

## Nutrition for Dogs and Puppies



### Food Choice and Vitamins

#### Should I feed my dog puppy food or dog food?

Until your puppy is a year old, he or she should be eating a puppy formula food. Foods created for older dogs do not provide the proper balance of calories and nutrients needed for a growing dog. As a general rule, you should switch to an adult formula dog food around your puppy's first birthday. Once your dog is seven years old, a senior formula dog food is recommended.

Female dogs that are pregnant or nursing should be fed puppy formula food. Because your dog's food must provide for all of his or her nutritional needs and energy requirements, it is important to buy the highest quality food that you can afford to feed him or her.

#### What brands of food does Clermont Animal Hospital recommend?

Clermont Animal Hospital recommends Hill's Science Diet, Iams, Eukanuba and Purina products, but many other quality foods are on the market. When choosing a brand of food, be sure to look for the American Association of Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) approval label on the bag to ensure that the food meets all nutritional standards. If you would like further information on choosing a diet, our staff will be happy to help you. You can also refer to this link to the Nutritional Support Service at the Ohio State University for additional information about nutrition and choosing a diet: <http://www.nssvet.org/food/index.html>

#### Should I give my dog or puppy vitamins?

Most commercial puppy foods provide all of the vitamins and minerals your dog needs; however, a vitamin supplement is a good way to ensure that your growing dog gets all of his or her nutritional requirements. Vitamin supplements are particularly important if your dog is a finicky eater, during periods of illness, or if more than 10 percent of your dog's diet is something other than commercial puppy food. We provide several types of vitamins here for your convenience. These are very tasty and make good treats for your puppy.

#### Is it okay to change food brands?

It is important to choose one brand and type of food rather than randomly buying whatever is on sale or most convenient. This is because changing foods can upset your dog's stomach and intestines.

Any time you decide to introduce a new food to your dog, be sure to save some of the old food for a transition period. For four or five days, mix the new food in with the old food. Each time you feed your dog, gradually add more of the new food and less of the old food. Most dogs will tolerate new foods well within four to five days; however, watch your dog carefully for any signs of intolerance during the transition (decreased appetite, diarrhea, etc.). If you notice these signs, slow down the rate at which you are introducing the new food and lengthen the transition period to seven to 14 days.

### **How often should I feed my dog?**

- As a general rule, most puppies under 4 months old should be fed at least three times a day.
- Puppies 4 - 12 months should be fed at least twice a day.
- Adult dogs can be fed one to two times a day depending on owner preference.
- “Free-choice feeding,” which is having food available all the time, is an alternative for any age dog as long as you are careful not to put out more food in a day than your dog should be eating.

### **How do I eliminate a feeding time as my dog gets older?**

When you want to eliminate a feeding time, decrease the amount of food fed at that meal gradually over a five to seven day period to help ease the transition. Once the amount fed is less than 1/8 cup, the feeding can be eliminated all together.

### **Weight Control**

Keeping your dog in the ideal weight range is probably the best thing you can do for his or her health. Overweight dogs are much more likely than thin dogs to develop a variety of problems such as arthritis or joint problems, torn knee ligaments (ACL injuries), diabetes and high cholesterol. While these are usually problems of older animals, good dietary habits must start when your dog is a puppy.

In large and giant breed dogs, puppy weight is a particularly important issue. Overweight puppies in these breeds have a much higher incidence of developmental bone and joint problems. For this reason, it is important to keep puppies of these breeds especially thin while they are growing.

### **How much should I feed my dog?**

The most important aspect of weight control is the amount of food you give your dog. If at least 90 percent of your dog’s caloric intake comes from puppy or dog food, the feeding guidelines on the food bag are a good starting point. Keep in mind that these guidelines are tailored to the needs of the average dog.

Once your puppy is spayed or neutered, his or her caloric requirements will probably decrease by 25-35 percent. Therefore, he or she will not need as much food. It is also important to realize that if your dog is very athletic and energetic, or if he is very inactive, you may need to adjust the amounts of food.

If you decrease the amount of food you are giving your dog, be sure to still feed your dog the same number of meals each day, just give him or her smaller portions.

In addition to controlling the amount of dog food, limiting calorie intake from treats and encouraging an adequate exercise program are also important in maintaining ideal weight and body condition.

