

Watch Out for This Pet Food Ingredient – It Can Pile on the Flab

Pet food makers are touting it as a nutrient-dense protein to try to impress you, but no matter how you dress it, it's not suitable for your dog or cat. Instead, it can create havoc if fed in large enough quantities, contributing to obesity, diabetes and other health problems.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Pet food producers continue their quest to find cheap ingredients with marketing potential. Today's example: millet
- The pet food industry may be gearing up to present millet as an ingredient with "good protein quality" that is "nutrient dense"
- Millet is a cereal grain, making it biologically inappropriate nutrition for carnivorous cats and dogs; it also has other problems as an ingredient in pet food
- Optimal nutrition for dogs and cats closely mimics their ancestral diet, not the latest-and-greatest discovery in cheap plant-based ingredients

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A headline in [pet food industry](#) journal reads:

"Millet: An alternative ingredient in dog and cat food? With good protein quality and more fat than most grains, millet has the potential to serve as an 'alternative' ingredient in pet food."

Here's how the above headlined article starts:

"Millet is a small seed commonly associated with wild bird food. Its inclusion in pet foods may seem less than serious as it pertains to food production and nutritional support, but it may actually be one of the more nutrient dense of the cereal grains. Because of this, including millet as a new ingredient in dog and cat foods in order to stay competitive is something that progressive pet food companies may want to consider."

The watchwords here are:

- Good protein quality
- Nutrient dense
- New ingredient

- Stay competitive
- Progressive pet food companies

One of the first questions many of you probably had when you read those words was, "Wild bird food? Why would I feed my meat-loving cat or dog wild bird food?" Exactly!

Millet Doesn't Belong in Dog and Cat Food — Here Are the Reasons Why

1. **Millet is a cereal grain** — Cereal grains are biologically inappropriate ingredients in dog and cat food, especially in significant quantities. Grains are always included in the total protein content of commercial pet foods, even though they aren't a beneficial type of protein for dogs and cats.

If you're buying pet food that contains grains, it's important to understand that the "crude protein" percentage in the guaranteed analysis on the package label includes both animal and plant protein, and manufacturers aren't required to reveal how much protein is derived from animals versus plants.

2. **Millet is a carbohydrate** — Carbs are non-essential simple sugars and when they're included in your pet's diet, especially in large amounts, they can lead to blood sugar fluctuations, insulin resistance, obesity, diabetes and other health problems. Carbohydrate intake above your dog's or cat's daily needs will be stored as body fat.
3. **Millet is plant-based protein** — The pet food industry promotes plant-based and animal protein as equally nutritious sources of protein for cats and dogs. Don't be fooled. Dogs and cats need 22 amino acids, which are the building blocks of protein, to be healthy.

Your dog's body can make 12 of the 22; cats make 11. The remaining amino acids must come from the food they eat. The protein in animal tissue has a complete amino acid profile; plant protein does not.

As **carnivores**, neither dogs nor kitties have the physiological ability to turn plant proteins into the missing pieces needed for a complete amino acid profile.

The protein sources with wide-spectrum amino acid profiles include beef, bison, chicken, eggs, fish, lamb, turkey, duck, venison, elk and goat. Protein is a crucial component of every cell in your pet's body. Essential amino acids from high-quality animal protein build healthy cells, organs, muscles, enzymes and hormones.

4. **Millet is a magnet for mycotoxins** — Mycotoxins are noxious chemical substances produced by certain types of fungi that infect crops, and U.S. pet food manufacturers are being advised to monitor the quality of these ingredients going into their products. Aflatoxins are naturally occurring mycotoxins produced by certain fungi. They can cause acute toxic illness and cancer in animals and humans. Cats and dogs are more sensitive to aflatoxins than many other animals.

Aflatoxins frequently contaminate agricultural crops before harvesting. Conditions that promote contamination include high temperatures, prolonged periods of drought and insect activity. Aflatoxins can also be a problem after a harvest of damp crops, and they can grow on stored crops if the moisture level is too high and mold develops. Pearl millet is one of the most frequently contaminated agricultural crops.

Progressive Pet Food Companies Should Consider Adding Millet in Their Products to Stay Competitive

You certainly can't blame pet food companies for wanting to stay competitive, but wouldn't it be nice if more of them were competing to produce **fresh, nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate food** for dogs and cats? That would truly be progressive of them.

Today, the most advanced and enlightened pet food producers are the ones creating fresh food diets for pets — raw, gently cooked, dehydrated, freeze-dried. They certainly aren't busy promoting biologically inappropriate, cheap grains like millet as "new ingredients" in their formulas.

Instead, they're creating pet food that mimics, as closely as possible, the ancestral diets of pets. Wild dogs and cats thrive on fresh, living, whole foods that are moisture-dense, high in protein and minerals and with moderate to low amounts of high-quality animal fat (NOT plant-based fat like the fat in millet and other grains) and a very low percentage of carbohydrates.

Optimal Nutrition for Dogs and Cats

Think of it this way: There are nutrients that are absolutely necessary for your pet to not only survive but truly thrive, and there are nutrients that are completely unnecessary and even harmful over the long haul. Dogs and cats need quality animal protein and fats, and a small amount of vegetables and fruits, which provide antioxidants and fiber to animals that no longer hunt whole prey.

Natural sources of trace minerals, vitamins and fatty acids must be added, since the soils in which foods are grown are depleted of many of the nutrients pets need. Also, food storage, whether it's in a freezer or a pantry, decreases critical essential fatty acid levels in foods. Pets DON'T need grains, fillers, artificial preservatives, colors, additives, chemicals, by-products or processed foods. Although animals can eat some processed foods, they aren't designed to consume a lifetime of dry or canned diets.

The reality is most pets live their whole lives without consuming any living foods. They eat an entirely processed diet from birth to death. There are a number of reasons for this. Not everyone believes food matters to overall health, and many people simply don't correlate disease with diet.

In addition, veterinarians don't receive an objective education in animal nutrition. As a result, they aren't doing their job of helping pet parents make wise nutritional choices for their animal companions.

Feed Your Pet the Best Diet You Can Afford

Since everyone's financial situation is different and many people simply can't afford to feed their pet an entirely fresh food diet, set a goal to provide your pet with food she can thrive on by mimicking her ancestral diet as closely as possible without breaking the bank. For example:

- Consider a 50/50 fresh/processed split, meaning one meal a day is processed pet food, and the other is a fresh food meal
- If you can't swing 50/50, consider offering two to four fresh food meals a week
- Provide **fresh food snacks** — some fresh foods are better than none

Sources and References

[PetfoodIndustry.com](#) October 6, 2016
