

Feeding the Fluffy Bichon Frise

Learn how to choose the best food for your Bichon.

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How can you tell if your Bichon is the correct weight? Dr. Bartges explains that an optimally conditioned dog is one that's neither too fat nor too thin with some body fat, but no fat stores. You should be able to feel the ribs easily, but there should be a little bit of padding between your fingers and the ribs, he says. If you stand above the dog and look down at its back, there should be an indentation in the flank an hourglass shape.

The best way to fight the battle of the bulge is to prevent your Bichon from ever getting fat. Don't overfeed it. (Tip: Feed according to the food manufacturers recommendation, then adjust the amount if necessary, depending on your dogs response.) Limit between-meal treats and provide your Bichon with plenty of vigorous exercise. If your dog can't exercise vigorously because of knee or hip problems, substitute less intense exercise, such as walking, and increase the duration, if possible.

If your Bichon already has a weight problem, you'll need to take more drastic action. Reduce the amount you feed by 25 percent or switch to a light, restricted-calorie food. Eliminate all table food, snacks and treats. Increase your dogs daily exercise by 15 minutes. If your Bichon can't handle vigorous exercise, just try walking. Increase the exercise intensity and duration as your dogs fitness improves.

An Ounce of Prevention Bichons, like many small breeds, are susceptible to urolithiasis stones (uroliths) that form in the urinary tract. The most common types of uroliths in Bichons are struvite, which form in association with a bacterial urinary tract infection, and calcium oxalate, which form without an accompanying infection.

Diet, while not the sole factor leading to urolithiasis, is an important factor in its treatment and management. For example, struvite urolithiasis is treated with a therapeutic diet to dissolve the uroliths (along with antibiotics for the infection), followed by another therapeutic diet to prevent their recurrence. Calcium-oxalate uroliths must be removed surgically. Their recurrence can also be prevented by dietary management, although a different one from that used to prevent struvite urolithiasis.

Because calcium-oxalate urolithiasis is difficult to treat, dietary measures are used to prevent calcium-oxalate urolith formation in dogs that are predisposed (not every Bichon is at risk). The goal is to minimize urolith formation by feeding a low-protein diet and avoiding foods and supplements that increase urinary acidity, calcium content or oxalate content. Many foods are potentially harmful, including milk, corn, broccoli, soybeans and others.