



Pawsonal Health
Health & Nutrition for Playful Paws

The Ultimate Guide to Dog Food Types: What Every Dog Owner Should Know



An honest, jargon-free guide to every major dog food type in the UK. Created by Pawsonal Health.



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Hi, I'm Jodie – a trainee canine nutritionist and the founder of Pawsonal Health.

I created this guide to help fellow dog lovers confidently understand what's really going into their dog's bowl. Whether you're just starting out or simply want to make more informed choices, I hope you find this guide genuinely helpful (and refreshingly honest!).

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What's in Our Dogs' Bowls?

This guide is designed to help you navigate the sometimes confusing world of dog food. From traditional kibble to freeze-dried raw, each section below breaks down the key types of food, how they're made, pros and cons and what to look out for.

How to Read Your Dog's Food Label

Let's face it – pet food labels weren't designed to be easy to read. Between vague ingredient names, confusing percentages, and marketing buzzwords, it's no wonder most dog owners feel lost when trying to figure out what's actually in their dog's bowl.

But knowing how to read a dog food label is one of the most powerful things you can do for your dog's health.

Ingredients are listed by weight, so the first ingredient makes up the largest part of the food. Ideally, you want to see a named, fresh meat source (like chicken, lamb, or salmon) right at the top. That's a good sign you're getting quality protein – not fillers disguised as nutrition.



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✓ Look For:

- Named meat ingredients – e.g. chicken, turkey, or salmon.
- Avoid vague terms like meat or animal derivatives.
- Percentage of meat – Aim for at least 60–70% meat in raw/fresh, and 50%+ in dry.
- Complete & balanced – Look for a statement saying the food meets FEDIAF or AAFCO nutritional guidelines.
- Transparency – Clear, specific ingredient lists (not just “cereals” or “derivatives”).

⊘ Be Cautious Of:

- Ingredient splitting – e.g. listing “pea flour, pea protein, pea fibre” separately to make meat look higher on the list.
- “With Chicken” – By law, this only needs to contain 4% chicken.
- Artificial additives – Watch for preservatives like BHA, BHT, or vague terms like “antioxidants”.
- Hidden sugars – Sometimes disguised as beet pulp, molasses, or caramel.



 **Marketing Terms ≠ Nutrition**

“Veterinary approved” or “natural” isn’t regulated – always read past the packaging claims.



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KIBBLE (BAKED & EXTRUDED DRY FOOD)

What It Is

Kibble is one of the most widely fed types of dog food in the UK. It's a dry, shelf-stable product made by combining ingredients like meat, vegetables, grains or legumes, oils, and synthetic vitamins and minerals. These ingredients are processed into small pellets or biscuit shapes.

There are two main types of kibble—extruded and baked—and they differ in how they're made and how nutritious they are once finished.

Types of Kibble



Extruded Kibble

This is the most common type found in pet shops and supermarkets.

- Ingredients are ground into a paste and cooked using high heat and pressure (typically 120–200°C)
- The paste is forced through a machine (extruder), puffed into shape, and dried
- Oils, fats, flavourings, and synthetic nutrients are often sprayed on afterward



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Nutritional impact:

Extrusion exposes ingredients to high heat and pressure, which can destroy naturally occurring nutrients, reduce bioavailability, and leave the food more reliant on synthetic additives for completeness.

Baked Kibble

Baked kibble is made using lower temperatures in an oven, rather than a pressurised extrusion process.

- Dough is mixed and gently baked at moderate heat (typically under 100°C)
- This method avoids puffing and results in a denser, more biscuit-like texture
- Nutrients are more likely to remain intact, and the food is often easier to digest for some dogs

Nutritional impact:

Baking is gentler than extrusion and may help preserve more of the food's natural nutrients and enzymes, depending on the ingredients used.



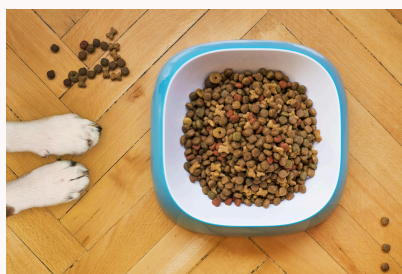
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Pros:

- Convenient and easy to store
- Often made with better ingredients than extruded dry food
- Longer shelf life than raw or fresh food
- Dogs often enjoy the texture and taste

Cons:

- Extruded kibble is highly processed and exposed to extreme heat
- Low moisture (~8–10%), which can strain hydration and digestion
- Nutrient degradation during processing may require synthetic rebalancing
- Some products contain fillers, artificial preservatives, or animal derivatives
- Not always well-suited to sensitive dogs or those needing species-appropriate diets





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WET FOOD (TINNED, TRAYED, OR POUCHED)

What It Is:

Wet food comes in cans, trays, or pouches and contains a high moisture content (typically 70–80%). It may be complete or complementary and is ideal for dogs needing more hydration or softer textures.

How It's Made:

Ingredients are weighed and mixed together, and then cooked as a loaf or cut into chunks, and then mixed with gravy or jelly. Mixture is then put into containers, sealed, and then cooked again to preserve shelf life; this reduces nutrient content.

