



THE ALPHABET OF DOG NUTRITION

26 Things You May Not Have Thought About—But Need To!

Can something as simple as carefully reading a dog-food label add three to five years to your pet's life? Can the wrong bite of an ostensibly healthy fruit have nasty and lasting consequences? Does your dog need a diet—and would you know if he did? For pups as for people, scientists are constantly re-examining and revising the official live-longer-and-better guidelines.

APPLES - All the stuff in apples that makes them nutritional powerhouses for humans (fiber, vitamins A and C, omega-3 and -6, antioxidants, flavonoids, polyphenols) works wonders for Rover, too—with a few exceptions. The seeds contain a form of cyanide, which human systems can filter out but our four-legged friends can't, and too many apples can lead to diarrhea or, -because of their high sugar content, weight gain.

BONES - Despite popular images, not every bone is good for Fido. Almost everyone knows that easily-splintered poultry bones are particularly dangerous for dogs. But improperly prepared beef and pork bones can be just as harmful. Safe bones are specially prepared to be almost rock-hard and virtually "shatterproof." Cesar's line of bones include beef leg bones that are slow-roasted for as long as 36 hours to ensure their safety. His sterilized bones are all-natural and recommended for dogs with sensitive stomachs who still love a good bone! Available for purchase at your local Canadian Tire Store (Canada only).

CANNED vs. DRY FOOD - Reviewing the literature on canned vs. dry might make one think the Hatfields and McCoys were at it again. On one hand, canned foods tend to have higher-quality protein, and more of it, as well as fewer preservatives and fillers. On the other hand, the dry foods sold by reputable companies are just as nutritionally balanced as their wet counterparts. Dry foods can have more meat by-products, but remember, Lady isn't as squeamish about animal parts as we are. Kibble lets dogs satisfy their urge to [chew](#), and it's good for knocking tartar off of teeth. But some dogs have delicate gums or are missing teeth, which means, yes, that wet food is the way to go. Dry food tends to be less expensive and is easier to store, but wet foods usually have fewer calories and carbohydrates. What to do? Go with what suits you and your pets' lifestyle, but always pick nutritionally balanced food, the highest quality you can afford.

DRINK - Dogs should drink about an ounce of water per pound of body weight daily, and of course you know to always have fresh, clean water available. And pooches usually regulate their own intake; if you notice changes in drinking habits, see your vet, as this could indicate health problems. Doggie sports drinks are available, and while it might be cute to share a post-workout quaff with Bingo, canines don't need specialty drinks. (They don't sweat out electrolytes like humans do.) As for dental rinses and water additives, see your vet if you're concerned about halitosis and plaque, and to get recommendations.

EGGS - Loaded with protein and a host of vitamins and minerals, eggs provide blue ribbon-worthy luxurious coats. Are raw eggs OK? Some say no, citing concerns of salmonella poisoning and a biotin deficiency caused by a substance in whites, while others say yes (and give them the shells, too), noting that salmonella is fairly rare in dogs and the yolks contain enough biotin to overcome any deficiency. Bottom line: If you're worried, go ahead and cook them.

FISH - Fish is an excellent source of protein for Scooter and can be a lifesaver for dogs with meat allergies. -Although some raw-diet enthusiasts recommend sushi and even the occasional whole raw fish, there are parasites that can be extremely harmful (notoriously one in salmon) that cooking quickly destroys. Just remember, all that beneficial fish flesh hangs on a frame comprising scads of tiny bones, any one of which can do a number on a dog's mouth and digestive tract.

GRAINS - Grains are an important part of a balanced doggie diet (read more under "Labels"), and rice especially can be a godsend for a pup with digestive woes who needs a bland diet for a few days. That said, the gluten in wheat is a noted allergen for some—symptoms include itchy skin and ear inflammation (dogs may shake their heads in discomfort)—so foods containing oats and -barley may work better. If you suspect food allergies of any type, see your vet.



HOW MUCH AND OFTEN TO FEED - If dogs ran the world, the Canine Café would be open 24 hours a day. Most dogs love to eat. And eat. And eat some more. But though it's tempting to show your love with extra helpings, or by making food available all day, overfeeding does no dog any favors. (Overweight pets can suffer from the same ailments as hefty -humans do.) There is no precise answer as far as how much to feed a dog, -because caloric needs vary with size (a [Chihuahua](#) doesn't chow down like a -Mastiff), age, and activity level. One rule of thumb is that if Sir Barksalot is -energetic and keeping his figure trim, he's probably eating the right amount. Food packaging offers recommendations, but remember: Those are just guidelines (see "Use a Measuring Cup"). How often should you feed your pal? Morning and evening meals are recommended for adult dogs. (Puppies are a different story; go by your vet's advice.) Twice-daily feedings make it easy to monitor your dog's intake, and thus his health, since dogs who are not feeling well tend to drop their routines. Also, regular feedings keep a dog...regular.

