

Feeding your Dog

As in human nutrition, the goal of good nutrition in animals is to maximize the length and quality of life. It is very important to feed our companions a healthy and well balanced diet that meets their specific needs. Lets begin by taking a look at the nutritional needs of dogs.

It is first important to remember that not all dogs are the same, just like no two people are the same. Because of this, their nutritional needs can be very different. One thing all dogs have in common, however, is their need for a complete and balanced diet. A complete and balanced diet means that your pet is receiving the proper amount of vitamins, minerals, proteins, carbohydrates, fiber and other key nutrients.

Lets examine pet foods a little closer. Complete and balanced diets, those without excesses and deficiencies, help to avoid health problems. Giving your dog the right food throughout its life helps to avoid diseases like diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, and of course obesity. Lets look at choosing the right food for every stage of your dogs life. There are many high quality premium dog foods available, such as Hills Science Diet, Iams, Eukanuba and many more. It is important to avoid generic diets that have too many fillers and too little nutritional value.

We will begin with puppies. A puppy requires a great deal of nutrition to get through it first year healthy and happy. In order to get the correct nutrients for growth, such as calcium and phosphorous, it is important to feed a diet specifically for puppies until they have stopped growing. This usually occurs by twelve months of age, but in large breeds this may not come until eighteen months. A diet tailored for growing large breeds should be fed to these puppies. As a puppy becomes an adult dog, the nutritional and energy needs of the dog change. As a responsible pet owner, we will want to shift to a diet to meet the nutritional requirements of the adult dog. These high quality diets contain carefully balanced ingredients, such as vitamins and antioxidants that are vital for preventing disease. Feeding the right diet at the right life stage can have a significant impact on increasing the life span of our pets.

By age seven, we should be transitioning our nutritional focus to our pets golden years. As our pets slow down, so do their nutritional needs. Premium diets targeted to the needs of older dogs contain fewer calories, yet just the right balance of essential nutrients. Obesity at any age will likely shorten your pets life span; however, feeding the correct diet will help to prevent obesity. Your veterinarian can help you determine if your pet is overweight. You should be able to feel his or her ribs, but not see them. If you can't feel your pets ribs, your dog is probably overweight. Current estimates suggest that at least 35% of dogs are grossly obese. Genetic factors, as well as overfeeding, greatly influence weight gain. Remember to avoid giving your dog an excessive amount of treats and never feed table scraps! If you can easily see the ribs, your dog is probably too thin.

The amount of food needed changes rapidly during a puppy's first year. Most puppies should be fed 3 times a day until they are 6-8 weeks of age. After this age, most dogs are fed one to two times daily. The quantity of food can be determined by reading the suggested feeding volumes

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listed on the food bag. Regularly scheduled meal times are optimal as opposed to free feeding throughout the day. Free feeding often leads to obesity.

Your pet's nutritional needs are paramount to a long and healthy life. With the help of your veterinarian, you can develop a well balanced nutritional program that will help to ensure a happy and healthy dog!

