

Supplemental Dog Diet

The Problem With Commercial Pet Foods

This diet is designed to “fill in” for the deficiencies in commercial dog foods. These deficiencies are due to the fact that most commercial dog foods are composed meat products that are derived from the government-defined “**GRAS**” list. **GRAS** stands for “**G**enerally **R**egarded **A**s **S**afe”. The meat in the GRAS list comes from what the dog food industry describes as the “**5 D’s**” sources. The **5 D’s** sources are “**D**ead, **D**own, **D**ying, **D**iseased and **D**isabled” animals. For obvious reasons, none of this meat is considered “safe” or “acceptable” for human consumption but **IS** acceptable for use in animal feeds, including some of the highest priced dog foods such as Nutro, Iams, Science Diet etc.

This means that, despite the high cost of these foods, the basic protein source (meat) is often of extremely poor quality. Tumors removed from animals during slaughter, the meat from diseased animals, and meat from animals that have been dead long enough to make the meat unacceptable for human consumption is regularly used in commercial dog food along with meat from injured animals and those which are unable to walk for undiagnosed reasons. This meat is often ground up with indigestible items such as bone, hooves and cartilage and is listed as beef/chicken/lamb/turkey “meal” or “byproducts”. Despite the poor quality of the protein in these dog foods, the price per pound for commercial dog food remains comparable to that for human-quality premium meat such as steak, chicken, lamb and turkey.

The poor quality of the meat in commercial foods is the primary reason that dogs get tired of commercial dog foods but seldom lose interest in human food. To make the food more palatable, the dog food manufacturers add dozens of artificial flavor enhancers. The list of “flavor enhancers” makes up most of the unpronounceable listings under “ingredients” on the dog food label.

Because dog food often has a relatively high fat content “buffers” are used to prevent the fat from becoming rancid. In the best “natural” diets these buffers are in the form of “vitamin E”, a safe and beneficial substance. Unfortunately, the use of Vitamin E is quite expensive, so many dog food companies (again including some of the highest-priced “designer” dog foods) use a substance called “**ethoxyquin**”. Ethoxyquin is a petroleum-based substance which is a **known carcinogen** (cancer-causing agent) in humans. It is banned for use in human food but is regularly used in pet foods. Ethoxyquin is usually the last ingredient listed on the “ingredients list” on dry dog food labels

In addition to flavor enhancers and ethoxyquin, most dog food manufacturers add corn, wheat or other grains (which have poor protein balance) to “bulk up” the product. Although these grains are beneficial in limited quantities, they should not comprise the majority of the nutrients in a balanced canine diet. Eating a diet which is primarily grain-based is comparable to a human eating pasta and bread as his primary diet.

How Commercial Dog Foods Effect Our Pets

Commercial dog foods often have a high level of protein. Unfortunately this protein is often of very poor quality. High levels of protein “challenge” the organs of pets (particularly the kidneys and liver) because digestion of this protein produces by-products which must be eliminated by these organs. Despite the fact that the organs are “working overtime” to eliminate protein by-products, the animal is not getting the benefits of the protein due to its poor quality.

Protein is essential to build and maintain every cell in the body, therefore with most commercial diets the dog is receiving all of the disadvantages and none of the benefits of the protein.

This often results in premature organ failure, reduced resistance to disease and infection and poor overall condition. Many dogs on commercial diets develop coat problems, poor weight retention, urinary tract disorders or premature organ dysfunction.

The chemical flavor enhancers and fat stabilizers may cause other problems such as allergic reactions, skin and coat problems, immune system disorders and, in the worst-case scenario, cancers. These are often exacerbated by the high levels of grain products in the foods. Yet, most pet owners buy these foods.....often times the most expensive types in the belief that they are providing the optimum diet for their pet.

In addition to the physical problems, many “behavioral” problems result from this type of poor nutrition. **Chewing problems** are the bane of most pet owners, yet approximately half of all chewers do so because they are “seeking” a particular missing element in their diet. That element is most often a “trace mineral” that has not been included in the commercial diets. Children suffering from similar deficiencies develop “pica”, the habit of eating of dirt, ashes, and other organic substances. Pica in children is most often due to a lack of minerals in the diet and resolves if their diet is supplemented with the appropriate element.

Many dogs suffer from “**coprophagia**” or “feces eating”. Dog that eat their own stool are similarly “seeking” a missing element in their diet. Many vets consider this to be a behavioral problem and prescribe “Forbid” or similar products that simply make the feces taste bitter. This product is only marginally successful in preventing a dog from eating its own stool and totally ineffective in stopping it from eating the feces of other animals.

