

## Feeding Your New Puppy

Few things in life are more irresistible than the image of a roly-poly puppy running through the house. While that picture may be cute, however, it isn't always healthy. Veterinarians are your best source of information to help you make more informed choices about which brand of food to feed or what kinds of rewarding treats to give your little friend for good behavior. Every puppy is different, and no single diet will work best for all pups. When deciding what to feed your new puppy, make sure you get reliable, professional veterinary advice on:

- What type of diet to choose
- How much food to feed
- How to adjust your puppy's diet as your puppy grows into adulthood

### Eating Right—Nutrition Basics

Puppies should eat a diet that contains protein, fats, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, and water in the proper proportions.

Commercially produced puppy foods must meet AAFCO

(Association of American Feed Control Officials) nutritional standards. Pet foods that meet AAFCO standards are marked with the phrase "complete and balanced" and, in the case of puppy foods, should be formulated for growth. Any diets that meet these guidelines won't require any additional supplementation—the diet will include all necessary vitamins and minerals. Don't forget to also make sure your puppy has a continuous supply of fresh, clean water!



There are many commercial puppy foods on the market. Ask a veterinary professional for advice on what products offer the right nutritional mix for your pet.

### How Much and When?

Typically, tiny puppies—those under 12 weeks of age—should eat three to four times a day. Once a puppy is 3 months old, he or she can generally make the switch to eating two to three times a day. The frequency of feedings, however, will depend on the puppy's breed, size, and individual needs. This frequency should continue until the puppy has reached adulthood.

Growing puppies require significantly more food for their size than adult dogs. The feeding guidelines listed on your pet food bag are a good place to start, but you should monitor how well those amounts seem to be meeting your puppy's needs. A puppy that is leaving food in the bowl at mealtimes or becoming too pudgy may be eating too much; a puppy that seems lethargic or excessively thin may not be getting enough.

It's also important to set a regular schedule for feeding your puppy. A good schedule helps prevent stomach upsets and supports housetraining your puppy.

### Large Breed vs. Small Breed

Picture a huge Great Dane puppy standing next to a tiny Chihuahua puppy. They're both dogs—and members of the exact same species—but their nutritional needs during puppyhood and young adulthood are completely different.

Small-breed dogs mature faster, typically have faster metabolisms, and have tiny mouths and teeth. They often need puppy diets that are easy for them to eat and chew and are more “energy dense” to help keep up activity levels and encourage proper growth and development. In addition, small, toy, or teacup breeds may need to eat more often.

Large-breed dogs, on the other hand, often mature at a slower rate and are prone to developing joint (e.g., elbow and hip) problems if they eat too much and grow too rapidly. Excess body weight can also stress developing bones. For these reasons, it is vitally important not to overfeed large-breed puppies.

Thankfully, there are a number of commercial diets specifically for dog breeds of different sizes. Diets designed for large-breed puppies, for example, are typically less energy dense and, therefore, are less likely to be overfed. Ask a veterinary professional for advice if your puppy belongs to a particularly large or small breed.

### **Feed by the Puppy, Not by the Package**

The key point to remember is that every puppy is different, and no single diet will work best for all of them. To ensure that your puppy has a healthy adulthood, seek professional advice, educate yourself about good puppy nutrition, and carefully monitor your puppy's growth rate, activity level, and body condition.

### **Body Condition**

When you visit your veterinarian, he or she can weigh and examine your puppy to help you determine if things are “on track.” In between those appointments, which become less frequent as your puppy ages, you should be able to monitor your puppy's progress on your own. Many veterinarians and nutritionists use a *body condition score* to determine whether an animal is overweight or underweight. These scores usually rank a pet on a five- or nine-point scale. In general, your dog should score a 4 on a nine-point scale or a 3 on a five-point scale throughout his or her life.

One of the most important aspects of caring for your dog's health is to maintain your dog at a proper weight. Studies have demonstrated that dogs maintained at the proper weight will live up to 2 years longer than overweight or obese dogs. Therefore, it's best for all dogs—puppies and adults—to be a little on the lean side. That doesn't mean your dog should be abnormally skinny. It means you should be able to feel—but not see—ribs when you run your hands down your dog's sides. Your dog should also have a definite “waist” when viewed from above.

If you have any concerns about your puppy's growth rate, condition, or eating habits, schedule a weight check.

### **Read the Label**

Under federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations, every puppy food must include a label listing its ingredients and a guaranteed analysis of how much protein, fat, and other important nutrients are in it. Reading the percentages can get complicated, so one of the best quick ways to assess the quality of a diet is to look at the ingredient list. By law, the pet food manufacturer must list the ingredients by weight. For more information on reading pet food labels, visit [www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/ResourcesforYou](http://www.fda.gov/AnimalVeterinary/ResourcesforYou) and click on “Pet Food Labels—General” under “Information for Consumers Fliers.”