

Puppy Food

Rules for feeding your puppy.

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Keep in mind that a regular puppy food, as opposed to a food that's made specifically for a certain size dog, provides complete and balanced nutrition for any size dog; the difference is that its not fine-tuned to meet the precise needs of, say, a Saint Bernard puppy.

What if you don't know how big your puppy is going to be? Mixed-breed puppies adopted from animal shelters often don't come with background information about their parents size. But theres a rule of thumb that will get you in the ballpark, according to Dr. Carey. Based on the puppys weight at 8 weeks of age, you can estimate that it will be four to five times that size when its an adult. For example, an 8-week-old pup that weighs 12 pounds is likely to weigh 48 to 60 pounds as an adult. This estimate is probably a little on the low side, but it can give you an idea of whether you need to provide a food geared for a large or small breed. Get Into a RoutineWhatever you choose to feed your puppy, the most important thing is that it be a complete and balanced diet. During a puppys formative period, both when its still in its mom and during the early feeding and growth period, poor nutrition can lead to all sorts of adverse long-term implications, such as a compromised immune system or poor skeletal development, or things that we don't even yet know about, says Dorothy Laflamme, D.V.M., Ph.D., a diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Nutritionists and a Ralston Purina Research Fellow in St. Louis, Missouri. So, good nutrition is very important during that early phase.

Unless you've raised a lot of puppies, growth rate can be difficult to determine, but your puppys body condition provides a clue, so keep tabs on that waistline and tummy size. Good nutrition doesn't mean that young Rover should be roly poly. A healthy, well-fed puppy is slim, not stout. The biggest nutrition problem for dogs in America is obesity, Dr. Hamil says. It starts with puppies, just like it does with children, by getting too heavy when they're young.

Your well-fed puppy should be slightly lean, with some cover over the ribs. A little puppy fat is okay, but a big round tummy is a sign that a pup is overweight. Stand over your puppy and give it a healthy hug with your hands. Can you feel its ribs? Then its just right. If you can't feel the ribs, its too fat. Take a good look at your pup. Is its abdomen fairly flat or does it have a protruding abdomen and little or no waistline? In the latter case, your pup has put on a few too many pounds.

Just as important, if not more so, is a moderate growth rate. You're better off if the puppy grows slightly slower than average, than above average, Dr. Carey says. Adult size is determined genetically, and puppies will get there almost regardless of how fast they grow. You can slow them down a little bit by feeding them moderately so they grow at a moderate rate. They'll not only eat less food, they'll also have better skeletal health.