

# **Above all – A good diet**

## ***Let food be your medicine - Hippocrates***

Nothing is more important in our dogs' day-to-day life than a healthy diet. Their food must provide the building blocks upon which all life forces and health depend. Metabolism, growth and healing cannot proceed optimally without the proper energy which derives from the food we feed ourselves and the pets we love.

All the basic tenets of human nutrition and physiology also apply to our pets. A good diet is one composed of wholesome (preferably organic) foods, with plenty of variety. Beef, poultry, fish, vegetables and fruit should all be part of this diet. All food, in moderation, is fine. Feeding only one regimen, be it commercial or home-prepared, exclusively for a dog's entire life predisposes to nutritional deficiency and cannot ensure optimal health.

A "100% complete and balanced" claim can be made by any dog food company meeting minimal standards. Although this "perfect" food may sustain the perfect pet living in a physiological vacuum, one food alone cannot be either complete or balanced for all dogs.

The ideal diet for an individual species is the one upon which it evolved. This is a simple, irrefutable fact. Dogs and cats are carnivores (though only cats are obligate carnivores). They have adapted (with our prodding) to a cereal-based diet. The ideal diet for the carnivore however is raw meat from hunted prey possibly with some grains and vegetables (from stomach contents). The powerful enzymes and microorganisms (probiotics which are real catalysts of your animal's health) that should be consumed in the stomach contents may need to be supplemented when a less than ideal diet is fed.

In addition to a diet of raw meat, the ancestors of our pets today experienced periods of enforced fasting due to lack of prey. Cycling between having plenty to eat and having nothing is normal and healthy. Fasting is beneficial because it allows the body to rest, detoxify itself and heal. I do normally let my dogs fast once a week. Fasting has even been used in human studies to aid arthritis and atherosclerosis.

The raw meats of today are a far cry from that which the carnivores of yesterday survived on. Nowadays, antibiotics, hormones, pesticides and bacterial contaminants are the rule in most commercially raised meat and poultry. Feeding organic meat and poultry is the best alternative.

A dog food with very high quality ingredients which is properly stored can be the basis for feeding our pets. This should be supplemented with fresh (raw, juiced or steamed) vegetables, some fresh fruit, and meat. Alternatively most pets will thrive on a totally fresh food diet. In some cases serious problems like allergies and epilepsy can be treated just by stopping all commercial food.

Feed divided meals throughout the day. One large meal is not adequate and may predispose to bloat. Smaller, divided meals are easier on the body. Kibble, when fed, should be soaked well beforehand. In addition to allowing the gas within the pelletized dry food to escape, soaking allows hydrolysis (water-assisted digestion) to occur outside the body.

Fresh foods should be used to supplement, or in some cases replace, the commercial diet. With your veterinarian's or a canine nutrition expert's guidance a totally home-cooked diet can be formulated for your pet. In many cases a fresh wholesome diet alone will alleviate many medical conditions. If commercial food is the predominant component of your dog's diet, use the highest quality affordable food and even then supplementation may be necessary.

Please note: The information provided here is meant to supplement that provided by your veterinarian or by a canine nutrition expert. Nothing can replace a complete history and physical examination performed by your veterinarian. - **GF**