ICE CREAM - Dogs are generally lactose intolerant, yet for some reason they love dairy products. A spoonful of ice cream—or -frozen yogurt, which has less lactose than ice cream—every now and then shouldn't bother Barney (but do keep an eye on him to see if he -experiences any tummy distress). Also, be sure the ice cream doesn't contain ingredients that are harmful to dogs: chocolate, coffee, raisins, and certain nuts, to name just a few.

JERKY - The FDA has cautioned against feeding dogs chicken jerky from China, and some U.S. companies issued voluntary recalls of jerky treats because of fears of melamine-tainted gluten, also from China. But there are lots of safe jerkies, and dogs go wild for it. Also, tossing King the occasional piece of for-humans jerky while you're sitting around the campfire won't hurt him. Just be sure it's not the spicy or flavored kind. And you could also try making your own: Recipes abound online.

KIBBLE - Making your own kibble (a.k.a., dry food) is a great way to monitor ingredients for fillers, preservatives, and other additives, and to tailor your dog's food to his specific likes and needs. (Taffy has a gluten allergy? Use rice flour.) Recipes are all over the internet, it's easy and economical to make (buy supplies in bulk), and kibble lasts a long time in the freezer. Remember, though, that dogs have specific nutritional needs, so do your research.

LABELS...and how to read them - If you want to be sure you're feeding your dog the best canned or dried food, you need to carefully read the label. Terms like "gourmet," "super-premium," or "natural" don't really tell you anything about what's in the food, but the -ingredients do have to meet standards set by the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO). Ingredients are listed in descending order, -according to how much they make up the total food mix.

MOLDY FOOD - Your dog should be the only thing sprouting fur in the kitchen, but don't freak out if Jiggs gets at some old bread. Turns out a little mold won't hurt him (as one online poster noted, think of what else dogs put in their mouths). Still, like humans, dogs can have mold allergies, and some molds can cause very serious problems, so keep the lid firmly on the trash can.

NUTS - Never give your dog -walnuts or macadamia nuts! Both are extremely poisonous for pups (a toxin in macadamias can lead to tremors and hind-quarter paralysis). Cashews and peanuts are better, but nuts in general are high in calories and phosphorous (which can lead to bladder stones in dogs), and they're often salty. And none of that is good for Bowser. An occasional peanut or cashew is fine, but do make it a special treat.

ORGANIC FOOD - Thinking of going organic with your best friend's diet? Here are a few things to keep in mind: Organic foods often use human-grade protein sources and generally have fewer fillers (corn and wheat and their by-products) and no synthetic preservatives, pesticides, food coloring, or other additives—thereby reducing the number of potential allergens in your dog's diet. They typically contain whole grains instead of bulk fillers, which aid in weight control and digestive health, and boast superior nutritional quality, which can reduce skin irritation and boost coat sheen. So what's the downside? Well, apart from the expense of organic foods, as of this writing, pet foods are certified as organic according to guidelines established for human organic foods. Read food labels closely to make sure your pup's getting all his essential nutrients. Plans are in the works to bring organic pet food standards in line with pets' needs, but until that happens, do scrutinize the small print. You can follow the progress on the - Association of American Feed Control Officials website ([aaafco.org](#)).



PUMPKIN - This festive gourd is a miracle food for dogs. Good for both diarrhea *and* constipation, canned pumpkin (not raw, not the sugary, spicy pie filling) is loaded with fiber and beta-carotene, which the body converts to vitamin A. Don't give Buddy a lot of it—too much A is highly toxic to dogs—but a couple of teaspoons a day for little pups, or a couple of tablespoons for big boys, should keep them right on track.

QUICK TIP - To keep Scruffy from chewing on electrical wires, make them unpalatable by coating them with a mixture of rubbing alcohol and hot sauce.

RAW MEAT - And so the raw food debate rages on... One thing all parties would agree on, though, is that pristine raw meat would be a marvelous source of quality protein for Spike. However—and this is a big however—the meat most of us have access to just isn't pristine. Salmonella is a major concern, especially in raw poultry (not to mention the danger posed by chicken bones), and all raw meat carries the risk of microbes and parasites, including E. coli. And we're not just talking about dogs being at risk here; humans are also vulnerable, through handling the meat and also through cross-contaminated surfaces. While many do feed their dogs raw meat to no ill effect, take care to purchase the highest quality available. If you go this route (and you will not be alone, as the raw movement is gaining more and more adherents), be sure your ingredients are absolutely fresh, watch out for bones, and keep a close eye on your pal's total needs.

