines detail the nutritional needs of cats and dogs at the varying life stages (growth, adult and senior) and they are peer reviewed by independent veterinary nutritionists throughout Europe.

"The vast majority of pet foods available on the market are 'complete' pet foods. The term 'complete' is a legal definition and it means that the pet food must by law include all the nutrients a pet needs in its daily diet. Providing a pet with a 'complete' pet food is akin to a person having their meals routinely put together by a human nutritionist. Whilst it's not impossible to provide a nutritionally balanced homemade diet, it is a complicated and time consuming task.

"It is widely recognised by the veterinary profession that pets today are benefitting from this tailor-made nutrition as 95 percent of vets surveyed at the London Vet Show (November 2014) were of the view that pets are now living longer as a result of this advanced nutrition."



**LISA P. WEETH, DVM, DACVN, MRCVS,
VETERINARY NUTRITION SPECIALIST**

"Dogs and cats have different nutritional needs than humans and a direct comparison cannot be made based on the size of tin. Prepackaged human foods have more sodium and fat than most dogs and cats can tolerate, putting them at risk of serious illness. There are also certain foods, such as onions and garlic, which are used to flavour human foods and are toxic to pets.

"Commercially-prepared pet foods are also designed to provide your dog or cat with all the essential nutrients they need each day, meaning that the tin or bag has all of the essential vitamins, minerals, fatty acids, and amino acids your pet needs in the correct proportions.

"If you want to compare the cost of making your own pet food at home you need to factor in the cost of the main whole food ingredients (meat and starches), plus the cost of all of the supplements needed to provide the essential fatty acids, vitamins and minerals each day; and how much time it will take to prepare the food and what they think their time is worth; and the form of the pet food is considered.

"For example, the daily cost to feed a 23 kg dog a home-prepared balanced diet is about £3-4 (maybe more depending on ingredients) plus cooking time, wet pet food for the same dog would be £3-4 per day, and to feed that same dog a dry dog food could be less than £1 per day."

**SEAN WENSLEY, PRESIDENT OF THE BRITISH
VETERINARY ASSOCIATION**

"Keeping a pet can be costly and buying suitable food is just one aspect of this. Different animals have different nutritional needs and bigger animals will eat more than smaller ones, however, regardless of size, the cost must still be covered.

"We would recommend potential owners visit their local vet practice and discuss the costs of owning a pet before committing to buying one, as well as talking through their intended pet's dietary needs. This is important, as even common pets such as rabbits frequently suffer health problems due to being fed the wrong diet. It's also worth noting that an animal's diet might vary at different stages of its life." 🐾

