

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 is 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.

We do recommend you feed a complete, dry food diet so that their food 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.

Facts about dog digestion:

- Dogs have powerful jaws that can hack but cannot chew.
- They have few taste buds, so don't have a great sense of taste.
- They have high stomach acidity for the digestion of bones and destruction of harmful bacteria.

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

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

Understanding food packaging

Artificial additives

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

Artificial Colourings

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 be sourced from **any** animal and any part of the animal. Generally they are derived from the undesirable 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 foods' minerals behind (like calcium, phosphorous, zinc, iron, etc). The average ash content of most commercial dog foods appears to be somewhere around 5-8 %.

Understanding food packaging

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 provides 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 **fruit** 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 puppies settling in period and a guidelines 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 x daily

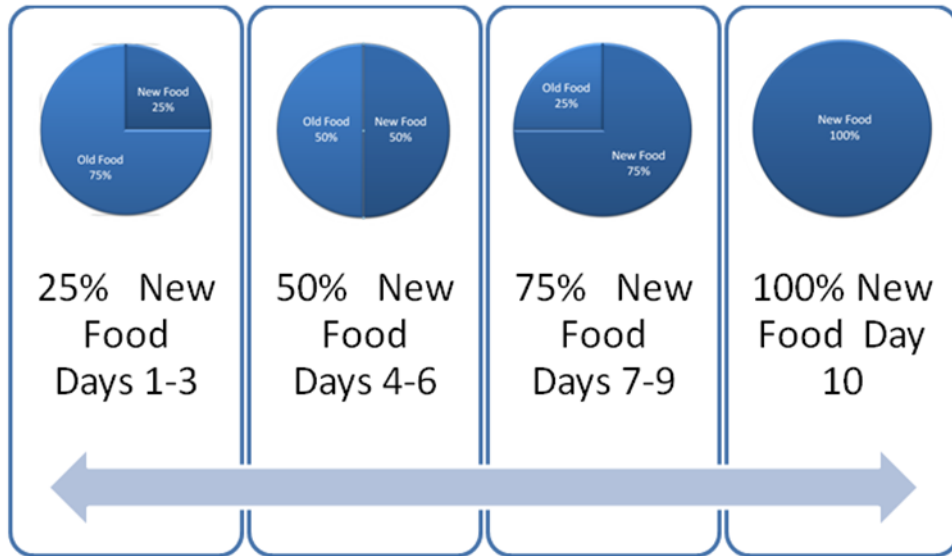
12 weeks of age - meals gradually reduced to 3 x daily

6 months of age onwards – meals gradually reduced to 2 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 and maintenance in the correct quantity to maintain a healthy weight.

Later in life, senior dogs need a high quality, palatable diet with easy digestible protein, lower calorie levels and 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 dogs have a need to chew and need a suitable outlet for this. Provide your dog with raw beef or lamb bones, rawhide chews, roasted and calcium bones to fulfil this need. If you are worried about giving your dog these to chew on, supervise them and use stuffed KONGs or large hard plastic nylabones when you are unable to supervise them.



Rotate chews regularly to keep the dog interested, getting children involved with choosing different bones etc. for different days of the week can be used to help develop life skills.



Activity toys are really helpful if your dog eats very quickly, they can help slow them down. Putting a large rubber ball or KONG in their food bowl to eat around can also help (making sure it cannot be swallowed). There are also 'slow' feeding bowls available that are designed to slow feeding down and are available online or from pet shops.

Using **activity toys at busy times of the day**, such as when getting children ready for school or using a KONG at these times can also be helpful, especially to keep young dogs occupied. It doesn't matter if they get their breakfast in two frozen KONGs for example rather than in their bowl.

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
- **Safe:** free of toxins or anything which could harm a pet

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 the quality of its coat
- **Long term:** the development of the animal's health over several months or years

Suitable food:

- Because products are listed in ascending 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 **fruit/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 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 and multi coloured foods
- Artificial flavourings
- Artificial Preservatives
- EC Permitted additives
- Unspecified fat source

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