

Feeding the Labrador Retriever

Nutrition tips for Labs in all walks of life.

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It's been said that food and water are the two most important items in a dog's life. Proper nutrition including a balanced proportion of vitamins, minerals, fats, protein and carbohydrates promotes growth, good health and the ability to fight illness. A Lab that eats a high-quality, balanced diet, and drinks plenty of fresh water is usually a very healthy dog.

All dogs need a proper diet, but there are times when nutritional needs vary slightly. For example, to maintain peak energy, a highly active competitor may need a diet higher in fat than an adult nonworking dog. The following are thoughts and ideas from experts that can help you provide your Lab whether the dog is a companion, show dog or active competitor with an appropriate, nutritious diet.

Feeding the Companion The pet Labs nutritional needs are the same as any canine companion. A daily dose of a complete-and-balanced diet full of nutrients, along with an ample ration of water, will do the trick of keeping a companion Lab a healthy best friend.

Most Labs bring to the dinner table an appetite that's beyond compare. Labs love to eat. And eat they will. As much of anything that an owner allows. As Mary Weist, a breeder, AKC conformation judge and president of the National Labrador Retriever Club, says, Labs are walking stomachs. If a Labrador doesn't eat, it's sick.

Labs are known as easy keepers, which means they can quickly gain weight, even become obese, if owners aren't careful. The Lab appetite is so hearty that it's difficult to keep weight on target, no matter what the dog is doing sitting fireside, trotting around the show ring or competing in the field.

Labradors like to eat and therefore will become obese if overfed, says Autumn Davidson, D.V.M., National Labrador Retriever Club medical advisor, diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine, and associate clinical professor, school of veterinary medicine, University of California at Davis.

In addition to a hearty appetite, many Labs have a genetic tendency toward putting on pounds. Dottie LaFlamme, D.V.M., veterinary nutritionist and Ralston Purina research fellow, says, One of the very special things about Labs is many of them are predisposed to being a little heavy. So, it's really important for the general health of all dogs that they not be overweight, but Labs especially because of a predisposition to hip dysplasia and other problems.