Both of these problems improve quickly with the addition of “kelp” (a natural source of minerals) to the diet. In the case of chewing about 50% of the dogs stop chewing when kelp is added to their diet and no other disciplinary measures are used. Dogs who eat their own stool have an almost 100% resolution of the problem within 3 weeks of introducing kelp to the diet. In addition, their overall health, vigor, coat condition and weight improve dramatically with the addition of kelp, vitamins, oil and good quality protein.

Why Doesn't My Vet Tell Me About This Problem?

Veterinary medicine is a highly intensive study that, in many ways, is more challenging than human medicine. The most obvious reason is that veterinarians are required to have medical knowledge about many different species. Because of the advances in veterinary medicine over the past 20 years, the veterinary medical field has had a difficult time simply keeping up with advances in medical procedures and limited attention has been placed on nutrition. In the past 20 years, hip replacements, ultrasound, MRI's, CT scans, Mylograms, pacemakers, organ replacements, chemotherapy and many other medical procedures, which were previously limited to human patients, have been added to the veterinary medical arsenal.

Fitting all of this new knowledge into a Veterinary medical degree has been challenging. As a result little or no attention has been focused on the field of nutrition or “preventative medicine”. This problem is being rapidly resolved in the current veterinary medical curriculum but many practicing veterinarians today have had only a few basic courses in the field of nutrition. Most rely solely upon the reputation of the dog food industry. They simply carry the brands of dog food that seem to have a good reputation. The distributors of these pet foods solicit them and, of course, tout their product heavily, and the veterinarians carry the product as a service to their clients.

So How Do I Give My Dog A Good Diet?

The easiest way to improve your dog's diet, as well as his overall health, is to supplement his diet with human quality foods.

1. The most important is to **improve the quality and quantity of protein**. The addition of eggs (cooked only) in any form, cottage cheese, and cooked meat will raise the quality of protein in your dog's diet. This should be increased slowly to avoid stomach upset or diarrhea. Because dogs tolerate a higher fat content, you should choose ground chuck over ground round steak. The fattier forms of meat will be more reasonably priced as well as more satisfying.
 - For a small to medium size dog start with 1 teaspoon of egg, meat or cottage cheese and slowly increase it to ½ cup (small) to ¾ cup (medium) over a period of 1-2 weeks
 - For a large to giant size dog start with 1 tablespoon of egg, meat or cottage cheese and slowly increase it to 1 cup (large) to 1 ½ cup (giant) over a period of 1-2 weeks
2. **Increase the fat content**. Cholesterol levels in dogs have no significance. They do not get "hardening of the arteries" as people do. Increasing the fat level in their diet will improve the level of satisfaction, palatability, coat condition and will maintain normal weight levels. Again, this should be increased slowly to avoid stomach upset or diarrhea. Note: If your dog tends to be overweight lower the amount of food rather than lowering the fat and protein level, and increase his exercise level.
 - For a small to medium size dog start with 1/2 teaspoon of any oil (olive oil, corn oil, beef fat, bacon fat) and slowly increase it to 1teaspoon (small) to 1 tablespoon (medium) over a period of 1-2 weeks
 - For a large to giant size dog start with 1 teaspoon of any oil (olive oil, corn oil, beef fat, bacon fat) and slowly increase it to 1 tablespoon (large) to 1 ½ tablespoons (giant) over a period of 1-2 weeks
3. **Add a vitamin supplement**. Dogs require the same vitamins that humans require. There are lots of dog vitamins on the market. Most are quite high-priced and the only difference between them and human vitamins is that they are packaged in a chewable form.....usually by combining the vitamins with malt tablets. The theory is that malt is relished by most dogs. I have not noted this to be particularly valid. For a young dog or puppy "Flintstones" vitamins are often just as palatable and considerably less expensive. For adult dogs, any good-quality human vitamin will be as good or better than most of the high-priced pet vitamins.
4. **Add Kelp**
Kelp is nothing more or less than "seaweed". Seaweed, as well as many other plants which grow in the ocean, are an excellent source of minerals, especially the "trace" minerals that are often missing in "multi-mineral tablets". Since Kelp is a natural product, it is much like adding spinach to a diet.....i.e. you can't "overdose" on it. Kelp will improve many chewing problems and will virtually eliminate feces eating. Additionally it will provide your dog with a balanced mineral level which will improve his overall health. Kelp is available in tablet, powder and granulated forms. Most people find that mixing the powder or granules with the food is the easiest way to feed the kelp, but if your dog will eat the tablets you may find that to be the easiest method to feed it. Kelp is available in most health food stores in all three forms and in many pharmacies and variety

stores in the tablet form. Start adding small amounts and slowly increase until you reach the optimum level to avoid stomach upset or diarrhea. Dosage is as follows:

