

Building Blocks to a Healthy Australian Shepherd

Diet information to keep your Aussie healthy.

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Premium Pups Nutrition is particularly crucial during the first weeks of an Aussie's life. Mothers milk contains all the nutrients neonatal pups require as well as invaluable antibodies that provide passive immunity during the pup's first few days of life. Pups should stay with the dam until they are 7 weeks old, says Elizabeth Cochran, D.V.M., of the Southeast Community Animal Hospital in Greensboro, North Carolina. The dam will start to wean them before this time, usually when their teeth erupt.

Beginning at about 3 weeks of age, Aussies should be introduced to a premium, softened puppy food, she says.

I usually advise my clients to start their puppies on a watered-down, wet food when they're up and running around, at about 3 to 4 weeks of age, so that when they're 6 weeks old, they're ready to be weaned, adds Michelle Berryessa, D.V.M., an Aussie owner and veterinarian in Roy, Washington, and a board member of the Australian Shepherd Club of America Inc. (ASCA).

Once weaned, a premium dry or wet puppy food can be fed, but dry foods are more convenient, less expensive and may have the benefit of helping to maintain better dental health, Dr. Cochran says. Most veterinarians and breeders recommend slowly transitioning puppies or any dog for that matter from one food to another to avoid gastrointestinal upset. For instance, dry puppy food can be slowly added in increasing quantities to the softened wet food fed to newly weaned puppies. Additionally, an owner who acquires a new Aussie pup from a breeder or shelter should plan to feed its current diet for a couple of weeks, transitioning the puppy over time to another brand, if desired.

How long a young Aussie should eat puppy food is open to debate. For Aussies, the rapid growth stage of puppyhood has slowed considerably by 9 to 12 months of age, and the pup has attained most of its height and weight, Dr. Cochran says. Adult food can be started at that time for most Aussies.

On the other hand, citing a concern over the rapid growth that high-protein puppy foods often encourage, Dr. Berryessa recommends weaning Aussie puppies to a quality adult maintenance food earlier at around 4 to 5 months of age. Some of those puppy foods have up to 30 percent protein, she says. They're going to [reach maturity] anyway. On a good [adult maintenance diet] they'll just get there slower. Although Aussies as a breed are not particularly susceptible to musculoskeletal problems, such as the hip dysplasia often seen in large-breed dogs, a diet that encourages moderate growth may help prevent growth abnormalities, Dr. Berryessa says. Again, consult your veterinarian before changing your puppy's diet.