



What should pets eat?

Pets should eat similar foods to their wild relatives if they are to stay healthy.

A pet such as a cat or a dog is a tame animal. But thousands of years ago their ancestors were not tame. They were wild animals. People tamed them and made them into pets because they were useful. Dogs were good protection and cats hunted rats and other animals that carry disease.

Pets are not humans. Their insides are different and they need a different range of food from humans.

A dog's diet

Although dogs will eat scraps from the table, this is not their proper food. Some human foods can actually harm pets.

Some dogs, for example, can be made very ill if given chocolate.

The wild relatives of the dog were probably wolves. Wolves are meat eaters, so pet dogs should be given at least some meat to eat (Picture 1). They can also be given special biscuits for added nourishment.

Cat food

Cats are meat eaters. They cannot get any nourishment from plants and so they must be given meat (Picture 2).

Because it senses that it needs meat, your cat may still hunt birds and mice even though you may give it all the food it needs.



◀ (Picture 1) Bones are a source of food for dogs. When a dog has finished ripping the meat from a bone, it will crack the bone open. Inside the bone is soft marrow which is rich in nourishment.



Rabbits, hamsters and the like

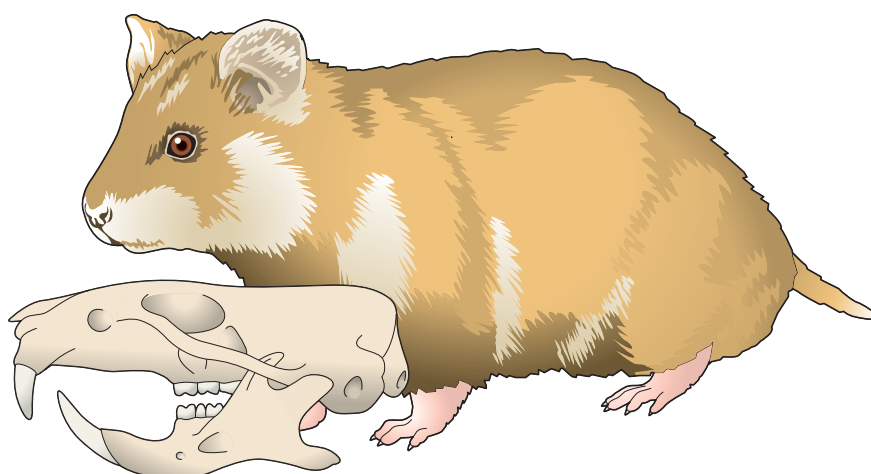
Rabbits, guinea pigs and hamsters (Picture 3) can be fed on vegetables, such as carrots and cauliflower, but they still need grass every day, even if it is in the form of dried grass called hay. The hay contains fibre which helps them digest their food. They will also eat a mixture of cereals.

Remember the water

All pets need water as well as food for their diet, and, if you keep a pet, you should make sure that it is able to take a drink at any time.



▼ (Picture 2) Cats have large canine teeth for tearing into flesh. The sharp incisors cut flesh from bone. The back teeth have pointed ends for holding flesh as the incisors cut it. Cats do not have flat crushing teeth.



▲ (Picture 3) Hamsters and rabbits have continuously growing teeth to cope with the tough plant food they have to eat. That is why, if you do not give them naturally tough food to eat, you need to provide them with wooden twigs or something similar to help them file down their teeth.

Summary

- Pets are descended from wild animals.
- Pets need to be given the same sort of food as their wild relatives.
- Pets can be harmed by eating human food.