



HOUND'S HEARTH

The Honest Dog Nutrition Guide

What's actually worth buying, how much your dog needs, when supplements help, and what to do about the itchy dog.

A free guide from Hound's Hearth.
Vet-aware. Marketing-free. Yours to keep.





WELCOME

Honest guidance, not hype.

We built Hound's Hearth because the pet aisle is loud. Bags promise the world; bottles promise miracles. This short guide is what we'd tell a friend over coffee — how to read a dog-food label, how much to actually feed, when a supplement earns its place, where the itchy-dog rabbit hole really leads, and a simple grooming routine. No jargon. No fear-selling. Just answers you can act on this week.

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Important. This guide is general education, not veterinary advice. If your dog has a known condition, is pregnant, or is on medication, talk with your veterinarian before changing diet or adding supplements. Anything Hound's Hearth recommends is fulfilled by our supply partner — we may earn a commission at no extra cost to you.



PART 1

Read any dog-food bag in 30 seconds

The label tells you almost everything — if you know where to look.

Start with the first five ingredients

Ingredients are listed by weight, so whatever is in positions 1–5 makes up most of the recipe. You want a **named animal protein in position one** — "deboned chicken," "salmon," "lamb" — not a vague "meat meal" and definitely not a grain.

Green flags

- A specific, named meat first ("chicken," not "meat")
- Whole foods you can picture: sweet potato, oats, carrots, blueberries
- A named fat source ("chicken fat," "salmon oil")
- An AAFCO "complete and balanced" statement on the bag

Yellow & red flags

- Corn, wheat or soy high on the list (cheap fillers; common inflammation triggers)
- Vague terms: "meat by-product," "animal digest," "added color"
- Chemical preservatives BHA, BHT or ethoxyquin (FDA-approved but debated)

***The splitting trick.** A brand may list "corn," "corn gluten meal" and "ground corn" as three separate ingredients so no single one tops the list. Add them together in your head. Same goes for "pea protein," "pea flour" and "peas."*

Words that mean nothing

"Premium," "holistic," "gourmet," and "natural" have **no legal definition** on pet food. They're packaging language. Judge the ingredient panel, not the front of the bag. "Grain-free" isn't automatically better either — it usually swaps grains for peas, lentils or potato. Most dogs do well on a quality recipe that includes wholesome grains like oats or brown rice. The FDA has been investigating a possible link between certain grain-free diets and a heart condition (DCM); the picture isn't fully settled, but it's a reason to be skeptical of "grain-free is better" marketing.



PART 2

How much should I actually feed?

Bag guidelines are a starting point — they're built around the average dog, not yours. Here's the math vets and nutritionists use, in plain English.

The vet formula

Start with the **Resting Energy Requirement (RER)** — the calories a dog needs at rest:

$$RER = 70 \times (\text{body weight in kg})^{0.75}$$

Multiply RER by a life-stage / activity factor to get the **Maintenance Energy Requirement (MER)** — daily calories.

Situation	Multiplier × RER
Weight loss / overweight	1.0
Senior, low activity	1.4
Neutered adult, normal activity	1.6
Intact adult, normal activity	1.8
Active adult (high activity)	2.0–5.0
Puppy 4–12 months	2.0
Puppy under 4 months	3.0
Pregnant (last 21 days)	3.0

Cups vs calories

"Two cups a day" means nothing without the kcal-per-cup printed on the bag. Divide daily calories by kcal-per-cup to get cups. Don't want the arithmetic? Our planner does it: houndshearth.com/planner.

Switching foods: the 7-day rule

- Days 1–2: 25% new, 75% old
- Days 3–4: 50/50
- Days 5–6: 75% new, 25% old
- Day 7+: 100% new

Adding a probiotic during the transition often smooths things out for sensitive guts.

Body-condition score beats any chart

Feel your dog's ribs. You should feel them under a thin layer of fat — like the back of your hand. Can't feel ribs? Trim ~10% of daily food. Too prominent? Add ~10%. Recheck in two weeks. Body condition tells you the truth that the bag can't.



PART 3

Supplements that actually earn their place

Most healthy dogs on a complete and balanced diet don't need a cabinet full of pills. Supplements work best when they're **targeting one specific issue** — not topping up a good diet that's already doing its job.

The four that tend to be worth it

Omega-3 (fish or algae oil)

The most universally useful one. Dull coat, dry skin, itchy skin, joint stiffness — omegas often help all of them within a few weeks. Look for a wild fish source with the EPA and DHA amounts printed.

Probiotics

For loose stools, gas, or a sensitive gut. Also smooths a food transition. Strain matters more than count — look for canine-targeted strains.

Joint support (glucosamine + chondroitin)

For large breeds, working breeds, and seniors. Start **before** stiffness becomes a problem; results show up over 4–8 weeks, not days.

Skin-targeted blends

For dogs whose itchy or flaky skin doesn't fully resolve from food changes alone. Usually a combo of omegas, biotin and zinc. Give it 3–4 weeks to see whether it moves the needle.

When to skip — or ask your vet first

- Stacking products that double up on the same nutrients
- Adding supplements when there's no symptom to target
- Pregnant or nursing dogs, or dogs on medication — always check with your vet
- Anything that promises a result in days — that's marketing, not biology

One supplement at a time, three to four weeks each. If you can't tell whether it's helping at the end of a month, it probably isn't the right one. Move on.



PART 4

The itchy dog: where to actually look

If your dog scratches a lot, chews at paws, or has flaky skin, it's almost always one of three things — and shampoos alone rarely fix any of them.

