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ULTRA-PROCESSED CARBOHYDRATE-BASED DIETS IN PETS: TRENDS AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

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Ultra-processed foods (UPFs) are a hallmark of modern human food systems and have been associated with adverse health effects in humans; similarly, they are gaining attention in veterinary nutrition, where they are commonly referred to as ultra-processed carbohydrate-based diets (UPCDs). This study aims to review the UPCDs consumption trends and effects on health in companion animals. UPCDs include dry, canned and any other pets' food that are manufactured using more than one thermal or pressure processing step to produce the final product. Typical UPCDs include extruded kibble, baked treats, and canned or wet industrially cooked foods, which dominate the commercial pet food market and pet diets, being considered traditional pet food. UPCDs are considered a source of advanced glycation end products (AGEs) produced in Maillard reaction during the processing and have been reported to result in higher dietary AGEs loads and elevated plasma and urinary AGEs concentrations, particularly in wet food diets. AGEs intake is associated with reduced bioavailability of essential amino acids, oxidative stress due to their pro-oxidant properties, and a slow rate of tissue turnover. These effects have been linked to atherosclerosis, nephropathy, retinopathy, osteoarthritis, and neurodegenerative diseases, and in dogs, elevated tissue AGEs levels have been associated with multiple pathological conditions. Processing can also generate acrylamide and other Maillard reaction products, which may contribute to oxidative stress and long-term metabolic disturbances. It has been suggested that early life feeding patterns have long-term effects, UPCDs significantly increased the risk of chronic enteropathy, whereas non-processed and human food leftovers were associated with a lower incidence later in life. In response, there is growing interest in pets' diet, as it plays a significant role in health and longevity, leading to a growing trend of feeding pets homemade and raw animal-based diets.

Keywords: Pet nutrition, feeding practices, ultra-processed carbohydrate-based diets, advanced glycation end products, pet health

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