



The adage 'You are what you eat' applies to dogs as well as people - however more is not necessarily better. Puppies and young dogs suffer from a variety of bone and joint disorders. Especially important are those diseases caused by the incorrect feeding of puppies and young dogs, since these can be avoided. Over-feeding and over-supplementation with unnecessary nutrients and minerals can have serious consequences. If you are getting your first puppy make sure you ask your vet for advice on feeding them.

Do puppies need special diets?

A correct diet is vital for puppies and young growing dogs. These animals have requirements which are different from adult dogs, and most reputable manufacturers now make 'growth' or 'junior' foods which supply the young dog with all the essential nutrients required for normal growth and bone development.

In general, it is safer to stick to reputable brands (ask for advice at your veterinary hospital), as these are manufactured to strict quality control guidelines. Prepared mixed feeds available through other outlets, such as agricultural feed merchants, may not have the same quality control procedures applied. These may be cheaper than other commercial brands of dog food but they can have disadvantages. Some of these feeds have been shown to lack some essential diet components and may deteriorate if stored.

Do growing dogs need special foods?

Different breeds mature at different rates. In general, the larger the breed, the longer it takes for their bones to develop fully (skeletal maturity). Some big breeds may not be skeletally mature until 18 months of age; whereas a small breed may have stopped growing at around 6-8 months of age.

It is very dangerous to over-feed growing dogs. Severe and permanent damage can result to bone and joints. Steady, controlled growth should always be the aim. An over-fed young dog may remain obese and with bone and joint problems for the rest of its life.

Do large breed dogs need special diets?

Large and giant breeds are especially prone to the dangerous effects of over-feeding and over-supplementation with, eg calcium or vitamin D. These dogs should be fed carefully, ensuring there is not rapid weight gain, and exercise should be moderate and regular. Many manufacturers produce feeds specifically designed for large and giant breeds. Balanced commercial feeds should never be supplemented except under specific veterinary advice. Excessive levels of some of the essential dietary requirements can upset sensitive checks and balances within the body, and cause problems for the development of bones and joints.

Can puppies eat home-prepared diets?

It is possible to successfully rear a puppy on a home-prepared diet, but this takes considerable research and work. Veterinary advice should be sought to ensure that all nutritional requirements are being met. A haphazard approach is likely to cause problems, particularly in large or giant breeds that have specific requirements. Vegetarian dog foods are available and your vet should be able to advise you on reputable brands.

Are vitamin/mineral supplements needed?

If you are feeding a correctly balanced diet, it is quite unnecessary to supplement - the dog receives no benefit. In large breeds, indiscriminate supplementation is dangerous for bone and joint development.

A good quality complete puppy food and water are all most puppies need for healthy growth.

How do I know how much to feed?

Veterinary staff can weigh and condition score your dog to ensure that body development is progressing normally. You can request this every 2 months or so. In large and giant breeds, too fast a growth rate must be avoided. These dogs naturally develop slowly and must be allowed to do this if they are to avoid bone and joint problems later in life.

Feeding your puppy



Most reputable dog feeds come with detailed charts showing the amount to feed. However, these recommendations are only guidelines - individual dogs may require more or (quite commonly) a little less than that stated. If in doubt, seek professional advice.

Do pups need supplements from the breeder?

If the breeder of your puppy gives you anything to supplement your puppy's diet see your veterinary surgeon and take the product along with you. You can discuss with your vet the current diet being fed and whether any supplements are required. Most breeders are well informed about dietary matters but some persist in following their own particular beliefs, which may not be scientifically validated.

The first step in keeping your dog healthy is establishing an appropriate diet. You may be bombarded with information in the first few days of owning a puppy. Let your vet help you select an appropriate diet for the needs of your pet.

Tips for rearing a healthy puppy

- Feed a food from a reputable manufacturer that is appropriate for your dog's age and breed.
- Do not give any form of vitamin or mineral supplement to your dog except under specific veterinary advice.
- Avoid over-feeding young and growing dogs.
- Do not over-exercise large and giant breeds until they are skeletally mature.

If you want any other information on health issues concerning your dog please contact Unicorn Vets on 023 8034 3434 and we will be happy to advise you.