

# What is the best dog food or puppy food? Experts recommend these top four brands.

Our furry babies are important to us, and that's why many pet parents will do whatever it takes to [feed their dogs](#) the best food possible.

However, walking down the aisles at the grocery store can be overwhelming with all of the different brands and types of food available – so what is the best [dog food](#) and what can you look for to feel confident you're feeding your dog the best?

We talked to the experts about what will keep your dog [happy and healthy](#).

## What is the best dog food?

[Current FDA regulations on pet food](#) are not enough to ensure that your pet's food is nutritionally balanced, so it is easy to buy food that is poorly made or doesn't meet nutritional requirements, according to veterinarian Diana Watkins, owner of 143 Veterinary Services in Massachusetts. However, there is an organization called the Association of American Feed Control Offices ([AAFCO](#)) that has created guidelines companies can choose to follow if they wish.

It is hard to say what the outright best dog food is but there are ways that you can tell you are feeding your pup regulated food that will be better for them than anything else.

“You always want to make sure that your pet food meets the nutritional needs for either a growing puppy or an adult dog put forth by AAFCO,” Watkins said. “That's a minimum – if they are not meeting the guidelines of AAFCO I would run the other way.”

AAFCO also has feeding trials, where companies can have their food fed to a colony of dogs and then show how a dog responds to life with that nutritional feed, according to Watkins.

You can tell if a certain brand of dog food has been approved by AAFCO and gone through a feeding trial by reading near the label, where these [statements will be shown](#): “[Product Name] is formulated to meet the nutritional levels established by the AAFCO dog food nutrient profiles” and “Animal feeding tests using AAFCO procedures substantiate that [Product Name] provides complete and balanced nutrition.”

“When you start to look at all the foods, you want to find one that follows AAFCO guidelines, goes through the feeding trials and has an actual nutritionist, ideally, a veterinary nutritionist,” Watkins said.

## Best dog food brands

As recommended by Watkins, these are the so-called "big four" pet food brands that are regulated and are among the best options for your pet:

- [Hill's Science Diet](#)

- [Iams](#)
- [Royal Canin](#)
- [Purina \(Purina Pro Plan Level\)](#)

Within those brands, it's ideal to choose the food that best matches the size of your dog, whether that is a small or large breed, Watkins said.

“If you have a large breed dog you do want a specific large breed formulation because it has a different ratio of calories to make it so the dog doesn't grow too rapidly and it makes them less susceptible to orthopedic issues,” she said.

Similarly, if you have a smaller breed, you would want to choose a "small bites" option for the smaller pups to manage the size of the kibble.

## Best puppy foods

While the "big four" all offer a puppy meal, Watkins prefers [Purina Pro Plan Puppy](#) or [Hills Science Diet Puppy](#) because they are the most straightforward. Owners can choose a small or large breed in that puppy food as well.

When your pup is really small, it is best to moisten their kibble or mix it with a wet version of the same food, Watkins said. This allows the puppies to continue to teeth and have the food be kinder to their teeth and gums.

**Keep your pup safe:** [Human foods that are safe \(or toxic\) for dogs](#)

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