

Supplement Your Athlete's Diet

Athletic dogs work hard year-round and need more fuel than the average indoor pooch to maintain good health.

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Athletic dogs work hard year-round and need more fuel than the average couch pooch to maintain good health. When winter blows in, active dogs burn even more calories to keep themselves warm. Your dog is active and requires extra calories if it spends more than two hours a day participating in activities such as Frisbee chasing, ball fetching, hiking, obedience or walking. Your dog is super-active and needs even more extra calories if it participates in highly strenuous activities, such as sledding, skijoring, herding, agility, police work, conformation or field events.

You can determine whether your dog eats enough calories based on its demeanor, appearance and weight. Does your dog seem depressed or lethargic? Does it seem less energetic than normal? Is it ravenous at mealtimes? If so, you may need to feed it additional food or higher energy foods.

Check your dog's ribs and examine its body outline from an overhead perspective. If you see extra padding over its ribs and no sign of its waist, you are probably feeding too much. Cut down on the dog's portions or bulk out its meals with lower-calorie foods, such as brown rice. If its ribs are starkly evident and its waist a little too pronounced, it needs more calories. Finally, invest in an accurate scale and weigh your dog on a regular basis. After a while, you'll be able to pinpoint an ideal weight for your dog. Note that this weight may vary according to the seasons.

You'll need to adjust the amount you feed on a weekly or even daily basis. The energy a dog requires varies with climate, amount of exercise, stress, breed and the quirks of each individual dog. Most veterinarians recommend you feed your athletic dog two to three meals each day, with the largest meal served at least an hour after the exercise session. A large meal before strenuous exercise can cause indigestion, cramps and other health problems.

You can provide the additional energy your active dog requires during the cold weather two ways: Feed more of the food you already give your dog, or feed it foods that are more tightly packed with nutrients.