

Feeding the Fluffy Bichon Frise

Learn how to choose the best food for your Bichon.

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How do you know your Bichon's food contains all the necessary nutrients? If you're feeding a commercially prepared food, just read the label. A food can't be labeled as complete and balanced or nutritionally complete unless it has been demonstrated in feeding trials or by meeting specific nutritional requirements. The Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) controls both processes. This organization develops the nutritional requirements called nutrient profiles based on the most current canine nutritional information. The label must also state the particular purpose or group for which the food is intended, such as puppies, seniors or adult maintenance.

The nutritional analysis on the package lists protein, fat, fiber and moisture contents, as well as other information. The percentages are as fed values for the food as it comes from the sack or can. Protein and fat are listed as minimum values; fiber and moisture (water) are listed as maximum values. Carbohydrate content isn't listed, because it's everything that isn't protein, fat, fiber and moisture.

Protein levels in commercial dry foods usually range from about 23 to 26 percent for adult maintenance and 26 to 30 percent for growth and reproduction; for canned foods, the values are about 7 to 9 percent (adult maintenance) and 9 to 13 percent (growth and reproduction). The fat content of commercial dry foods ranges from 9 to 10 percent for adult maintenance and up to 20 percent or more for growth and reproduction; for canned foods, fat content ranges from about 2 to 3 percent for adult maintenance up to 8 percent or more for growth and reproduction. The dry food values are larger than those for canned food, but that's just because dry food contains less water; the values are actually similar when compared on a dry matter basis.

The label's nutritional information refers to crude protein and crude fat amounts analyzed in the laboratory. This analysis, although technically accurate, doesn't tell you how much of the nutrient your Bichon can actually use (digestible content). You can obtain information about the actual digestible content by contacting the manufacturer. Many manufacturers have 800 numbers or websites listed on their labels.

The ingredient list on a food label shows the ingredients in descending order by weight. It may include several different forms of a single ingredient (for example, ground corn and corn gluten meal). The protein may be derived from beef, chicken or other animals. The food may contain meat by-products, meat and bone meal, and animal fat, which may not appeal to you, but are nevertheless nutritious and safe for your Bichon. It's preferable to have meat or meat products near the top of the ingredient list (unless it's a vegetarian food), but you shouldn't worry about grain products, as long as the label indicates that the food is nutritionally complete. Contrary to popular belief, dogs are omnivores and need both plant and animal foods for optimal health.