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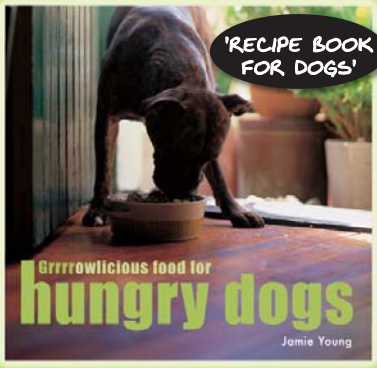
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Good Treats, Bad Treats and How Much Is Too Much?

You'd do anything for your dog or cat if you feel guilty about not taking them out, spending enough quality time with them or just to lift their spirits with a treat. Just like treating yourself at the Food Hall or deli to a 100 gram sliver of pate de foie gras from France for \$20 or a slice of Roquefort cheese for \$100 a kilo, it's comfort food isn't it?

Just the other day at David Jones I saw Italian pork for \$380 a kilo! Would you spend \$100-\$200 a kilo for pate, salami, dried or smoked meats or other treats at a deli? Would you eat treats loaded with fat, salt and sugar as well as preservatives, chemicals and 'flavour enhancers' if you were paying \$40-\$90 a kilo for it. You wouldn't feed it to a dog, surely!

Well, a lot of consumers are unknowingly doing just that with the range of pet treats being broadcast to them on TV and radio, advertised on bus shelters, billboards and print media as well as promoted at pet expos and through special displays at pet stores. Consumers often buy based on what's touted to them in media as well as its positioning in the most convenient place they shop—the supermarket. Aside from the high prices if you do your maths, the contents of many pet treats—whether from multinational companies or local manufacturers—contain alarming amounts of additives in addition to hidden dangers of contamination. But you may not be able to read it.

Last Sunday, I accidentally found myself in the Newtown IGA pet food aisle which is off to the side where I seldom go. Looking at the pet treats I'd likely never feed my pets proved to be an eye opener! It's easy to be dazzled by the colourful packaging and cartoonish pets on the wrappers.

The first treat on offer at eye level was three pigs ears in a pack for \$5.49 which weighed 50 grams and equated to \$110 a kilo. They were labelled as 'pet health treats' as were the ones of dried lamb by the same Australian manufacturer which were \$5.09 for 75 grams or close to \$70 a kilo. Aside from the fat content which wasn't revealed on the wrapper, there are other ingredients not shown.

Fancy some dried pig snouts with flavourings? I saw a small packet of All Pet brand and thought it seemed like a mini-snack. At \$3.15 for 15 grams, it comes in at a whopping \$210 per kilo!!! The cost of materials is a small fraction of that price so its packaging, advertising and markups? Often, treats from major multinational companies that advertise heavily on TV and radio cost far more than locally made treats or even 'gourmet' treats made by small pet food crafts people.

For example, a 100 gram pack of two beefhide chews next to the snouts cost \$4.59 or \$46 a kilo while another pack of two small ground rawhide bones—which also contained rice, sugar, salt and preservatives—came in at \$3.75 for 80 grams or \$46 a kilo. These were imported from Thailand. Simple dried fish for cats next to it was \$2.78 for 85 grams or almost \$33 a kilo when fresh sardines are less than a fourth that price at the Fish Market.

A well known snack food which is made to look for people like bacon strips for dogs is \$3.95 for a 100 gram pack which is \$40 a kilo, while Schmackos strips come in at \$2.89 for 96 grams or a whopping \$30 a kilo. And these are supermarket prices for standard range items. I can buy prime filet steak for that. I wonder if most people who buy these know what they're paying for them.

But it's not just the price that will kill you. Pigs ears have been proven to be contaminated by salmonella. Oddly enough, it was first brought out by Danish farmers who were trying to cull their swine herds of salmonella and discovered the herd contamination came from commercial pig's ear treats they were feeding their dogs. Anecdotal evidence from US health sources show children have been infected by handling them as well. While Australian and North American made pigs ears may have high standards, it's the ones made in third world countries and imported here that can be a danger to people and pets. Many so called 'natural' treats have tested positive to e.coli and picking them from open bulk bins can be like playing Rover Roulette.

