

Feeding your dog



It can be difficult to decide what dog food to choose. A dog's diet can affect both their behaviour and their health so it is important to get it right. There are also differences in price between brands, so you may need to balance your budget with suitability and quality of the food you choose. The most expensive brands won't necessarily be the most suitable for your dog.

Complete kibble is very popular and helps ensure your dog's diet is balanced. It can also then be measured out, handled by children, used for treats in your treat bag, or soaked and stuffed into a KONG.

Other options include: raw, wet/tinned, fresh, and a mix/variety of all. Take the time to research what option is best for you and your dog. Mealtimes are an important part of their day! For more information, please ask the **Family Dog Team**.

This hand out is designed to guide you through interpreting dog food packaging to help you make an informed decision of what food to choose.

Facts about dog digestion:

- New foods need to be introduced gradually, so your dog can build up the relevant gut flora.
- Dogs have around 1700 taste buds, compared to 9000 in humans.
- They have high stomach acidity for the destruction of harmful bacteria.

Understanding food packaging



By law, food manufacturers are required to list ingredients by weight in ascending order before cooking. So fresh meat and other water rich ingredients will be near the top of the list, leading to the belief that they make up the main ingredients, but this isn't the case. For example, fresh meat contains 75% water, so food containing 25% lamb before cooking will actually only contain 6-7% lamb protein in the dry food.

So....

25% Fresh meat = 4-5 % protein

Food manufacturers may use terms to describe food content; here is a rough guide to what it may equate to as a percentage:

"contains..."	less than 4% of the ingredient mentioned
"with....."	4-14% of the ingredient mentioned
"rich in....."	14-26% of the ingredient mentioned
".....paste"	26-100% of the ingredient mentioned
"full....."	100% of the ingredient mentioned (so the food isn't likely to be balanced)

So...

"With" chicken = 4-14 % chicken



Artificial additives

There is no nutritional benefit to the addition of artificial additives to dog food but they may be used for:

Artificial Colourings (look)

Used to make the food more attractive to the pet owner and not the pet—dogs don't care what colour their food is. Artificial colourings can affect a dog's behaviour, so a bland coloured kibble is advisable.



Artificial Flavourings (taste)

Used to improve the palatability of pet foods. However, this shouldn't be necessary in a high quality dog food. Both artificial colourings and flavourings have been associated with causing hyperactivity.

Artificial Preservatives and Antioxidants

Pet foods require antioxidants to give them shelf life. This is because as soon as fats come into contact with air they begin to oxidise and become rancid. To prevent this, manufacturers have the choice of using either synthetic or natural antioxidants.

Synthetic antioxidants are often listed as "EC permitted antioxidants":

- E320 - BHA - Butylatedhydroxyanisole
- E321 - BHT - Butylatedhydroxytoluen
- E324 - Ethoxyquin

These are extremely effective at their job, however they are associated with several health problems (including cancer) when fed in quantity, so this is one of the cheaper methods of preserving pet foods.

The healthiest option is to preserve the food naturally with **tocopherals** which are a blend of vitamins "E" & "C". These are commonly made from **vegetable oil**. This is quite often used in conjunction with **rosemary** which is a natural antioxidant.

Meat and animal derivatives

This is a generic term for animal proteins which can sourced from **any** animal and any **part** of the animal. Generally they are derived from the less desirable parts such as the heads, feet and guts. Manufacturers can also choose different sources depending on market cost.

Ash

Not used as a filler but is deliberately used to dilute a recipe, it is what is left over when a food has been completely incinerated, leaving just the food's minerals behind (like calcium, phosphorous, zinc, iron, etc). The average ash content of most commercial dog foods appears to be somewhere around 5-8 %.

Cereals

Cereals are a good carbohydrate source and provide necessary dietary fibre.

However, cereals vary in their nutritional value and in their digestibility. The less digestible grains tend to be cheaper.

When the term "**cereals**" is used as a dog food ingredient, the actual grain used can vary from batch to batch. This allows manufacturers to take advantage of market prices, using whichever grain is cheapest at a given time. So the cereal isn't chosen for the benefit of your dog.

They can also be used as bulking agents. These are ingredients that provide a lot of bulk to the product but is of little nutritional value and also cheap. Some products can contain a high percentage of cereal.

Some pet food manufacturers try not to use any cereals, using **fruits** and **vegetables** or more digestible grains such as **rice** (brown rice is preferable to white rice) instead. This is a good alternative.

Manufacturers should state on the packaging which cereals are contained in the product.

Feeding for different life stages

Puppies should be fed on a complete diet suitable for their age and their breed e.g. Toy breed and giant breeds will have different diets/feeding quantities within a range of feed. The breeder should provide you with enough food for the puppy's settling-in period and a guideline on when they are fed. Keep the puppy on the same food for the first few weeks when they have entered your home as they will have had a lot of change to contend with. Very gradually wean dogs over to a new food if you want to change their diet after their settling-in period (see chart).

