

Nutrition for the Best Basset Hound

Balanced nutrition and portion control can help your food-loving Basset battle the bulge.

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The measure of a Basset Hound's devotion to food is the eagerness with which most Bassetts gobble down even the most bland and unappetizing of meals.

Elements of your dog's diet include water, protein, fats, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals. Water is the most important substance of all, because a dog can do without food for much longer than without water. It's your job to make sure your dog has a constant supply of clean, fresh water, preferably in stainless steel dishes. Steel dishes are easy to clean and won't develop cracks, chips or pockets like plastic or ceramic dishes, thus reducing the chances of food contamination. Wash the dishes frequently, because most Bassetts don't like drooly water and will turn to alternate sources, such as the toilet.

Proteins build muscle. To be at its best, your Basset needs an animal protein source.

Animal protein (meat, eggs, dairy products) is much higher in quality than plant protein. For example, the so-called biologic value (amount of nutrients versus the nutrients actually absorbed by the body) of eggs is 100; that of corn is 45.

As a rule, the cheaper the food, the less animal protein it contains; animal protein is more expensive than plant protein. Manufacturers aren't required to list what percentage of protein in the food comes from animal sources as opposed to plant sources, so you're forced to guess by checking the list of ingredients. Foods that list an animal protein source first are more likely to have more total animal protein, but not necessarily. Some plant sources may be split on the ingredient list into separate parts, such as rice bran or middlings, which makes it look as if there is more animal protein. You can obtain more detailed information if you contact the company.

The optimum range of protein in a Basset's diet is dependent upon its age and other conditions, such as the quality of the protein. A smaller amount of high-quality (animal derived) protein is superior to a larger amount of lower quality (plant-derived) protein. In addition, puppies and senior dogs need more protein than young adults.

While we are on the topic, it's possible to make a vegetarian of your Basset, but he probably won't like it. Like all dogs, Basset Hounds are omnivores, which means they can survive on a diet of plant or animal protein. However, dogs are designed to eat mostly meat. Normal Bassetts (although they will eat a disconcerting array of objects) generally prefer beef to barley. Unless very carefully chosen, vegetables simply don't provide the complete amino acid palette that dogs need in order to thrive. Even then, they want steak.

Fats supply energy; provide essential fatty acids (EFAs) critical nutrients the body cannot make for itself but must obtain from the diet; carry the fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E and K; and comprise parts of the membranes surrounding cells. Fats also help make calcium available to the system. Siberian Huskies run the Iditarod on an unbelievable 70-percent fat diet.