

The Benefits of Proper Puppy Nutrition

Give your new puppy the gift of future health and proper growth by following these four principles.

Eve Adamson

The size your puppy will be as an adult adds another important consideration. If you have a small breed, a dog that will be 20 pounds or less as an adult, every bite counts. "Little puppies need a very dense, high-energy food," Carey said. Small breeds have faster metabolisms than other puppies, so they need to be fed even more often — four times a day if possible.

The latest research in puppy nutrition has focused on large and giant breeds, dogs that will be 65 pounds or larger as adults. According to a study by Richard Kealy, Ph.D., a nutrition scientist at Ralston Purina Co. limiting food consumption in puppies resulted in a significant decrease in the incidence of hip dysplasia later in life, and quick growth rates in large breeds due to excessive calorie consumption produced weaker, more porous skeletons. The Iams Co. and others have researched excess calcium in the diets of large and giant breeds resulting in bone problems, too.

How much should you feed your large-breed pup? Just enough to maintain a slim, hourglass shape when viewed from above, Kealy said.

Afraid your giant breed won't reach its potential? Don't worry. "It's not true that underfeeding will restrict growth," Rogers said, explaining growth will be slower, but genetics, not diet, determines ultimate size. "In any species, we don't know if maximum growth is ever good, and in several species, it has been proven that restricted growth extends life span and improves health."

4. Play switcheroo.

You may have heard you should never switch your dog's food because of the risk of stomach distress or that you should never feed table scraps. Not true, Rogers said. "You shouldn't feed more than 10 percent of your dog's calories as scraps or treats, but don't worry about occasionally offering healthy table scraps."

Rogers suggested rotating commercial foods. "With the uncertainty of not yet knowing all the information about canine nutrition, switching dog foods every so often among those that are well tested is probably a good idea. You'll be sure to get a variety of ingredients and not overdo any one nutrient, either."