

Feeding the Fluffy Bichon Frise

Learn how to choose the best food for your Bichon.

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The nutritional requirements of senior dogs differ from those of both puppies and younger adults. According to Dr. Bartges, maintaining optimal body condition is extremely important, just as it is with puppies. The specific nutrient or diet requirements will vary from dog to dog, he says. Some older dogs gain weight and so require fewer calories, while others lose weight and require more calorically dense diets.

As dogs age, their metabolism slows, decreasing their energy needs. Obesity can result if this change is not considered when feeding a senior Bichon. Most senior foods have less fat and fewer calories than food formulated for younger dogs. Many contain added fiber, which adds bulk without increasing calories.

Some senior dogs are underweight because of diminished food intake, health problems or a high activity level (many Bichons remain active well into their senior years). Decreases in the senses of smell and taste may cause appetite loss. Some senior Bichons have good appetites, but lose weight because they can't digest food or absorb nutrients efficiently. Underweight seniors need food that provides more energy than the standard senior diet. These foods often have added levels of high-quality fat to increase palatability and boost energy content.

It was once thought that dogs needed less protein as they aged. On the contrary, most healthy senior dogs actually need more protein up to 50 percent more than they did when they were younger because the ability to metabolize protein decreases with age. Chronic protein deficiency can lead to muscle wasting and weakness. Protein is also crucial for proper immune system function even a mild protein deficit can increase your Bichons susceptibility to infections and stress. Many foods for senior dogs have protein levels that are as high as those in puppy foods.

A Weighty Problem Obesity is by far the most prevalent nutrition-related health problem of all dogs, including Bichons. Many owners just feed their dogs too much food, Dr. Datz says. Often its fed free-choice and its a rare dog that can limit itself under those conditions. Dr. Datz adds that some owners also contribute to their dogs weight problems by feeding them too many snacks, including too much people food.

Obesity can cause serious health problems for your Bichon. It increases its chances of developing urinary stones, diabetes, liver disease or pancreatitis. Extra weight can also aggravate slipped kneecaps and hip dysplasia (an inherited hip joint malformation). It can force your Bichons heart to work harder and make it difficult to breathe, especially when it lies down. These problems can limit your Bichons ability to run, play or even walk, which in turn, increases the likelihood of continued weight problems.