

# Canine Nutrition

- A proper diet is necessary to ensure the health and longevity of your dog.
- Dogs are omnivores, meaning that they can eat meat and plants as their primary food sources.
- Look for a statement on the food's label that says the food underwent AAFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials) feeding trials.
- If you prefer to feed a homemade or raw diet, it's best to do it under the guidance of a veterinary nutritionist.
- Table scraps and treats should be kept to a minimum to ensure that your dog receives balanced nutrition and does not become overweight or develop a problem (such as itchy, infected ears or a skin infection) due to a food allergy.

### How Do I Choose a Dog Food?

A high-quality, complete and balanced diet is important for the health and longevity of your dog. Among other benefits, a proper diet helps build strong bones, promotes healthy gums and teeth, protects immune function, and results in a lustrous haircoat. Unlike cats, which are carnivores (meaning that they must eat meat), dogs are omnivores, meaning that they can eat meat and plants as their primary food sources.

A large number of dog foods are available at pet supply stores, so selecting a dog food can be daunting. How do you find a food that's right for your dog? Start by asking your veterinarian the following: "Which food will meet the particular needs of my pet?" and "Which brand(s) do you recommend?"

Most pet foods are created for different life stages, including puppy, maintenance, or senior diets. Within these life stages are even more specific categories. For example, if you own a Saint Bernard puppy, you'll need to feed a puppy food for large-breed dogs. Large-breed puppy foods are specially formulated to meet the special requirements of large-breed puppies (for example, these foods have higher amounts of calcium and phosphorus because large-breed puppies grow faster than small-breed puppies). As another example, an adult dog that is used for hunting or

breeding will most likely require a maintenance diet with higher energy content.

Before purchasing a dog food, look for a statement on the label that verifies that the food underwent AAFCO feeding trials. This means that the food was tested on animals according to guidelines from the Association of American Feed Control Officials. A label that says the food meets AAFCO standards simply means that a chemical analysis of the food appears to be complete and balanced, but the food has not been tested on animals. Because some nutrients may not be digestible when fed to animals, the feeding trial statement is a better indication of the nutritional adequacy of the food.

Dogs are omnivores, meaning that they can eat meat and plants as their primary food sources.

With a complete and balanced commercial diet, vitamin supplements are usually not necessary; in fact, supplying too many nutrients can be dangerous. Consult your veterinarian before giving your pet any supplements.

### Do Certain Diseases Require Special Foods?

Nutrition can help slow the progression, or manage the signs, of many diseases. For dogs with kidney disease, for example, diets lower in protein have been shown to help slow disease progression. Foods with limited or hydrolyzed proteins can help reduce the itching and scratching in many allergic dogs. For dogs with osteoarthritis, many diets now contain higher levels of glucosamine and antioxidants to help reduce pain and inflammation.

Most diets that are designed for a specific disease are prescription diets and are only available through veterinarians. If your pet has a disease or condition, consult your veterinarian for nutritional advice.

### Is a Homemade or Raw Diet Okay to Feed?

The advantage of homemade diets is that they can be tailored to the specific needs of your dog. However, most homemade diets found in books or on the Internet can be too vague or too complex, and ingredient substitutions or alterations may result in a diet that is nutritionally deficient or unbalanced or is even toxic. If you really want to provide your dog with a homemade diet, it's best to work under the guidance of a veterinary nutritionist to ensure that the diet you prepare is complete and balanced for your dog.

While the proponents of raw diets claim that meat and bones more closely resemble the diet that dogs would eat in the wild, there is a lack of scientific evidence to support this idea. Raw diets have the same potential drawbacks of homemade diets: raw diets can also be nutritionally deficient and unbalanced. What's more, raw diets carry the risk of contamination with bacteria such as *Salmonella*, and bits of bone can break teeth and perforate the digestive tract. If you want to feed your dog a raw diet, consult your veterinarian for advice, and make sure to handle all the food and your dog's feces with care to avoid transmitting bacteria to people in your household.

### What Do I Need to Know About Table Scraps and Treats?

The biggest problem with table scraps and treats is that they add unnecessary calories that can make your pet overweight. Pet obesity often leads to diabetes, increased blood pressure, and orthopedic problems, all of which can reduce your dog's life span. If your dog is overweight, consult your veterinarian about a diet and exercise plan to get your dog back to a healthy weight. In addition, many dogs are allergic to common foods, such as wheat and chicken, resulting in problems such as itchy, infected ears and skin infections.

Table scraps and treats can also upset the bacterial balance in the digestive tract, resulting in vomiting and diarrhea. Fatty treats, especially, can lead to pancreatitis (inflammation of the pancreas), which can require hospitalization. Even if your dog is fed a balanced diet, additional treats can result in unbalanced nutrition. If you can't refuse your dog's begging, consider giving your dog healthy treats such as raw carrots and green beans.