Canine treats such as rawhides, dried beef and jerky treats can also harbour bacteria, and can grow fungus, moulds and toxins if they are not properly prepared, dried long enough, or if they are packaged and exposed to sunlight on display, causing them to sweat and turn rancid or go off. Rawhides have little or no nutritional value except some are high in fat and kilojoules and many have excessive amounts of sugar, salt, questionable preservatives or 'flavourings'. In addition, corn, wheat and soy flours which are used as filler in ground rawhide formed bones are three of the biggest culprits in food allergies.

One example of a product touted as a meat product is labelled as Real Chicken treats made from: Meat from Chicken & Beef, Wholemeal Flour, Wheat Bran, Soya Flour, Corn Flour, Sugar, Preservatives, Flavouring, Vitamins & Minerals with six straps weighing 50 grams at \$1.15 coming out to \$23 a kilo.

Very few pet treats are labelled with nutritional information, but Schmackos Bakon Stripz did have a breakdown of Protein (15%), Fiber (3.5%), Fat (4%) and moisture (24%) but not carbohydrates which would have been greater than 50%. I also found a very basic ingredient list on the pack which was not that easy to read and buried in the print.

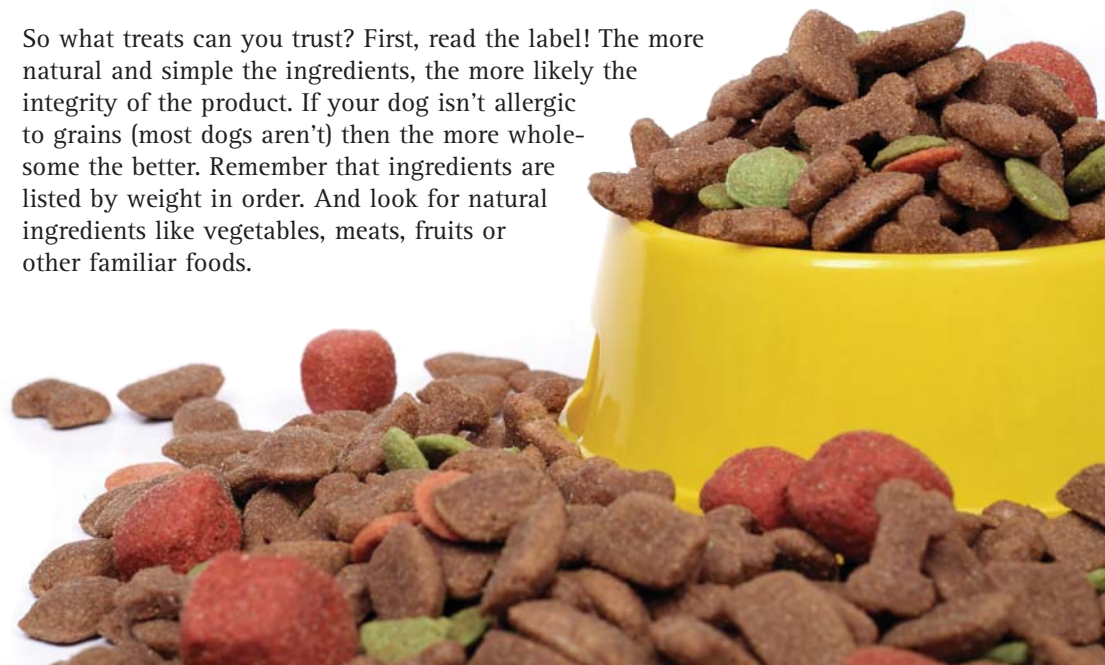
But what was most revealing online at their site (if you could find it) is the true breakdown of ingredients: wheat flour, soy grits, water, sugar, corn flour, bacon, animal fat (preserved with bha, citric acid), glycerin, hydrogenated corn starch hydrolysate, salt, natural bacon and smoke flavours, phosphoric acid, calcium carbonate, sorbic acid (a preservative), calcium propionate (a preservative), color added (titanium dioxide, yellow #6, red #40, red #3, and blue #2), and lecithin. This is all on the website, but not on the label. Notice the first five ingredients are not meat but grains, water and sugar. It's the equivalent of pet junk food.

