

## The Dalmatian Diet

**Take a bite out of health problems with a properly balanced diet.**

*Christina Cox-Evick*

It would be nice if choosing the correct diet for your Dalmatian was as black and white as his singular coat. Protein, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins and minerals should be supplied in proper proportions from quality sources, but canine metabolisms vary just as much as human metabolisms. The same amount and type of food that keeps one Dalmatian in optimum condition might leave another looking scruffy.

When searching for a good diet for your Dalmatian, learn how to read dog-food labels. Ingredients are listed in descending order by weight. Although dogs are omnivores, the foods protein source is still very important. Dogs have short digestive tracts suited to digesting meat protein. Although soy is a popular alternative protein source in foods, some dogs may have difficulty digesting it. According to nutritionist and author Earl Mindell, R.Ph., Ph.D., Meat should be the first ingredient. If the food does not specify the type of meat, such as chicken, lamb or beef, cross that food off your list.

Premium-quality dog foods list the type or types of meat protein sources. William Young, D.V.M., owner of Chevington Animal Hospital in Pickerington, Ohio, says premium foods have another advantage. Premium-dog-food manufacturers buy and use the same ingredients despite price fluctuations. Many generic foods substitute ingredients depending on what is less expensive at the time, says Dr. Young. This variation in formula can cause a dog to experience digestive disturbances, including excessive gas, diarrhea and vomiting.

Fat sources include poultry fat, lamb tallow and safflower oil. Because fat becomes rancid fairly easily, dog-food manufacturers must stabilize it with some type of preservative.

Because of the debate over the safety and necessity of chemical preservatives, most premium- food manufacturers now offer diets preserved naturally with vitamins C or E.

Once you have checked out the ingredients, take a look at the protein-to-fat ratio listed on the percentage chart. Protein and fat levels must correspond. Holistic health expert Richard Pitcairn, D.V.M., Ph.D., advises, There are metabolic reactions between [protein and fat] and also when a diet is fattier, an animal will eat less to assuage its hunger. High-powered performance diets may have a protein-to-fat ratio as high as 30-to-20. This type of diet is for working dogs under great stress, such as sled dogs, police dogs and herding dogs. For most dogs, a protein-to-fat ratio ranging from 20-to-10 to 26-to-16 is more appropriate.