- For a small to medium size dog start with $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of kelp and slowly increase it to 1 teaspoon (small) to 1 tablespoon (medium) over a period of 1-2 weeks
- For a large to giant size dog start with 1 teaspoon of kelp and slowly increase it to 2-3 tablespoons (large) to 3-4 tablespoons (giant) over a period of 1-2 weeks

5. **Add Extra Amounts Of Vitamins Which Buffer Or Improve The Immune System**

These include Vitamin C, Omega 3 and Omega 6 fatty acids (the fish oils which are the source of Omega 3 and Omega 6 are not very palatable so it is best to get this in tablet or capsule form. Remember to start this very slowly since it may upset their stomachs), vitamin E and beta carotene. These substances enhance the dog's immune system and improve his resistance to disease and allergies. If your dog has joint problems or arthritis you might also consider adding Glucosamine and Chondritin which enhance and repair joint cartilage.

6. **Other Good Additions**

Adding vegetables to your dogs food will increase his appetite and nutritional level. The type of vegetable will be determined by your dogs individual preferences and yours. Peas, carrots, broccoli, green beans and lettuce are good choices. Starchy beans such as kidney beans should be fed in limited amounts due to stomach sensitivities. Potatoes and rice are good "bases" and provide both fiber and carbohydrates. If you have a small dog you may want to eliminate the dry and canned dog food entirely and simply substitute potatoes and rice mixed with the meat, vegetables and other suggested supplements. If you have a larger dog, simply choose one of the good-quality "natural" dry dog foods and supplement it, but be sure to read the ingredients list to make sure that you are not getting lots of chemical additives. Again when you make additions to your dog's diet, do so slowly to avoid stomach upsets.

Last Thoughts

Many dogs will "survive" on any type of food. In my grandparents day, dogs were often fed potatoes, bread, table scraps (often food that was unfit for humans) and other poor quality foods as their entire diet. It was not uncommon to see rickets in dogs and children at this time. The creation of commercial dog foods improved the overall health of dogs. It was literally a move in the right direction. Unfortunately the dog food industry has become big business and the price of dog food has far over reached the quality of the ingredients. Our increased desire to provide optimal nutrition for our pets has also become a serious consideration.

Additionally, as dogs have been regularly "line-bred" (a form of breeding that would be considered in-breeding if applied to humans) they have lost much of their innate ability to process the nutrients in their food. Their immune systems have also suffered from this close breeding and many of our breeds are plagued with genetically inherited illnesses and disorders. Hip displasia, allergies, cancer and auto-immune diseases have become commonplace in pets. At one time we considered mix-breed dogs to be exempt from these problems, however over the years, the breeding of close genetic partners in purebreds has also resulted in mixed breed dogs which are the product of these closely bred parents. This means that many mixed breed dogs suffer from the same problems as their purebred counterparts. Therefore, supplementing the diet, buffering the immune system and avoiding chemical additives has become important to all dogs, regardless of their breeding.

Vets often fear that if people choose to create their own diets for their pets they will not provide the proper balance of nutrients, therefore they warn against homemade diets and advise people to use commercial dog foods. Everyone knows someone who feeds their dog on nothing but ground round steak or chicken. Obviously this is not a balanced diet. However, it is not complicated to feed your dog a healthy homemade diet that is both well-balanced and natural. The extra time required to prepare the diet is offset by the cost of veterinary treatments for dietary-induced ailments. Preparing food can be done on a weekly or even monthly basis and the food can be frozen in small packages for daily use. If you have a smaller dog and are not using any commercial dry food, containers of food can be frozen and defrosted for use.

All of these suggestions are based upon the average dog who is not suffering from any disease or ailment which would be affected by diet. If your dog suffers from immune system diseases, hormonal disorders (such as Thyroid dysfunction), or any other inherited or acquired disease process or illness, you should consult your veterinarian regarding dietary restrictions which may apply to the treatments of these problems. He is the expert and you should rely solely upon his advise.