

Feeding Puppies: What, When, How

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Puppyhood is a time of rapid growth and development. As such, puppies require nearly double the amount of nutrients per pound of food than do older dogs. Puppies need higher levels of nutrients that are not available in regular dog food. Because of their special nutritional needs, your puppy should only receive puppy food for the first year. Most dog food manufacturers offer a special formula for puppies that is higher in protein (28%-30%), and enriched with the fat soluble and water soluble vitamins, minerals, fats and other essentials your growing puppy needs.

Feeding the first few days

For the first few days, it is a good idea to continue feeding the same type and brand of puppy food and use the same feeding schedule the puppy was on before he came to you. Then you can slowly start using the food you have chosen. Switch to a new food slowly to prevent intestinal upset. By "slowly" we mean over the course of 7-10 days go from feeding 100% of the previous food to 100% of the new food. For example, make a mixture that contains 25% of the new food and 75% of the old food and feed that for several days. Then make it 50-50 for several days, then 75% new food to 25% old food for several days. Then you can start feeding 100% new food. If at any time you puppy starts vomiting, or has loose stools or appears constipated, slow the rate at which you are switching him over.

Type of food

We never recommend canned food or the semi-moist fake meat burgers. Canned foods are typically higher in calories and fat and are usually 80 to 83 per cent water. The semi-moist foods are about 55% water and use high salt or sugar levels for preservation. You are paying too much for water and puppies don't need the salt and sugar. Dry foods are only 9 to 11 percent water and are made of the same quality ingredients as the other types. They are more economical, easier to use and, in our opinion, better for your dog.

Dogs on dry foods typically have fewer intestinal upsets, either diarrhea or constipation. They have fewer problems with unwanted weight gain. We see no advantage as far as hair coat or skin quality is concerned with those on canned foods. Probably the most important advantage of using dry foods and feeding them dry is that the abrasive action of eating them is good for the dog's teeth and gums. Dry food is the only food choice that helps control plaque while it is being eaten. It's also the only food that helps satisfy your puppy's need to chew. In addition, dry food is easy to store, less expensive than alternatives, more conveniently served, palatable and has less odor. Dog's that constantly eat any of the softened foods always have more dental problems ranging from tarter and plaque build up, abscesses, tooth loss and gum disease. Any or all of these cause bad breath.

Young puppies should not be given table scraps because their digestive tracts are not fully developed and table scraps could cause diarrhea or other gastrointestinal problems. Table scraps fill them up but do not provide the nutrients their rapidly growing bodies need. Feeding them from the table teaches them the bad habit of begging; this may make house training more difficult for you.

Table scraps should never account for more than 10% of your mature dog's diet. No chocolate, no bones that splinter easily, and keep your dog away from high-fat, greasy foods.

When to feed

The puppy's feeding schedule will be somewhat dictated by your own personal schedule. We

don't want to leave food out for the puppy so that it can eat it whenever it wants. You need to be there for the feedings because you want the puppy and its entire body on a set schedule. This is best accomplished by feeding the pup what it will eat at specific times on a specific schedule. Puppies under six months of age should be fed three times daily; between six and twelve months old, two times daily; and once per day after twelve months of age. Puppies maturing into adults will naturally decrease the number of feedings per day on their own. **By feeding on a set schedule, the dog will then go to the bathroom on a more set schedule and make houstraining easier and faster.** Make it a habit to give the puppy some quiet time after the meal. Don't let the children romp and play with it for the first hour to an hour and a half after eating. This can lead to some stomach upsets that can sometimes be very serious.

Amount to feed

The amount of food given with each meal should never be dictated by what is on the back of the dog food bag. From our experience, these people obviously want to sell a lot of food. With our own pups, we place an ample amount of food down for them and then after 10 to 15 minutes it is picked up. You'll soon learn to judge how much they need and, depending on how fast they clean it up, when they need more. Remember to have water available with or immediately following the meal. Treats should never account for more than 10% of your puppy's caloric intake (which isn't much in small breeds). Your puppy's food is its sole source for the nutrition it needs so don't "fill up" your puppy on treats before meal time. Liver products are great treats because they provide nutrients your puppy is unlikely to obtain from any other food source. Hard chew treats keep your puppy entertained and improve dental health by exercising the gums and scraping the teeth. It also satisfies your teething pup's need to chew. Treats can be used during training to reward good behavior, but be careful not to overdo it.

Rawhide bones

Pet owners have a lot of questions about rawhide, the most common which is whether or not chewing rawhide is healthy for puppies. A few years ago, one of the major medical schools in this country conducted a laboratory test to answer this question. The results showed that in groups of test dogs, even in those fed an almost exclusive diet of rawhide, there were no ill effects. On the other hand, the chewing of rawhide had the beneficial effect of removing plaque from the animals' teeth and keeping them cleaner. This is significant because periodontal disease is a real problem in many adult dogs. Therefore, buy quality rawhide from a source you can trust. It will not only satisfy your pet's natural urge to chew, it will also help keep him healthy.

Water

Puppies may seem to drink large quantities of water. They need it and it cannot be deprived of it. Water is the most important nutrient of all. For dogs of any age that eat dry food, water will be needed to re-hydrate it in their stomachs for digestion. Puppies also need more water per pound than adults do because they are growing. Growth comes through very active metabolism at the cellular level. These processes produce many wastes and by-products that are excreted into the blood. It requires plenty of water to carry these substances to and be flushed through the kidneys. It is okay to schedule when your puppy drinks, but on a daily basis you must allow them to consume what they want and need. Providing fresh water is important. Infectious agents and diseases such as leptospirosis, Giardia, E. coli, and Cryptosporidium can be transmitted through contaminated water sources. Providing fresh water greatly reduces the risk of disease and therefore keeps your pet happy and healthy.