

Feed Your Collie Right

Customized nutrition is the foundation for your dog's health.

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Choices, Choices, Choices Not so many years ago, commercial dog foods differed only in form or flavor. Today, however, there are all kinds of choices, such as: n Naturally preserved or preservative-free foods: Dog foods were once kept fresh by the addition of artificial chemicals, such as BHA, BHT and ethoxyquin. Because some consumers were concerned about the safety of these compounds, manufacturers replaced them with natural (though artificially synthesized) preservatives, such as vitamin E (sometimes listed as mixed tocopherols) and vitamin C. Preservative-free dog foods are also available. These products must be stored in a cool, dry environment and used promptly to prevent spoilage.

Organic foods: If you're concerned about pesticide and chemical contamination of food products, you may want to feed your Collie an organic dog food. Be forewarned: The term organic usually indicates that the foods ingredients were grown without the use of artificial chemicals or pesticides, but the food may not meet the more stringent requirements that govern the labeling of human food as organic.

Vegetarian foods: Dogs can get along quite nicely on vegetarian dog food, as long as the food has been properly formulated to provide complete nutrition. These products allow vegetarian owners to maintain their dietary principles when feeding their dogs. Vegetarian foods are also useful for dogs with meat allergies.

Therapeutic foods: Veterinarians sometimes prescribe therapeutic foods--in conjunction with appropriate medical care--for certain health problems and situations, such as heart disease, kidney disease, food allergies, and recovery from major illnesses or surgery. These products are available only from your veterinarian.

Raw foods: These diets (Biologically Appropriate Raw Foods or Bones and Raw Foods [BARF] diet) have gained popularity in recent years. Raw-food advocates contend that these diets closely duplicate the diets of wolves and other wild canidae, and are thus healthier for domestic dogs than commercially prepared or cooked foods. This hasn't been demonstrated scientifically and isn't supported by statistics that show that domestic dogs live, on average, much longer than their wild counterparts. In addition, raw meat, especially chicken, can harbor Salmonella and E. coli bacteria--hazards to both humans and dogs. (Salmonella infection often causes few symptoms in dogs, but infected dogs can become carriers and shed Salmonella in the saliva and feces for weeks.)