

# Taking a Good Diet History



An accurate, comprehensive diet history is part of a nutritional assessment that helps determine if a pet's overall diet is nutritionally complete and balanced – and optimal for that specific pet. Completeness is also essential for developing and delivering effective dietary recommendations. In addition, a thorough diet history provides information about how human family members use food in interactions with the pet.

When using questions to elicit information from clients, it is not enough to ask the right questions – although knowing what questions to ask is important. As it turns out, how questions are phrased can influence the quantity and quality of the client's response. Using a variety of open-ended questions in a funnel technique (i.e., from broad to focused) can help draw out more quality information.

## Key Messages

- A detailed diet history gives an accurate account of **ALL** foods fed to a pet on a typical day. Thoroughness and accuracy are essential for determining if the diet is nutritionally complete, balanced and appropriate for the pet's life stage and health status. The diet history should include:
  - brand, form and flavor(s) of pet food, including amount, how it is measured, frequency of meals and how long the pet has been eating the food
  - all brands, types, amounts and frequency of snacks or treats, including dental chews
  - amounts and frequency of human foods or table scraps
  - brand and type of nutritional supplements (e.g., toppers, probiotics, glucosamine and chondroitin)
  - flavored or chewable medications
  - food for medication administration
  - type of chew toys
  - access to other food sources (e.g., other pets in the home, neighbors)
  - toothpaste
- A diet history form that the client completes at home and returns to the clinic prior to the appointment gives the veterinary health care team an opportunity to review the diet history ahead of time. It also saves time during the consultation, or appointment, for clarifying details or filling information gaps.
- Studies have shown pet owners provide more information and details when the diet history interview is approached from the client's viewpoint.
  - Broad, open-ended, "telling" questions tend to draw out more information – for example, "Tell me about everything [pet's name] eats during a day, starting first thing in the morning and ending at bedtime."
  - More focused, yet open-ended, "specifying" questions – for example, "What treats does [pet's name] get and when?" – are helpful for following up on specific food items or feeding practices.

- Close-ended questions can be used for clarifying details – for example, "Is [pet's name] interested in food?"

## Additional Resources

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The Purina Institute aims to help put nutrition at the forefront of pet health discussions by providing user-friendly, science-based information that helps pets live longer, healthier lives.

