

“Human Grade” vs. “Pet Grade” Ingredients in Your Pet’s Food

Q. What’s the difference between the ingredients used in human foods and those used in pet foods?

A. Pet foods are the traditional dumping grounds of the leftovers of human food manufacturing. Ingredients destined for human food products have to pass minimum standards of quality and safety imposed by the USDA. (U.S. Dept. of Agriculture). Any indigestible wastes, condemned parts, or other by-products deemed unfit for human consumption are then used for pet food, where the quality and safety of ingredients are unregulated. In the big business of multinational food companies, nothing is wasted. This applies to grocery store brands and mass marketed specialty brands such as Science Diet (Colgate Palmolive) Iams (Proctor and Gamble), Nature’s Recipe (Heinz), and Ralston Purina. A few conscientious pet food companies that are not owned by large conglomerates go to great lengths to make pet foods containing only human quality ingredients. More about them later.

Q. What kind of meats are used in pet foods?

A. There are two sources of supply for “pet-grade” meats and poultry. One source is federally inspected USDA meat packing plants, where the carcasses that fail inspection due to damage, disease, or cancerous tumors are separated for shipping to the pet food factory. The other source is rendering plants, where 4D animals (dead, dying, diseased, or disabled) are rendered into a dry crumbly meal and used for livestock feed, fertilizer, and pet food ingredients. Rendering plants also process road kill and euthanized pets from shelters and veterinary clinics.

Q. What about grains in pet foods?

A. Name brand pet foods utilize the waste products in the grain category, too. After the more valuable starches and oils have been extracted, often by chemical processes, the hulls and remnants are turned into ingredients such as ground corn, corn gluten meal, brewer’s rice, ground wheat, and various flours. These ingredients have almost no nutritional value, and are merely fillers. Sometimes whole grains are used that have been deemed unfit for humans because of mold, too many pesticides, or improper storage.

Q. How about fats and oils used in pet foods?

A. Fats are an expensive and nutritionally important part of a pet’s diet. Many manufacturers use “blended fats” from multiple sources, including recycled restaurant grease (often rancid) that are stabilized with powerful chemical preservatives. Both the toxins formed in previously cooked fats and the preservatives used to stabilize them have been linked to cancer.

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