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## ***Pet's Need a Nutritious Diet When Summer Activity Begins***

A healthy diet is important year-round, but especially when your pet becomes more active this summer. Be sure to choose the right pet food for your pet and their ever-changing lifestyle needs.

**First Step in Determining Diet.** Contact your veterinarian to discuss your pet's health. At your bi-yearly veterinary checkup, the veterinary staff will weigh your pet and ask a series of questions to determine lifestyle and calorie needs. Armed with this information from your veterinarian, you're ready to find the right food.

**Evaluate the Label.** A lot of nutrition information can be determined just by the name of the pet food and also by how it is certified. The Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) was founded in 1909 to help regulate the nutrition contained in pet foods. The AAFCO defines ingredients, nutritional terms and determines protocols for testing pet foods.

**Food Evaluation Rating Scale.** There are two ways that pet foods are evaluated for nutrition content by the AAFCO. One way is to conduct feeding trials. In this case the label would read "Animal feeding tests using AAFCO procedures substantiate that (product name) provides complete and balanced nutrition". The other way is biochemical analysis. In this case the label would read "this product is formulated to meet the nutritional levels established by the AAFCO food nutrient profiles."

**Does the Food Meet Certification Standards.** When picking out a pet food it is wise to check the label and know how the food was certified. It is beneficial to do animal feeding trials because then it can be determined that the pet's body actually uses and metabolizes the nutrients properly. Many smaller companies can not afford to do food trials.

**Read the Ingredients.** Be sure to read the label to see what foods are included in the feed. Be sure to check with your veterinarian if you have questions or are concerned about possible allergens. Below are some examples of pet food names and what they mean when evaluating the label.

- 95% – Products such as Beef for dogs or Tuna for cats must contain at least 95% of the named item.
- "Dinner" – Pet foods called "dinner", "platter", "meal", "entrée", "formula", "recipe" must have 25% of the ingredient in the name example: i.e. beef dinner is 25% beef
- "With" – Pet food must contain at least 3% of named item. i.e. Dog food with Beef
- "Flavor" – Product has less than 3% of the item but it has to be recognized by the pet.

A pet's diet is one of the biggest factors to their health and well-being. Be sure to check their diet often and work with your veterinarian to adjust as the seasons change and their needs change.

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