

What Should Fauves Eat?

by Laura Liscum, PhD | October 2025

In the last newsletter, I wrote about how to evaluate your Fauve's weight and calorie needs based upon a seminar I heard by Valerie Parker, DVM, Professor of Veterinary Clinical Sciences at the Ohio State University Veterinary Medical Center. Dr. Parker is a Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine (DACVIM) and the American College of Veterinary Nutrition (DACVN). Her seminar also included information on how to choose a dog food and that is what we will consider here.

Feed your Fauve a quality complete and balanced diet. When you walk down the aisle of any pet food store, you are faced with a dizzying array of choices. Dr. Parker said that reputable commercial dog food companies are those with a full-time ACVN board certified veterinary nutritionist on staff. The companies should have a research and development department, have excellent quality control standards, freely provide full nutrient profiles for their foods, and have conducted feeding trials to test their formulation. You and I cannot carry out the evaluation of each commercial dog food company; however, that is the job of the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO), which regulates the sale and distribution of animal feeds. AAFCO has established guidelines for nutrient profiles and labels for pet foods (www.aaafco.org/Consumers).

When choosing a pet food, examine the AAFCO adequacy statement on the label. It should state whether the diet is complete and balanced and, if so, for what life stages. The bulk of your dog's meal should be a food labeled "complete and balanced". If the label says, "intermittent or supplemental use only", then the food is appropriate for a specific purpose only, e.g. kidney disease or weight loss, or as a small supplement to the diet. It is



Was that the dinner bell I heard?

Quintessa D'Aahroo (Tess)
Photo by Alpha Dog Media Group

not meant to be a complete and balanced diet for a healthy dog. Your dog should eat food appropriate for his/her life stage (labeled growth, reproduction, and adult maintenance), not one labeled for all life stages. A food labeled for all life stages will have the calories needed for growing puppies, which is way too much for an adult dog. Also, Dr. Parker said that there is no need to switch your dog to a senior diet if he/she is healthy. In fact, there is no standardization of senior diets. Foods labeled senior typically have some supplemental ingredients, but they are in trace amounts. If your dog is feeling his/her age, ask your vet about an appropriate supplement that you can mix into the food in the appropriate amount.

It is important to examine the ingredient list on the dog food label. The ingredients are listed by weight

starting with the heaviest. Some people avoid foods that contain poultry or beef by-products. Dr. Parker said that there is nothing inherently wrong with specific by-products. By-products are heat-treated and processed into meal in order to prevent microbial contamination from the raw meat. Good quality meal that comes from a reputable provider is an excellent source of concentrated protein for your dog.

Grain free dog foods are currently very popular; however, Dr. Parker said that grain free is a marketing strategy. These diets were developed in response to owner preference, not to the nutritional needs of our dogs. They are formulated without common grains such as wheat, rice, corn, and barley. Grains provide a nutritious source of carbohydrates, essential amino acids and fatty acids. So when grains are removed, something has to replace them. Many grain-free diets add pulses (e.g., peas, lentils, chickpeas) to the food. Grain free is often marketed as more 'natural' since dogs did not evolve to eat grains. But dogs did not evolve to eat peas either! We'll talk more about grain-free diets at the end of this article.

Dr. Parker stressed that treats should account for no more than 10% of your dog's caloric intake. Milkbones, rawhides, jerky sticks, Pup-peroni treats, etc. are all rich in calories! She suggested some low calorie options, such as Charlee Bear treats or limited amounts of the dog's normal kibble.

What if I want to cook for my Fauve?

Many people prefer not to feed their dogs commercial dog foods; instead, they prepare home-cooked diets or raw diets.

One resource that I go to for information on pet nutrition is *Petfoodology*
<https://sites.tufts.edu/petfoodology/>

Dr. Parker said that there are numerous books that describe homemade diets. Unfortunately, the recipes in most of these diet books do not provide the balanced nutrition that your dog needs. If you are making home-cooked meals for your dog, Dr. Parker recommended that you consult with a veterinary nutritionist. Alternatively, a website that might be helpful is the Balance.it database of recipes. Go to the Balance.it website, click on the basic ingredients you want to use and the program will give you recipe options. For example, I selected chicken breast, brown rice, coconut oil, and green beans. Next I chose the mid-range protein/carb option and adjusted for the weight of my dog. The program indicated that I needed to add a supplement to supply the vitamins, nutrients, and minerals that are essential for my dog but missing from my ingredients. (The supplements can be purchased from the BalanceIT website.) There are even cooking videos that demonstrate how to make a nutritious dog meal. Dr. Parker said that the problem with this recipe database is that often the meals have too high a calorie count.

What about raw diets? Safe handling of raw meat, or commercial foods coated with raw meat, is a major concern with this diet. Dr. Parker said that the dogs eating a raw diet are not usually affected by the bacteria present, such as salmonella; instead, the person preparing the meal and the dog's family are at risk. Whether feeding a homemade or commercial raw dog food, it is important to use safe kitchen food-handling practices.

Dogs who are fed commercial raw diets can also develop diet related hyperthyroidism if the food contains the thyroid gland of slaughtered animals. This is rare, but if you notice the symptoms of canine hyperthyroidism (weight loss, aggressiveness, rapid heart rate, panting, restlessness) consult your veterinarian immediately.

Are dietary supplements necessary? Supplements for dog (and human!) health are a completely unregulated business. The only supplement that Dr. Parker would consider for a healthy dog is a low dose of fish oil that contains omega-3 fatty acids. Dogs with heart disease typically receive a 1-gram capsule that contains 300 mg of fish oil per 10 lb. of body weight. Healthy dogs should be given half that dose. When asked about probiotic supplements, Dr. Parker said that the probiotic she usually recommends for digestive issues is Purina Fortiflora.

Update on grain-free diets. It has been shown that diets that are high in pulses (e.g., peas, lentils, chickpeas), are linked to increased risk of dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM) in dogs. Many studies have been conducted to determine the clinical characteristics of diet associated DCM, its outcomes, and the dietary ingredients that cause the disease. It has recently been shown that dogs with diet-associated DCM have a lipid accumulation in their heart tissue that points to a possible mechanism for heart damage (Freeman et al., 2025). In addition, they found a specific lipid in the urine of dogs on a high-pulse diet, which may serve as a biomarker, or indication that heart muscle is undergoing damage.

Not every dog fed a diet rich in pulses develops DCM. Identification of a biomarker means that a future urine test might pinpoint which dogs are developing heart damage and should be switched to another diet.