1. The food

Corn, wheat, soy and "by-product meal" are common inflammation triggers. If those are in the first five ingredients of your dog's bag, a single-protein recipe with whole-food carbs is the first thing we'd change. Give a clean recipe four full weeks before judging it — skin is slow.

2. The omega balance

Most kibble is heavy on omega-6 (cheap, from poultry fat and grains) and short on omega-3. That imbalance shows up on the skin. Adding a wild-fish oil topper is the cheapest, most reliable lever — coat usually looks shinier in 3–6 weeks.

3. The skin barrier itself

Grocery-store shampoos strip natural oils and leave the skin barrier raw. Switch to a gentle, sulfate-free shampoo with soothing ingredients (oatmeal, aloe, chamomile) and bathe less often — every 4–6 weeks is plenty for most dogs.

When to call the vet (not us)

- Hot spots, open sores, hair loss in patches, or visible parasites
- Itching that interrupts sleep or causes self-injury
- Anything seasonal that gets worse year after year (could be environmental allergies)
- Sudden changes after a new food, medication, or environment

Our honest take. Most "itchy dog" cases we hear about clear up with two simple moves: a cleaner-ingredient food, plus a wild-fish omega-3 topper added daily for a month. If you've done both for 4–6 weeks and there's no change, that's the signal to talk with a vet about allergy testing.



PART 5

Bathing & coat: a simple routine

You don't need a salon to keep your dog comfortable. Here's the routine we'd use, tuned by coat type.

How often to bathe

For most dogs, every 4–6 weeks is plenty. Over-bathing strips natural oils and worsens dry skin. Between baths, cleansing wipes or a deodorizing mist handle muddy paws and dog-park days.

A simple weekly check

- Brush 2–3× a week (daily for double coats during shed)
- Ears — peek inside weekly; clean only if waxy or smelly, never deep
- Skin — scan for hot spots and treat early irritation
- Nails — trim every 3–4 weeks; clicking on the floor means they're long
- Teeth — a daily dental chew or topper if you can't brush

By coat type

Coat	What it needs
Double (Husky, Golden, Lab)	Frequent brushing; never shave; de-shed seasonally
Curly (Poodle, Doodle)	Brush to the skin to prevent mats; regular trims
Short (Lab, Beagle, Boxer)	Weekly brush; easy baths; watch for dry skin
Wiry (Terriers, Schnauzer)	Brushing plus periodic hand-stripping
Long / silky (Yorkie, Shih Tzu)	Daily brushing; tear-stain care

Make grooming feel like a spa day, not a wrestling match. Go slow, reward after each step, and keep early sessions short.



PART 6

A few things we'd reach for ourselves

These are products we'd recommend to a friend — chosen because of the ingredient panel, not the marketing. They're fulfilled by our supply partner; if you buy through Hound's Hearth we may earn a small commission at no extra cost to you. Use them if they fit. Skip them if they don't.

For the itchy / sensitive dog

2-in-1 Itch-Relief Shampoo & Conditioner (Aloe, Oatmeal & Chamomile)

A sulfate-free wash that calms a stressed skin barrier without stripping natural oils. The aloe / oatmeal / chamomile combo is the gold-standard trio for irritated coats.

[View on houndshearth.com](#) →

Wild Alaskan Salmon & Pollock Oil

The most universally useful supplement we know — a real fish oil with EPA and DHA. Daily pump-on-food. Coat and skin usually look different in 3–6 weeks.

[View on houndshearth.com](#) →

Skin Support Plus

A targeted skin-and-coat blend for dogs whose itching doesn't fully resolve from food changes alone. Combines omegas, biotin and zinc. Give it 3–4 weeks.

[View on houndshearth.com](#) →

Allergy Solutions Set (Small & Medium / Large)

A bundle when you want the full reset — gentler shampoo, omega oil, and supportive supplement together. Costs less than buying separately.

[View on houndshearth.com](#) →

Not sure where to start?

Use our [Dog Planner](#) to size feeding and supplements for your dog in 60 seconds, or ask [Scout, our free advisor](#) — any question, any time.



REFERENCES

Where this guide comes from

The recommendations in this guide are drawn from veterinary-nutrition consensus sources. We've simplified the language but not the substance. If you want to dig deeper, these are the references behind it:

Selected sources

- **WSAVA Global Nutrition Committee** — Global Nutrition Guidelines for dog and cat feeding, body-condition scoring, and diet evaluation. wsava.org/nutrition
- **FEDIAF** — Nutritional Guidelines for Complete and Complementary Pet Food for Cats and Dogs (energy requirement formulas). fediaf.org
- **AAFCO** — Official Publication: ingredient definitions, "complete and balanced" claim standards, life-stage statements. aafco.org
- **National Research Council (NRC)** — Nutrient Requirements of Dogs and Cats. Foundational reference for RER and MER formulas.
- **FDA Center for Veterinary Medicine** — DCM and grain-free diet investigation updates. fda.gov/animal-veterinary
- **Veterinary Information Network (VIN)** — practicing-vet consensus on supplement use, omega-3 dosing and skin-barrier care.

Disclaimers in full

Not veterinary advice. *This guide is general education about dog nutrition, supplements and grooming. It is not a substitute for veterinary diagnosis, treatment, or individualized nutrition counseling. Always consult a licensed veterinarian about your dog's individual health before making changes, especially if your dog is pregnant, nursing, on medication, or has a known medical condition.*

No guarantees. *Individual dogs vary. Statements about typical timelines (e.g. "often improves in 3–6 weeks") describe what is commonly seen and are not a promise of results for your dog.*

Affiliate disclosure. *Products recommended in this guide are fulfilled by our supply partner, PawTree. When you buy through Hound's Hearth, we may earn a commission at no additional cost to you. We only recommend products we'd use for our own dogs.*

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