

## Customize Your Puppy's Diet

**Expert advice for feeding your new puppy a healthy diet.**

*Farrell R. Clancy*

Look for the product's nutritional adequacy claim on the label. Analysis done via "feeding tests" or "feeding trials" that follow American Association of Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) procedures means that real dogs ate the food. If the label says, "by comparison to nutrient profiles," it means that a laboratory analyzed the diet.

Nichol advises puppy owners to stick with a low-residue diet with few artificial flavor enhancements. "Low-residue diets don't use much waste or by-products, which is good," he says.

### Breed Dependent

The type of food you choose will depend on your puppy's breed. "Dogs come in a much wider variety of shapes and sizes than humans," Nichol says. Each breed or mix of breeds has its own individual needs for a healthy, well-balanced diet.

Some brands have separate formulas for small and large breeds. (Large breeds are classified as dogs that weigh 65 pounds or more when fully mature.) This is not a gimmick. Large-breed formulas typically contain fewer calories and are geared to maintain slow growth in order to prevent some of the joint problems associated with large-breed dogs and rapid growth.

If you bought your pup from a responsible breeder, your decision is easy, according to Arden, who recommends sticking with the pup's current food (the breeder should provide the name of the food). After all, "the breeder has done the research and knows the breed." If your puppy is doing well on the current brand, there is no reason to change. If, however, you do need to change your puppy's food (if your pup won't eat it or you want to switch to a higher-quality food), the key is to do it gradually to avoid upsetting your puppy's tummy.

### Dry Vs. Canned

What about dry versus canned foods? Because canned food is about three-quarters water, most experts recommend sticking with a dry, kibbled formula. Dry food is easy to feed and store, and is more cost-effective than canned food. Chewing the kibble also provides an abrasive action that may help keep teeth and gums healthy.

Of course, there are instances in which a canned, wet diet would be your best bet. Canned food is a highly palatable, concentrated food. Arden recommends canned food for certain breeds that are prone to kidney problems because the extra moisture can help prevent stones. Nichol cites similar advice for deep-chested large breeds, such as Saint Bernards, German Shepherd Dogs or Great Danes, which are prone to bloat (a potentially fatal condition in which the stomach fills with air and twists). "Pre-moistened food may lower this risk," he says. "But you can also soak dry kibble in water for 10 to 15 minutes until soggy instead of feeding canned food."