### **How do I know if my dog is the right weight?**

Weight varies greatly among breeds and even within breeds. **Body condition** is a much more accurate way to determine if your dog is eating the right amount. Dogs who are in ideal body condition have a clearly defined, tucked waist. If you run your hands over the rib cage of these dogs, you should be able to easily count every rib, but you should not be able to see the ribs looking at the dog. This link to the Nutritional Support Service at the Ohio State University will help you determine your pet’s body condition: <http://www.nssvet.org/food/bcs.html>. You should monitor your dog’s body condition throughout his or her life, and adjust the number of calories you are feeding as is necessary to maintain ideal body condition.

**Overweight dogs:** If your dog is starting to lose his or her waist and is developing a fat pad making it more difficult to feel the ribs, then it is time to decrease his or her caloric intake. To decrease the number of calories in his or her diet, you can start decreasing the amount of food you give your dog or switch to a lower calorie diet (most pet food brands have a “light” or “weight control” formula). If decreasing the amount fed, be sure to make the change gradually over one to two weeks. This will help adjust to the new feeding amount without feeling hungry. If you are switching to a lower calorie diet, you may not need to decrease the amount fed unless your dog is significantly over weight.

If your dog is more than just a few pounds overweight, simply decreasing the amount fed or switching to a “light” formula may not be enough. Please ask our doctors what other steps can be taken to bring your dog back into the proper weight range without causing your dog to feel hungry all of the time.

**Underweight dogs:** If you can ever see your dog’s ribs (except in large or giant breed puppies), you are not meeting your dog’s energy needs and should increase the amount of food you give him or her. In very underweight dogs, we sometimes recommend using a puppy formula or a high-calorie formula until your dog returns to a proper weight.

## “People Food” and Treats

In general, it is not a good idea to feed your dog “people food,” (table scraps or other food you and your family would eat) because:

- Humans and dogs have different nutritional and energy requirements, making it difficult to provide a balanced diet that incorporates a large portion of “people food.”
- Even using human food for treats is not a good idea. Once a puppy learns to expect handouts, begging and occasionally food snatching may become a problem.
- Human foods are often high-calorie treats, which can contribute to obesity.
- Many human foods can cause health problems in dogs, such as:
  1. **Chocolate**— Never feed your dog chocolate. Chocolate is toxic (poisonous) to dogs.
  2. **Fatty meats**—Never feed your dog ham, pork, or other fatty meats—these can lead to pancreatitis
  3. **Rich foods**—Many rich foods lead to diarrhea, vomiting or an upset stomach.

**If you can’t resist the urge to give your dog occasional “people food,” it is important to keep a few things in mind:**

1. Your dog’s diet should be at least 90 percent puppy or dog food. All human food, dog treats and other supplements should make up 10 percent or less of your dog’s total caloric intake. If this is not the case, your dog may not be meeting all of his or her nutritional requirements.
2. Feed human food in small portions. A bite-sized portion for you would be an entire meal for a toy breed dog. Keep your dog’s body size in mind when you’re doling out the treats.
3. Low calorie, high fiber foods are better than meats and bread products. Vegetables can make great snacks and fillers for dogs. “No Salt Added” canned green beans are a great low calorie snack. Celery, carrots, peas, and any other vegetable will make an acceptable treat for your dog.
4. Never feed your dog directly from your plate. This encourages mealtime begging.
5. Introduce only one new food item at a time and watch for any sign of an upset stomach after you give the food. If a certain food causes a bad effect, avoid this food item in the future.

### **Commercial Dog Treats**

Treats produced and marketed specifically for dogs are preferable to human food. Larger treats can be broken into bite-sized pieces for training and extra enjoyment. You will find that your dog will be more content with smaller treats given more frequently than with larger treats given less often.

Rawhides, pig's ears, and other chewable treats can extend the time of enjoyment because they cannot be quickly consumed. We recommend using only beef treats made in the USA or made from U.S. beef. If you choose to give your dog this type of treat, however, be sure that he or she is closely supervised. If your dog breaks off chunks or fragments, take them away immediately to prevent stomach problems associated with swallowing large pieces.

If your dog is on a special diet, reserving a few kibbles to give as treats is often enough to satisfy your dog's treat cravings. We also sell specially formulated treats for dogs on most prescription diets. Ask our doctors if these treats are appropriate for your dog.

[www.clermontanimal.net](http://www.clermontanimal.net)