



## TEN THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT DIET

Dogs are predominantly carnivores, meaning meat is a large part of their staple diet however they are capable of surviving on vegetables, fruit, rotting matter, carrion, offal and even insects. They are also mostly scavengers and will hunt only if they have to. In the wild, dogs spend a large part of their day searching for food followed by resting and sleeping.

Here are some tips on diet, types of food and healthy eating habits.

### **1. Puppies need good quality, well balanced food in order to grow properly and evenly. Growth in puppies varies enormously according to its breed.**

- Small breeds (Maltese, Chihuahua, Jack Russell Terrier and others of that size) are usually fully grown by the time they are 6 months old
- Medium breeds (Staffordshire Bull Terrier, Cattle dog, Kelpie and others of that size) are usually fully grown by 10 months.
- Large breeds (Labrador, Rottweiler, German Shepherd, Weimaraner and others of that size) are usually fully grown by 15 months.
- Giant breeds (St. Bernard, Black Russian Terrier, Irish Wolf Hound, Great Dane and other of that size) are usually fully grown by 20 months.

It is important that the pups, according to their breed, are on a puppy formula until they have reached their full size. If you are unsure about the time frame, speak to your vet, breeder or trainer.

### **2. The quality of your dog's food does depend on what you are paying (but compare prices as some companies give great bulk discounts.**

- If the food is relatively cheap, then the quality of the ingredients is usually quite low
- If the food is relatively expensive, then the quality of the ingredients is usually quite high. In other words, you pay for what you get
- Expensive foods are priced like that because they use real meat, high quality carbohydrates, have special additives to promote good joints, skin, immune system, teeth etc., and have been thoroughly researched to ensure they are of high standard
- They have high digestibility factors meaning their bodies will utilise the majority of that diet and excrete very little of it. Good quality foods produce small firm stools whereas poor quality foods produce frequent, sloppy, bulky stools
- Flatulence, bloating, bad breath, poor weight gain and a dull coat are also signs of a poor diet
- Calcium supplements in diets can cause serious harm to growth and joints. Balanced diets provide the correct amount of calcium/phosphorus so there is no need to supplement it any further
- If you choose to feed your dog a home-made diet, you need to ensure it has come from a very reputable source and that your vet recommends it also



**3. Raw meat, pasta and food scraps are not a balanced meal for a growing dog. It can cause deformity in growth and development. Rickets, bending ribs, flat feet, poor muscle development and stunted growth are all commonly caused by poor diets. You do not see these signs in dog fed high quality food.**

- If you are after a more natural diet that is balanced and recommended by vets, try Vet's All Natural. It's easy to make, dogs love it, is a lot more appealing than the dried biscuit and is now being studied as to whether it even influences behaviour and reduces some issues such as aggression. VAN is a grain mix that gets soaked for 24 hours and then mixed with a portion of raw meat, preferably lean rump mince and fed as a mushy, meaty substance.
- Avoid camel meat as it can be highly toxic

**4. Bones are important not just for cleaning teeth, but as a form of environmental enrichment. Bones must always be RAW, never, ever cooked or smoked. BBQ bones and roast bones are the worst offenders and hospitalisation is often the result of eating these cooked bones.**

- Bones need to be matched to your dog's size so they do not choke on them. The bone needs to always be the same size as your dog's head as a minimum
- Good bones to feed puppies and dogs are lamb bones, lamb shanks, lamb flaps, necks, spines, tails, rib cages, carcasses, lamb legs and shoulders, kangaroo, venison and even chicken necks for the very small breeds.
- Avoid beef bones as they can cause skin allergies, ear infection and dietary intolerance. Beef bones are also very hard bones and can fracture healthy teeth causing the broken tooth to rot and die.
- Bones to avoid are marrow bones, T bones, Osso Bucco and sharp pointy bones.
- Initially bones should be fed under supervision to ensure your dog eats it properly and does not choke. Once it seems to be settled and chewing comfortably, you can leave it with one for the day. Bones should take more than 10 minutes to chew and eat; if they finish them in less than 10 minutes, then they are too small
- Bones should be fed at least a couple of times a week. Too many can cause constipation and too few can cause rotting of the teeth and boredom
- It is normal for dogs to bury their bones and eat them again the next day or even week. This is perfectly normal and fine and they do not get sick from this
- Very old bones dug up in the garden from a previous dog are very harmful and can carry nasty bacteria like botulism. These must be removed immediately. Really old bones are very different from recently buried bones
- Leave skin, meat and gristle on bones as it adds to the quality. Stripped bones are quite boring but a little meat and fat makes a world of difference

**5. For apartment dogs or those that live indoors, bones might not be an option because they smell and leave meaty bits on carpet and rugs. An alternative that still offers dental cleaning are raw carrots and hardened French sticks or baguettes. They are a cleaner option and are also great for dogs which have suffered from pancreatitis or have meat intolerances**



