

Proper Puppy Nutrition – Nourish Growth & Development



NOURISHES GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

Puppies grow rapidly. At times during their rapid growth and development from weaning until approximately 4 to 6 months of age, puppies, depending on the breed size, require about twice as much energy, or calories, per pound of body weight as adult dogs of the same breed size and a higher nutrient intake to support their growing bodies.

“The first food a breeder introduces to puppies should provide complete and balanced nutrition to meet the nutrient requirements of growing puppies,” says Purina Veterinary Communications Manager Laura Eirmann, DVM, DACVN. “With proper nutrition, puppies are more likely to develop properly and have strong bones and teeth, healthy vision, a thick lustrous coat and strong muscles.” Although rapid growth in many breeds begins to plateau by 6 months of age, puppies continue to grow and develop for several months longer depending on the breed size of dog, with smaller breeds reaching physical maturity at a younger age compared to large- and giant-breed dogs. During this period, their nutrient requirements per pound of body weight are still greater than they will be as adults, and thus, they should continue to be fed a food specially formulated for growth, advises Eirmann, who is boarded in veterinary nutrition.

Large and giant breeds, such as Great Dane, Saint Bernard and Newfoundland, may not mature physically until nearly two years old. These breeds, as well as any puppy with an anticipated adult weight of seventy pounds or greater, should be fed a growth diet specifically formulated for large-breed puppies for their entire growth period.

NUTRIENT BALANCE IS IMPORTANT

The nutritional health of puppies, just like adult dogs, depends on receiving the correct amounts and proportions of six essential nutrients: water, protein, fat, carbohydrates, minerals and vitamins. To be considered “complete,” a puppy food should contain all essential nutrients, except water, which should always be accessible. These nutrients also must be present in the proper proportion to ensure a puppy food is balanced. The nutritional adequacy statement on the pet food label will state if a product provides “complete and balanced nutrition” for growing puppies. “Though fat, protein and calcium tend to get the greater emphasis in puppy foods, every single essential nutrient is key, especially during the period of rapid growth,” Dr. Eirmann says. “Deficiencies in any essential nutrient can compromise short- or long-term health.”

Feeding a complete and balanced puppy food is important for numerous reasons. Dr. Eirmann notes problems that can happen if nutrients are not balanced:

A zinc deficiency can contribute to compromised immune function and skin abnormalities.

Too little protein can cause disturbed growth as well as immune compromise and increased susceptibility to various stressor and infectious agents.

Calcium balanced with phosphorus is particularly critical for large-breed dogs, as too little or too much can lead to skeletal problems.

KEEPING PUPPIES FIT

Along with providing complete and balanced nutrition, puppies of all breed sizes need an appropriate amount of calories during growth. This is defined as the amount that supports normal growth and maintains the puppy at an optimal lean body condition.

Maximal growth is not optimal growth. Overfeeding and excessive weight gain in large dogs is a risk factor for developmental orthopedic conditions such as hip dysplasia. “When feeding a large-breed puppy, research shows that avoiding overfeeding benefits skeletal development,” says Dr. Eirmann. “A breeder or owner should monitor a puppy’s weight and body condition score, adjusting food intake as necessary to maintain ideal body condition.”

Just as in adult dogs, ideal body condition means that the ribs are easily palpable with minimal fat covering and that the waist is easily noted when viewed from above. A puppy in ideal body condition has an obvious abdominal tuck when viewed from the side. “Even puppies not predisposed to skeletal problems should be maintained at a lean body condition since overweight pups often become overweight or obese dogs with increased risks for various health problems,” Dr. Eirmann says.

Some breeds and some individual puppies may have higher or lower energy needs compared to average. “Puppies should be fed a measured amount, or a weighed amount for more precision, of a complete and balanced puppy food at each meal,” explains Dr. Eirmann. “The pet food label provides general guidelines to serve as a starting point, but the amount of food should be adjusted as needed to maintain a lean body condition for that specific puppy. Keep in mind that all additional foods including training treats contain calories. Treats should not exceed 10 percent of the puppy’s daily caloric intake in order to prevent excessive weight gain and unbalancing the puppy’s nutrient intake.”

Matching caloric density of the food to a puppy’s energy needs is important. “If a puppy eats everything offered and then seems excessively hungry after or between meals, a diet with a lower energy density that has fewer kilocalories per cup may help with satiety since the puppy can be offered a large volume of the lower calorie food,” she says. “Conversely, if a puppy is unable to eat sufficient volume of a food to maintain weight or if the volume appears excessive such that the dog looks bloated after meals, a puppy food that is more caloric dense may be beneficial because a smaller volume can be fed to meet energy and nutrient needs.”

One thing to keep in mind is frequently switching foods is likely to create a pattern of pickiness and/or obesity in a puppy. “Beyond that, the key is to select a complete and balanced puppy food that matches the energy needs of the puppy,” says Dr. Eirmann.

Getting puppies off to a good start in life includes feeding a highly nutritious food made for growth and development. Breeders who take time to give puppies a nutritious advantage in the food bowl will benefit from knowing they’ve played an important role in helping them transition to healthy adult dogs.

FEEDING PUPPIES WISELY

1. Puppies should be fed a food specially formulated for growth and development until they reach physical maturity.
 2. DHA an essential nutrient to support brain and vision development.
 3. Large and giant breeds do not mature until they are nearly 2 years old. Thus, until they reach maturity, they should be fed a diet specifically formulated for large-breed puppies in an amount that maintains lean body condition to prevent excessive weight.
 4. Small breed and toy breed puppies should be given food with nutrient-dense, bite-sized kibble. The smaller kibble size makes it easier for small mouths to chew.
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