SUPPLEMENTS - Yet another area where there's a lot of debate, although the evidence on supplements is pretty straightforward. If Zipper is getting nutritionally balanced meals, and is energetic and fit, he probably doesn't need supplements. But if you think he isn't getting enough nutrition from his food, supplements can be the way to go. Keep in mind that minerals, especially, should never be given to pups unless prescribed by a vet. Calcium, so good for -human bones, actually hinders bone formation and can damage maturing joints and cartilage in puppies, and too much zinc can be toxic (see "Zinc"). Vitamin A can damage blood vessels; excess D can lead to muscle atrophy. Also, supplements can interact with or hinder absorption of vital nutrients in foods or reduce the -efficacy of prescribed medications. Dogs on special -diets—raw, vegetarian, or vegan—may need vitamin or mineral supplements, as will many dogs who eat solely homemade foods, but that's something for your vet to determine.

TREATS - Who's a good dog? Every single one of them, and they all deserve a treat now and again. And that's the key: now and again. A cornerstone of many training methods, treats provide almost as much joy to the giver as to the recipient. But unfortunately, like most wonderful things in life, they come with a catch: Even healthy snacks have calories, so make sure you count goodie calories as part of your pup's daily intake. And remember that sometimes the things that make treats so tasty are salt and fat—another reason for moderation. When choosing snacks, keep your dog's particular nutritional needs and dietary restrictions in mind, along with his flavor preferences. A quick online search will turn up lots of easy, healthy recipes for homemade treats, many customizable to various dietary restrictions.

USE A MEASURING CUP - Alas, humans aren't the only animals getting wider, and obesity in dogs leads to the same kinds of problems that it does in us: diabetes, increased cancer risk, and liver disease—to say nothing of the toll it takes on joints. One solution, along with lots of [exercise](#), is strict food portion control. Don't eyeball—as one expert noted, your eyes are bigger than your dog's stomach—use a measuring cup. And serving sizes recommended on packaging are just guidelines. If Spot is packing on the pounds while eating the recommended amount, use a smaller measuring cup.

VEGETARIAN DIETS - Even the most committed vegetarians and vegans must allow that dogs are true omnivores who derive essential nutrients—not just protein—from meat. That doesn't mean that there aren't healthy, thriving, vegetarian dogs. But they're healthy and thriving because their conscientious owners make a concerted effort to ensure their pups are getting from other sources what they'd traditionally get from meat. Just one example: Dogs get essential amino acids from meat; a vegetarian dog will need to get these from quality supplements. And about that protein? Eggs are a terrific non-meat source of protein, and dogs love them. For vegans, there are lentils and legumes and brown rice, as well as supplements for vegan diets. Whichever route you go—vegetarian or vegan—you must keep your vet informed, so she can head off any vitamin or other nutritional deficiencies at the pass. Two good sources for advice on raising a meatless mutt are *Dr. Pitcairn's Complete Guide to Natural Health for Dogs & Cats* and the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animal's website (peta.org).



WEIGHTY MATTERS - Obesity is the most serious medical problem facing dogs in the U.S. today. Scientists delicately advise owners to look for things like a slight increase in the fat over the rib cage, an unusually rounded abdomen, or subtly jiggling flank folds as signs that a dog is moderately overweight. But of course what they're saying, in essence, is that deciding whether Snowy is headed for maximum density comes down to a commonsense assessment. Consult your vet if you're concerned; the chart he'll use as the deciding factor looks something like the one here.

X: AS IN, BANNED - This is by no means an exhaustive list, but here are some common people foods that should never be pup foods: avocados, alcohol, baking soda and powder, caffeine, chives, chocolate, corn cobs, fruit pits and seeds, garlic, grapes, macadamia nuts and walnuts (see "Nuts"), milk and milk-based products, mushrooms, nutmeg (and other spices), onions, raisins, rhubarb leaves, tomatoes (especially stems and leaves), xylitol (found in many candies and gums), and yeast dough.

YUCCA - A natural wonder for the canine world, when yucca root is steeped into liquid or ground to a powder and added to Blackie's food (just 1/4 teaspoon or so), it helps soothe tender joints, and—due to its substantial anti-inflammatory powers—alleviates pain associated with [hip dysplasia](#) and arthritis. It also eases digestive problems and can calm itchy skin caused by allergies. Grind it yourself or get the root or supplements at health food stores or online. As with any natural aids, ask your vet about interactions with prescription medications and specific dosage.

ZINC

If your otherwise healthy best friend eats a balanced diet, she shouldn't need zinc supplements. But even avoiding the supplements doesn't mean zinc toxicity can't occur; it does, especially in puppies, who eat everything—including pennies minted after 1982 (yep, they're zinc on the inside now). Symptoms include vomiting, diarrhea, and anemia, which can be diagnosed only by your vet—to whom you should take your pet pronto if you suspect she's ingested anything zinc, because left untreated, zinc toxicity can lead to kidney failure.

Read more: <http://www.cesarsway.com/dog-care/dog-nutrition/Dog-Nutrition-A-to-Z#ixzz2rtzWsCZs>