**6. There is no need to feed you puppy cereal, weetbix and milk, puppy milk or puppy porridge. They serve no nutritional value to the pup's diet and can cause poor growth and diarrhoea. These products are purely a gimmick.**

**7. Avoid feeding your dog as soon as it gets home from a walk or run as it can cause bloating and twisted bowel, especially in the giant, deep-chested breeds. There has been a lot of evidence to suggest that the excessive panting followed by excessive drinking and engorging of food straight after, contributes to bloating in these dogs.**

Instead, allow the dog to cool down completely and begin to breath normally again before allowing it to eat. With drinking it is also suggested to dribble it out of a tap or bottle or even hose rather than allow it to shove its head in a bucket and inhale litres of water.

For deep-chested breeds (Great Danes, Bassets, Dobermans, German Shepherds, etc) it was once advised to feed them from elevated containers to reduce the inhaling of excess air as they ate or even drank. Studies now have shown that this actually can cause bloat so the recommendation now is to keep bowls and food low to the ground just like for any type of breed.

**8. All dogs need treats in their life, especially if they are training. You do need to ensure though that the treats are not added on top of the usual diet.**

- If your pup or dog is getting treats, then reduce some of the main meal so it does not put excess weight on
- Try to get your pup or dog to work for its treat, in other words, NO FREEBIES. Even if they are scraps from dinner the night before, just ask the dog for a simple behaviour like LOOK and then toss it the scraps
- This will teach the dog to really appreciate the food it is getting while practising good behaviour at the same time
- Try to source out healthy treats like 4 Legs or Chicken Chunkers as these are lower in fat and made of fresh ingredients. Kabana, ham, bacon and chicken loaf are higher in salt and fat and can be used, but should be done sparingly

**9. Dogs do not get fat on their own and one of the most common problems seen by vets and people in the animal professions, it obesity.**

- Dogs do not feed themselves unless they are scavenging the streets, and for those that do, they are never overweight because they are always moving
- Overweight dogs are unhealthy dogs because many diseases and injuries occur as a result
- Pancreatitis, liver disease, arthritis, cruciate ligament damage, worsening symptoms of hip and elbow dysplasia, excessive bleeding in surgery) are just some of the problems seen in overweight or obese dogs
- We are now also seeing Type 2 Diabetes, endocrine disorders, heart disorders and more and these are often very preventable
- Owners need to be held accountable if their dogs are overweight; there is no excuse as the owner is in control of the food



- From 2010, owners can be reported and charged by the RSPCA if their dogs are deemed obese by a veterinarian or a ranger

### **10. There is no right and wrong amount of food to feed your dog but you can certainly work it out according to how it feels and appears.**

Using the guide on the food package can be very misleading as the company will always suggest a larger amount than actually needed. The more you feed, the quicker you run out, the more you buy!

Instead, feel your dog and look at its body.

- All dogs have waists, no matter what the breed and yes, even British Bull Dogs have a waist. There should be an obvious indentation between the dog's last rib and its thighs. If you look from above, you should notice ballooning where the ribcage is followed by a sudden dip in towards the belly. Dogs should not be one solid mass all the way through
- All dogs have ribcages and you should see the definition of it. In most short haired breeds, you can often see the outline of the end of the ribcage and this is ideal. In hairier breeds it can be more difficult to visualise so feeling it necessary
- Dogs should not have a chunky fat pad on the front of their chests. You should be able to feel the sternum or point of their chest with your fingers, covered by a slight film of fat. If you feel a solid, movable mass over the sternum, your dog needs to go on a diet
- All dogs should have a little fat on their bodies as it is needed for normal body function. A body cannot work without fat reserves. There should be a light cover of fat over the ribs; enough to stop them sticking out and also some cover over their hips bones (pin bones)
- When you feel a dog's ribs, they should feel similar to the back of your hand. If you run your fingers lightly over your hand, you can feel the individual finger bones and it should feel like that when you touch their ribcage. If you can't feel ribs at all (and you certainly can in lean hairy dogs), then your dog needs to go on a diet
- There is no such thing as a heavy boned or naturally chunky dog. Yes you can get large bones in giant breeds but they are all proportioned to their shape and size and they still have a waistline. Labradors for example should not weight more than 30kg and even this is pushing it. Most are around the 25kg mark and this is quite ideal for them. When you hear or see 40+kg Labradors, I can guarantee you will not see a waistline, definition of the ribcage or a lean sternum. You will not see a dog that can run 100 metres without needing to collapse at the end and you will not see an agile, quick moving dog.

For a comparison on dog food brands, quality, ingredients, price and availability go to <http://www.dogfoodanalysis.com> (web details were kindly supplied by Alcance Boxers)