Also online, its companion pet snack Mini Bones contained rice flour, wheat flour, corn grits, sugar, water, glycerin, animal fat (preserved with bha, bht), propylene glycol, dried beef, natural poultry flavor, potassium chloride, caramel color, salt, natural smoke flavor, sorbic acid (a preservative), potassium sorbate (a preservative), soy protein isolate and iron oxide. Would you eat this?

Aside from the fact water and sugar were greater ingredients by weight than any meat products, BHA and BHT have been found to promote liver and kidney disease as well as other health problems while the colours in the product are more to attract humans than dogs. Propylene glycol may be familiar to you as the key ingredient in automobile antifreeze while another ingredient often found in treats, ethoxyquin, is a suspected carcinogen.

I don't mean to scare anyone away from pet treats. But when the trend is to buy those bright red bags of endearingly illustrated treats with the familiar theme song and zany catchphrase, reading the ingredients is probably the last thing most shoppers do in the feel good purchase. Like many shoppers, it's either a guilt or comfort food purchase, a reward, maybe even something a little naughty. In the end, it's junk food.

So what treats can you trust? First, read the label! The more natural and simple the ingredients, the more likely the integrity of the product. If your dog isn't allergic to grains (most dogs aren't) then the more wholesome the better. Remember that ingredients are listed by weight in order. And look for natural ingredients like vegetables, meats, fruits or other familiar foods.








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← LARGE 16cm BARS →

Flavours:

Natural Lamb & Rice with Liver Chips
Natural Chicken & Rice with Liver Chips

Nutritional Profile

Added Vitamins & Minerals

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- Magnesium
- Potassium Chloride
- Sodium Chloride
- Biotin
- Manganese
- Ferrous Sulphate
- Copper
- Iodine
- Selenium
- Zinc Sulphate
- Vitamin A
- Vitamin D3
- Vitamin K
- Natural Vitamin E (tocopherol acetate)
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K9 Kooler—just the cool summer treat they relish

- 2 cups vanilla yogurt
- 1 mashed banana or a large jar of baby fruit
- 2 tablespoons peanut butter

Method:
Blend all together and freeze in either paper cups or ice cube trays. Serve in a bowl to prevent stains and stickies.

Kitty Kookies


- 1 cup whole wheat flour
- 1/4 cup soy flour
- 2 tablespoons wheat germ
- 1 teaspoon catnip
- 1/3 cup powdered milk
- 1 egg
- 1/3 cup milk
- 1 tablespoon unsulphured molasses
- 2 tablespoons butter or vegetable oil

Method:
Preheat oven to 180 degrees C.
Mix dry ingredients together. Add egg, oil, milk and molasses. Roll out flat onto oiled cookie sheet and cut into small, cat bite-size pieces. Bake for 20 minutes. Cool and store in tightly sealed container.

If you can't pronounce it, your pet probably shouldn't eat it. Though some chemical sounding names may actually be vitamins, less harmful preservative or legitimate ingredients, do your research. The more prominent and proudly ingredients are printed, the better the odds it's not a canine or cat chemical cocktail. Look at the country of origin. If it's a meat or hide product, it's come a long way over time to get here and some overseas pet food products have no regulation or reliable inspection at all. Best to check if it's locally made or determine its origin.


We are fortunate in the Sydney region to have a broad range of local treat makers who take pride in their product which may actually be less dear than the more commercial counterparts. You'll often find these treats at pet stores, vets, markets, health food stores and specialty shops as well as being available online or from pet food delivery companies. We can't name our favourites, but we've tried just about all the local pet treat companies' products, or at least our pets have, and we haven't heard any complaints yet? Unless they're begging and howling for more!

