

Feeding the Labrador Retriever

Nutrition tips for Labs in all walks of life.

Virginia Parker Guidry

Feeding the CompetitorThe athletic and versatile Labrador Retriever can learn to do just about anything: field work, agility, Flyball, therapy work, obedience. In fact, the breed thrives on challenging activities. Feeding the highly active Lab isn't much different than feeding a pet or conformation dog, but there are a few considerations owners must address when feeding the competitor.

The more active they are, the more calories they're burning, says Dr. LaFlamme. Which means the active Lab needs a diet that supplies extra calories. The best way to get that is to feed a diet that's higher in fat, she says. With a pet you probably want a fat content in the diet that's somewhere around eight or 10 percent. With an active dog, you're probably going to need 14 to up to 20 percent fat in the diet. So you want more fat in the diet to provide the energy they need.

Dr. Davidson suggests feeding a performance diet to supply the extra calories. Performance dogs may have a high caloric requirement, necessitating feeding a stress or performance version of dog food. Many of the well-known and respected dog food manufacturers provide these diets, which are higher in fat and protein.

Because performance diets are higher in protein than regular adult diets, some have come to believe that the active dog primarily needs extra protein, not calories. However, says Dr. La Flamme, Because animals tend to eat to meet their energy needs, manufacturers of pet food and any nutritionist that's formulating a diet, formulates all the nutrients in the diet in relation to the energy level. Because of that, diets that are high in energy are also high in protein. So when people say, You want to feed a high protein diet for the hard working dog, a little bit is because they have slightly increased protein requirements. A lot of that is the fact that its also a high energy diet.

According to Dr. LaFlamme, there are misperceptions about diets high in protein. She notes that research shows protein is not detrimental to the kidneys, for example theres no reason to be concerned about higher protein diets for normal, healthy dogs. The active competitor also needs a diet that digests well. High digestibility is going to be important because you want a lot of the food to be used, says Dr. LaFlamme.

And, You may want to provide snacks during the day, she suggests. Dogs that are going to use the carbohydrates out of their body, if you give them a snack right after they finish exercising, it helps replenish the glycogen. And that may give them a little extra edge, especially if they're doing really hard work.

In addition, keep the active Lab hydrated by giving water throughout the day. However, do not allow the dog to drink large quantities before or right after exercise. Finally, multiple small meals are best, but do not feed within 112 to 2 hours of exercise.

How can owners really be sure a Lab is receiving appropriate nutrition? Simply take a good look. You'll see a muscular body, trim waist, thick, shiny coat, and perhaps above all, an alert twinkle in those beautiful Lab eyes.

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