



Thinking of Cooking Your Pet's Food at Home?

Cooking at home for your pet on a regular basis is very tricky, and can be costly or even harmful. The vast majority of recipes you can find online or from “pet experts” will be lacking in many key nutrients and can harm your pet if used more than occasionally. Here are a few things to consider before you start cooking.

01 Read the fine print on your pet food



Consider whether home cooking is necessary for your pet. The truth is, many commercial dog and cat foods already provide well-balanced nutrition for your pet. To make sure your brand measures up, look for the “AAFCO statement.” This is a printed section on the food bag that says the food has been formulated to meet the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) nutrient profiles for certain life stages of dogs and cats. The labels are usually in very small type, so look closely!

02 Your best bet is to ask a veterinarian



Contacting a board-certified veterinary nutritionist is the best option if you think you need a customized pet diet. These highly trained veterinarians specialize in nutrition and can recommend specific diets based on your pet's species, health, and age. To find a nutritionist near you, you can search on the American College of Veterinary Nutrition website (acvn.org/directory).

03 Only get recipes from a reliable source



Veterinarians say the best option for finding a reliable recipe online is from the website BalancelT.com. You can select various ingredients and the site will concoct a recipe based on your selections. The catch? All recipes include a dose of supplements (made and sold by the company that runs the website) needed to round out the nutritional requirements for each recipe.

04 Think outside of just pumpkin



Pumpkin puree often comes up as a cure-all for pet tummy troubles, from diarrhea to constipation. But is it really helpful? Veterinary nutritionists say there is nothing magical about pumpkin puree, since it does not contain much fiber—but it probably won't do any harm, either.

A better option for acute gastrointestinal upsets? Cottage cheese and cooked white rice (one-to-one ratio). Some cats will eat cottage cheese, but you can substitute cooked, boneless chicken breast, which might be more palatable. Either way, this recipe should only be used in the short term.

05 The bottom line



You love your pet enough to consider cooking their meals, so you obviously want to do what's best for them. Whatever you decide, make sure to consult with your AAHA-accredited veterinarian first, in order to determine the best course of action.