Check out the Internet Interpet column on page 27 for information on Pet Food Ingredients.




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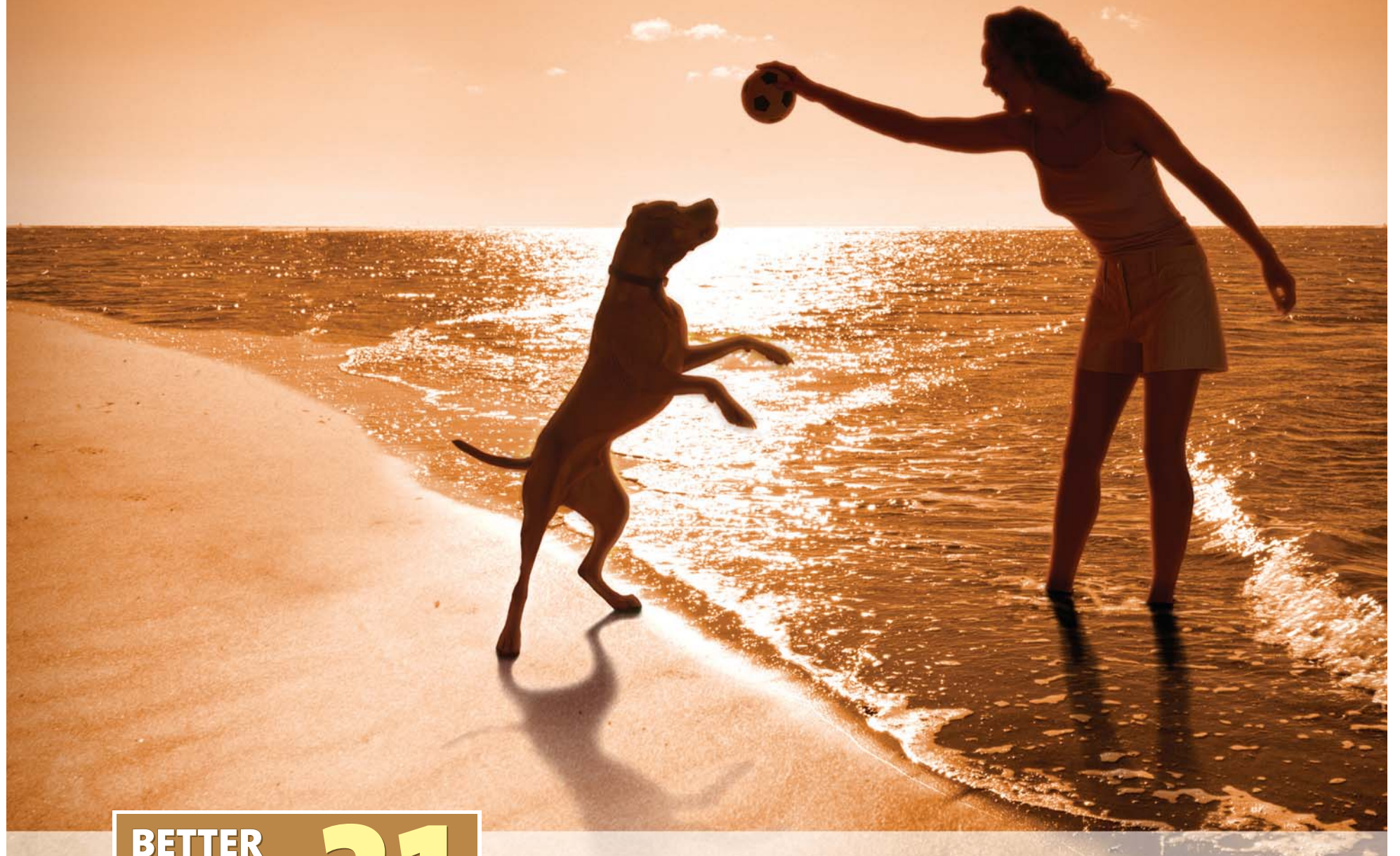
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