

Fuel Up Your German Pointer and Go

How to feed your high-energy dog.

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Too Much of a Good Thing Obesity--the most common canine nutrition-related health problem--can increase your German Pointers chances of developing diabetes, liver disease and pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas). Obesity can also aggravate pre-existing joint problems, such as hip dysplasia. Excessive weight can overwork your German Pointers heart and hinder its breathing. Exercise is more difficult, which increases the likelihood of continued weight problems.

Dogs often gain weight as they age because their metabolism slows down and they become less active. Obesity can result if the diet is not adjusted to compensate for these changes. Most foods for senior dogs have less fat and fewer calories than food formulated for younger dogs. Many contain added fiber, which adds bulk without increasing calories.

Not all senior dogs are overweight. Some, especially active dogs like German Pointers, maintain near-optimal body condition well into their senior years. Other dogs actually lose weight as they age. Weight loss in senior dogs may be caused by decreased food intake, which often accompanies chronic health problems--dental disorders, diabetes, cancer, heart or kidney disease, and many others. Some older dogs don't want to eat because their senses of smell and taste are less acute. Others eat seemingly adequate quantities of food, but lose weight because they can't digest food or absorb nutrients efficiently. Underweight senior dogs benefit from foods with added levels of high-quality fat to increase palatability and boost energy content.

The ability to metabolize protein decreases with age, so the protein requirement of senior dogs--even healthy ones--is up to 50 percent greater than that of younger adults. Inadequate protein intake can have significant health effects, such as muscle wasting, weakness and immune-system impairment. To prevent protein deficiencies, most senior foods have protein levels that are as high as those in puppy foods.

Use your eyes and hands to tell if your German Pointer is too fat. When viewed from above, your four-footed companion should have a waist--an indentation in the flank area. When you run your hands over your German Pointers body, its okay if you feel some padding, but you should be able to easily feel your dogs waist and ribs beneath it.

Weight problems are easier to prevent than they are to treat. Instead of feeding your German Pointer free-choice (allowing it to eat as much as it wants whenever it chooses), follow the food manufacturers recommendation, then adjust the amount depending on your dogs response. Limit between-meal treats; veggies are good low-calorie choices. Make sure your German Pointer gets plenty of exercise--preferably vigorous exercise, but even daily walking will help maintain a trim profile.

If your German Pointer is just a bit overweight, cutting back on its food, eliminating treats and increasing its daily exercise may be all it takes to slim it down. If its obese, however, you'll need to consult your veterinarian about a weight-loss plan, which should include a complete check-up, as well as dietary and exercise recommendations.

Your veterinarian may recommend a prescription or therapeutic food that's specifically designed for weight loss. These foods, which have less fat and fewer calories than light or reduced calorie foods available from retail sources, are more effective for producing weight loss in obese dogs. (The other products often work well for maintaining weight loss.)

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