

Puppy Food

Rules for feeding your puppy.

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It's a whole new world out there in puppy nutrition. Each year, veterinary nutritionists learn more about what pups need to grow into healthy, happy adult dogs. Thanks to their research, 21st-century dog owners can purchase foods designed for their puppies' size and growth rate. Just another marketing ploy, you say? Not necessarily.

Take large-breed dogs, for instance, which have more developmental skeletal problems than smaller breeds. Large breeds are defined as any dog that will weigh 50 pounds or more as an adult. Conventional wisdom once said that big dogs with big bones needed lots of calcium and other nutrients during their growth stage.

For a long time we thought that young, rapidly growing dogs, particularly of larger breeds, needed to have more calcium, phosphorus, protein and calories, and now we know that's really not true, says John Hamil, D.V.M., of Canyon Animal Hospital in Laguna Beach, Calif.

Feeding For Size As it turns out, says Dan Carey, D.V.M., a veterinarian in the lams research and development division in Dayton, Ohio, just the opposite is true. Large-breed puppies need less calcium so their bones can develop normally as they're growing. We found that if we reduced the calcium in diets for large-breed puppies and controlled the calories, keeping them from growing too fast, we could actually help them grow with fewer problems. Dr. Hamil, who breeds Bloodhounds, says that large and giant dogs seem to do better on this type of toned-down diet with fewer calories and lower levels of protein.

Some dog food manufacturers have also added nutrients believed to help improve joint cartilage, such as glucosamine and chondroitin, to diets for puppies, as well as large-breed adult dogs. These nutraceuticals, as they're called, are stable in foods for long periods, Dr. Carey says. We've tested it every which way we can, and the nutraceuticals not only survive the extrusion process—the making of the kibble—but are there for considerable time after the food's shelf life, he says.

What about small and medium-size dogs? They can have special needs as well. Small dogs of any age have a higher metabolic rate than large-breed dogs. This means that they burn energy more quickly, so their energy requirements are much higher. Diets for small and medium-size dogs, then, are formulated slightly differently than those for large breeds, and they have a different ratio of nutrient to calorie content.

The small guys, those that weigh less than 20 pounds, can really benefit from a nutrient-dense food that gives them a lot of nutrition in a small amount because their stomachs just aren't that big relative to their needs, explains Dr. Carey.