

## Feeding

### *There are so many kinds of dog foods. What should I feed my puppy?*

Diet is extremely important during the growing months of a dog's life. We recommend a name brand puppy food made by a national dog food company (not a generic or store brand) for puppies who will be less than 40 pounds as adults. This should be fed until your puppy is about 6-12 months of age, depending on the breed and size. Dogs that are going to be 40 pounds or more should be fed a quality adult dog food to protect rapidly growing joints.

We recommend that you buy only food that has the AAFCO certification. Usually, you can find this information very easily on the label. AAFCO is an organization that oversees the entire pet food industry. It does not endorse any particular food, but it will certify that the food has met the minimum requirements for nutrition. Most of the well-known commercial pet foods will have the AAFCO label. Generic brands often do not have it.

Feeding a dry, canned, or semi-moist form of dog food is acceptable. Each has advantages and disadvantages. Dry food is definitely the most inexpensive and can be left in the dog's bowl without drying. Crunching the kibble also helps to remove some of the plaque build-up on the teeth. The good brands of dry food are just as nutritious as the other forms. As a rule, we recommend dry food for your puppy.

Semi-moist and canned foods are also acceptable. However, both are considerably more expensive than dry food. Though often more appealing to your dog's taste, they are not more nutritious. If you feed a very tasty food, you are running the risk of creating a dog with a finicky appetite. In addition, the semi-moist foods are high in sugar and will allow tarter to accumulate more quickly. **WE RECOMMEND YOU NOT FEED TABLE FOOD.** Because human foods are generally very tasty, dogs will often begin to hold out for these and not eat their well-balanced dog food. It is also very difficult to feed a well balanced canine diet of table scraps and leftovers, and a complete diet of nutritious food is crucial to your puppy's lifetime health. If you do choose to give your puppy table food, be sure that at least 90% of her diet is good quality commercial puppy food.

We enjoy a variety of things to eat in our diet. However, most dogs actually prefer not to change from one food to another unless they are trained to do so by the way you feed them. Do not feel guilty if your dog is happy eating the same food day after day, week after week.

Commercials for dog food can be very misleading. If you watch carefully you will notice that commercials often promote dog food on the basis of taste. Nutrition is rarely mentioned. Most of the 'gourmet' foods are marketed to appeal to owners who want the best for their dogs; however, they do not offer the dog any nutritional advantage over a good quality dry food, and they are far more expensive. If your dog eats a gourmet food very long, it will probably not be happy with other foods. If she needs a special diet due

to a health problem later in life, she is very unlikely to accept it. Therefore, we do not encourage feeding 'gourmet' dog foods.

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

There are several appropriate ways to feed puppies. The most popular method is commonly called 'meal feeding.' This means that the puppy is fed at specific times of the day. A measured amount of food should be offered 4 times per day for 5-12 week old puppies. What is not eaten within 30 minutes is taken up. If the food is eaten within 3-4 minutes, the quantity may not be sufficient. Puppies fed in this manner generally begin to cut themselves out of one of those meals by 3-4 months of age and perhaps another one later. If a meal is ignored for several days, it should be discontinued.

'Free choice feeding,' means that food is available at all times. This works well with dry foods and for some dogs. However, other dogs tend to overeat and become obese. If there is weight gain after your puppy's optimal size is reached, discontinue this feeding method. We recommend 'meal feeding' because it gives you more control over how much your dog eats, the regular meals will make housebreaking easier, and, because your puppy will learn early on that you are the source of his/her food, they will recognize you as the leader of their pack.

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

Consult the food package for the proper amount to feed. Most often you will feed an amount based on the estimated ideal adult weight of the puppy. It is hard to overfeed young puppies between 6 weeks and 6 months of age, so if your puppy quickly eats all of 1 meal, give a larger volume at the next feeding. Conversely, if he/she doesn't eat everything in the bowl within 5-10 minutes, feed less at the next meal. If you have questions about the proper amount to feed, feel free to call our office.

When your puppy comes in to be spayed or neutered at about 5-6 months, we will give you information about feeding your dog as an adult.

### ***What about treats? How can I keep my cute puppy from growing into an overweight adult?***

All of us, people and dogs, love treats and tend to equate treats with love – I love my puppy, therefore I will give him/her treats. While dogs certainly enjoy treats, it's a safe bet that what your puppy really loves is the attention from you. If you feel the need to treat your puppy, offer carrots, green beans, broccoli stems, apple pieces, or some other fresh fruit or vegetable. Do Not feed grapes, raisins, or onions as these can be dangerous for your puppy. Dogs also should not chew on peach, apricot, or plum pits, or apple or pear seeds as these contain cyanide. You will find the 'right' nutritious treat for your pet provides the special attention your pet craves, while not contributing to dangerous weight gain.

Helping your dog maintain a healthy weight will benefit you and your pet in many ways. First, you greatly improve the chances that you'll enjoy many happy years with your puppy. Second, you'll save some serious money. Excessive weight contributes to many

expensive and potentially lethal health problems, among them heart disease, arthritis, knee ligament ruptures requiring surgery, and diabetes. And then there's the expense of buying those fancy treats. Finally, if you've been looking for an exercise partner, you may not need to look any farther than your dog. Dogs make great exercise partners for walking, running, Frisbee and many other active pursuits; and time spent together will build the special bond between you and your new buddy.