The number of times a day you feed your dog depends on their age, in general:

8 weeks of age – usually fed 4-6 x daily

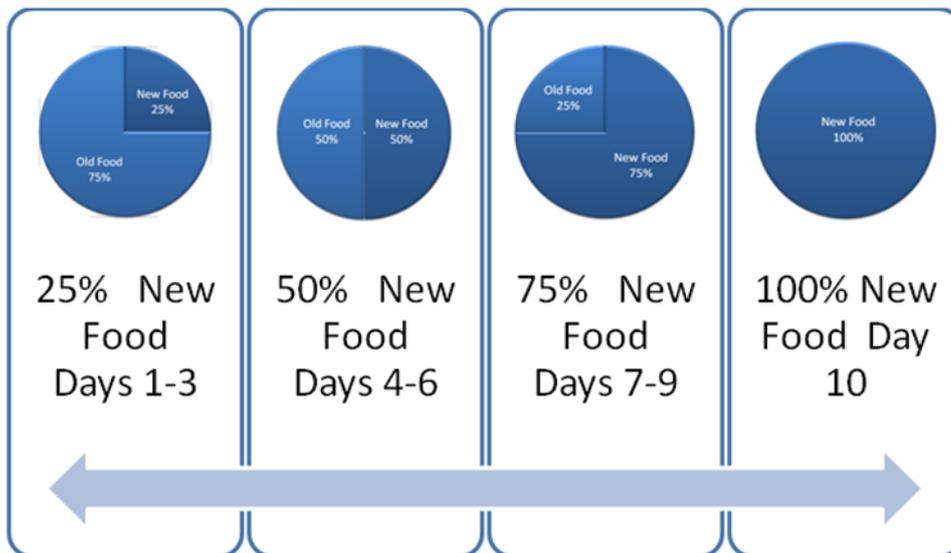
12 weeks of age - meals gradually reduced to 3-4 x daily

6 months of age onwards – meals gradually reduced to 2-3 x daily.

At around 6 months there may be a Junior food available within the range you are feeding. Generally dogs are weaned over to an adult diet at around a year old but this varies with the breed of dog. As an adult, feed a suitable diet for optimal body condition, in the correct quantity to maintain a healthy weight.

Later in life, senior dogs need a high quality, palatable diet with easily digested protein, lower calorie levels, and a careful balance of essential nutrients. Key minerals supporting aging joints and vitamins C and E, along with protein to support the immune system.

Weaning onto a new food



Chewing

Remember that dogs have a need to chew and need a suitable outlet for this. Provide your dog with dog-safe chew toys, Nylabones, stuffed KONGs, carrots, anco root, and/or buffalo horns. Adult dogs can have large raw beef or lamb bones, so long as there are no loose smaller bones or joints that may get lodged. Avoid rawhide as this often gets swallowed whole or in large chunks, and never feed your dog cooked bones. Always supervise your dog's chewing, and remove any small parts that break off that may get swallowed whole and/or lodged.



Puppy teeth are fragile, so puppies should only ever have soft chews, or those made specifically for puppies. A good guide is you should be able to dent the chew with your thumbnail. If you can't, then they are too hard for your pup!

Rotate chews regularly to keep your dog interested. Getting children involved with choosing different chews for different days of the week can be a great way to build their interest in the dog, and introduce responsibility.

Slow feeders and puzzle feeders are really helpful if your dog eats very quickly, as they can help slow them down. Putting their food in a muffin tray with large balls on top of each hole can help make mealtimes interactive and slow down speedy eaters.

Using puzzle feeders and activity toys, or a stuffed KONG at **busy times of the day**, such as when getting children ready for school can also be helpful, especially to keep young dogs occupied. You can put your dog's entire meal, or part of it, in the KONG to make it last longer and form part of enrichment without overfeeding.



Overall tips on choosing a food

Characteristics of a satisfactory pet food:

- **Complete:** provides adequate amounts of all the required nutrient
- **Balanced:** the nutrients are present in the correct proportions
- **Digestible:** your dog is able to digest the food and absorb the nutrient
- **Palatable:** appealing enough to be eaten

Judge the chosen food on its suitability over several phases:

- **Short term:** palatability and digestive tolerance
- **Medium term:** the development of the dog's weight and quality of their coat
- **Long term:** the development/maintenance of your dog's health over several months or years

Suitable food:

- Because products are listed in descending order of weight, you ideally want to see at least **2 named meat sources** in the first 5 listed ingredients
- Choose pet foods preserved with natural antioxidants such as mixed **tocopherals, ascorbic acid (Vitamin E)** and **rosemary**
- Choose products that name the cereal used such as **rice** which is highly digestible or **fruits/vegetables**, especially for those dogs with a sensitive stomach/allergies
- Choose pet foods containing **named meat** sources so that each batch will be the same, again especially if the dog has a sensitive stomach/allergies

Avoid:

- "Meat derivatives" and "animal derivatives"
- The term "cereal", wheat or corn/corn products at least where they are mentioned in the first 5 ingredients
- Artificial colourings and brightly/multi coloured foods
- Artificial flavourings
- Artificial preservatives
- EC Permitted additives
- Unspecified fat source
- Containing wheat or sorghum

Remember when making the final decision:

- Quality of ingredients
- The daily feeding cost
- Feed correct amount to maintain an optimum weight
- Suitability to your individual dog
- Appropriate for the life stage of the dog
- The higher the digestibility, the lower additives and bulking products in the food, the less waste your dog will produce = best value for money
- Wean dogs onto their new diet slowly
- Dogs don't just eat for nutrition, they have a behavioural need to lick, rip and chew so this need must be met through providing suitable chewing items. Aim for 30 minutes of chewing a day