

Kibble or Canned?

The ultimate question about Fido's diet is a contention of worry for dog guardians, but one that is not always discussed.

By **Lucy Postins**

How's a guardian to choose? If you've shopped around for pet food in recent years, you might have noticed there are now more categories than ever before. New foods in frozen, dehydrated and freeze-dried formats offer many different benefits over conventional processed foods. Yet kibble and canned diets continue to reign as the major players in a multi-billion dollar industry.

Kibble, or dry food, is baked or extruded using high heat and pressure, making hard brown chunks or "nuggets." Wet food is soft and moist, usually packaged in a can but sometimes in a flexible retort pouch.

The main advantage of a kibble diet is convenience. Kibble takes almost no time to scoop out of the bag and into Fido's bowl; it's quick, clean and simple. Canned foods offer relative convenience over frozen or dehydrated diets that require special storage or the addition of water before serving. However, canned foods do have to be refrigerated after opening, which makes them slightly less convenient than kibble.

Some kibble manufacturers claim that kibble helps keep teeth clean, as Fido crunches it and tartar gets scraped off. This, sadly, is a myth. Wouldn't it be great if consuming crunchy cookies helped to keep our teeth clean, too?

The main advantage of canned food is its naturally high moisture content, which more closely emulates the diet that nature intended and means it will not swell in the stomach. This may make it better suited for bloat-prone breeds as well as those prone to urinary tract infections or blockages, because the extra moisture helps to keep the urinary system flushed out. A wet food diet is often the best choice for senior pets or those with dental issues or missing teeth, but some guardians re-

port concerns about wet diets contributing to increased tartar buildup on the teeth.

One "con" of kibble is the fact that it is such a uniform, homogenous product; it's hard to identify what's really in those smooth brown chunks. Proponents of a fresh or non-conventional diet, such as raw or homemade food where variety is king, liken kibble consumption to a monotonous diet of nothing but processed breakfast cereal for themselves. No one wants that!

Canned foods can be more costly than kibble, especially for larger breed dogs, but there are some quality products on the market that use real, identifiable whole food pieces in their recipes—reassurance for those guardians made nervous by the visual mysteries of kibble. On the down side, some owners report that they dislike the smell of canned food, and some wet diets cause particularly malodorous or loose stools, which can be off-putting. Stool quality in kibble-fed dogs can be better than for those fed canned food, often because of the beet pulp used to reduce stool volume and facilitate "easy pick-up."

It's worth remembering, however, that what is appealing to us guardians isn't necessarily optimal for Fido. In determining what sort of diet to feed the dog in your life, his individual needs must be taken into account. There are no fixed rules about what feeding format is best for specific groups of dogs. As a general guide, a varied diet is usually best, so Fido has a chance to absorb nutrients from lots of different sources just as we do. **ff**

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The Silent Ingredient

A dollar saved is a dollar burned.

Costs vary dramatically on store shelves, but nowadays price isn't always the best indicator of quality. Some of the lower-end brands have undergone double-digit price increases in the last couple of years in response to fluctuating commodity costs for the grain fractions and other processed ingredients that go into their products. Home-cooked, raw or other novel food types may seem expensive to start off, but many guardians find the savings come later, in the form of reduced vet bills.

The ingredients panel should always be the first place to look, regardless of the diet format you plan to feed. It should contain lots of real, recognizable ingredients that you eat, too. It's worth paying more for a good quality product to reduce the risk of health problems related to poor diet later in life.

Some animal guardians like to feed a combination of both kibble and canned foods, which can offer the benefit of a slightly more palatable and higher moisture meal, and may be more economical to feed than canned (or fresh) foods alone.



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