Pros:

- High moisture for hydration
- Softer texture, great for seniors or dental issues
- Often more palatable for fussy dogs



Cons:

- More expensive per portion
- Cooking the ingredients twice degrades heat-sensitive nutrients
- Short shelf life after opening
- Some may contain unnecessary thickeners or fillers

Wet food can seem like a juicier, more appealing option for our dogs—but not all tins are created equal. Many wet foods are bulked out with cereals, unnamed meat derivatives, and low-quality fillers that do little for your dog's health.

To see what your dog is really eating, check the ingredients list.

Because wet food is usually cooked twice—once before packaging and again under pressure to preserve it—some natural nutrients may be lost or become less bioavailable.



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RAW FOOD (BARF / PMR)

What It Is:

Raw food diets aim to mimic a dog's ancestral diet and include raw meat, bones, offal, and sometimes vegetables or supplements. BARF (Biologically Appropriate Raw Food) includes plant matter; PMR (Prey Model Raw) excludes it.

How It's Made:

- Fresh meat, bones, organs, vegetables, and fruit are minced, then frozen to preserve the nutrients
- Sold as DIY ingredients or complete blends

Pros:

- Species-appropriate and minimally processed
- Smaller, fewer poos
- Supports skin, coat, digestion, and dental health
- Can be tailored to individual needs
- Experience increased cognitive function



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Cons:

- Requires freezer and fridge space
- Needs to be handled correctly
- Needs to be balanced correctly (especially DIY)



Raw feeding is growing in popularity—and for good reason. It's the closest thing to what dogs were naturally designed to eat. A good raw food should be made up of fresh, species-appropriate ingredients like meat, bone, and organ, without any fillers, grains, or artificial additives.

When choosing a raw food, check the label to make sure it contains clearly named ingredients. You want to see a balance of meat, bone, and offal, ideally from a single protein source to start with. Avoid products that use vague terms or add unnecessary extras like rice or vegetable oils.



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COLD-PRESSED FOOD

What It Is:

Cold-pressed food is gently made by pressing ingredients together at low temperatures (40–70°C), preserving more nutrients than kibble and breaking down more naturally in the gut.

How It's Made:

- Ingredients ground and mixed
- Pressed at low temperatures into pellets

Pros:

- Easier to digest than kibble
- Retains more nutrients than extruded dry food
- Compact and shelf-stable

Cons:

- Still dry—low moisture
- Can be rich for sensitive tummies
- Ingredient quality varies by brand



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LIGHTLY COOKED FOOD

What It Is:

Lightly cooked food is prepared at lower temperatures than traditional wet or dry food, often around 80–90°C. This gentle process helps preserve nutrients while offering the convenience of cooked meals.

How It's Made:

- Steamed or slow-cooked
- Usually frozen or chilled
- Vacuum-packed for freshness

Pros:

- Retains more nutrients than high-heat cooked food
- Easier to digest for sensitive stomachs
- No raw handling required

Cons:

- Needs fridge/freezer space
- Can be pricey
- May need supplementing for complete balance



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AIR-DRIED FOOD

What It Is:

Air-dried food is gently dehydrated raw food. Moisture is slowly removed without high heat, allowing nutrients to remain intact. It offers the benefits of raw but with easier storage.

How It's Made:

Ingredients laid out and dried at low temps over hours
Kills pathogens while preserving nutritional value

Pros:

- Nutrient-rich and shelf-stable
- High in meat content
- Mess-free raw alternative

Cons:

- Expensive
- Can be too rich for some dogs
- Must be portioned carefully



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FREEZE-DRIED FOOD

What It Is:

Freeze-dried food is raw food frozen and then dried using vacuum pressure. This removes water without heating, preserving nutrients and enzymes.

How It's Made:

- Frozen first
- Water is removed through sublimation (no cooking)

Pros:

Long shelf life

Raw nutrition without the freezer

Lightweight and travel-friendly

Cons:

Very expensive

Needs rehydrating for some dogs

Not as widely available



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How to Choose?

That depends on your dog's needs and your lifestyle. Ask yourself:

- Does your dog have allergies or digestive issues?
- Are they fussy or food motivated?
- Do you want something fresh or convenient?
- What's your budget and freezer space like?

Sometimes, the best choice is a mix of options—like kibble with fresh toppers, or raw in the morning and lightly cooked at night.

✗ Common Myths (and the Truth)

✗ *“Kibble cleans teeth”* – Not really. Most dogs swallow it whole.

✗ *“Grain-free is always better”* – Not if it's just full of potatoes or peas.

✗ *“Raw is dangerous”* – Only if done poorly. Balanced, hygienic raw diets can be incredibly beneficial.

✗ *“Wet food is more nutritious”* – Not always—many are overcooked and low in protein.



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Final Thoughts

There's no one "right" way to feed your dog—just the most informed one. This guide is here to help you choose the food that fits your dog's needs, your values, and your lifestyle.

And if you're curious about raw feeding or looking to add fresh foods to your dog's bowl...

👉 Download our Raw & Natural Feeding Beginner's Guide here: [Download our Raw & Natural Feeding Beginner's Guide](#)

Still not sure what to feed your dog?

As a trainee canine nutritionist, I can help!

Email me at info@pawsonalhealth.co.uk or follow me on social media for honest, dog-first advice and natural product support.

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