Feeding Your New Puppy

- Veterinarians are your best source of information for making informed choices about which brand of food or treats to feed your puppy.
- Commercially produced puppy foods must meet AAFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials) nutritional standards.
- There are a number of commercial diets specifically for dog breeds of different sizes.
- To ensure that your puppy has a healthy adulthood, seek professional advice, educate yourself about good puppy nutrition, and carefully monitor your puppy’s growth rate, activity level, and body condition.

When deciding what to feed your new puppy, make sure you get reliable, professional veterinary advice on:

- What type of diet to choose
- How much food to feed
- How to adjust your puppy’s diet as he or she grows into adulthood

Veterinarians are your best source of information to help you make more informed choices about which brand of food to feed or what kinds of rewarding treats to give your puppy for good behavior.

Eating Right—Nutrition Basics
Puppies should eat a diet that contains protein, fats, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, and water in the proper proportions. Commercially produced puppy foods must meet AAFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials) nutritional standards. Pet foods that meet AAFCO standards are marked with the phrase “complete and balanced” and, in the case of puppy foods, should be formulated for growth. Any diets that meet these guidelines won’t require any additional supplementation—the diet will include all necessary vitamins and minerals. Don’t forget to also make sure your puppy has a continuous supply of fresh, clean water!

Large Breed vs. Small Breed
Picture a huge Great Dane puppy standing next to a tiny Chihuahua puppy. They’re both dogs—and members of the exact same species—but their
nutritional needs during puppyhood and young adulthood are completely different.

Small-breed dogs mature faster, typically have faster metabolisms, and have tiny mouths and teeth. They often need puppy diets that are easy for them to eat and chew and are more “energy dense” to help keep up activity levels and encourage proper growth and development. In addition, small, toy, or teacup breeds may need to eat more often.

Large-breed dogs, on the other hand, often mature at a slower rate and are prone to developing joint (e.g., elbow and hip) problems if they eat too much and grow too rapidly. Excess body weight can also stress developing bones. For these reasons, it is vitally important not to overfeed large-breed puppies.

Thankfully, there are a number of commercial diets specifically for dog breeds of different sizes. Diets designed for large-breed puppies, for example, are typically less energy dense and, therefore, are less likely to be overfed. Ask a veterinary professional for advice if your puppy belongs to a particularly large or small breed.

Feed by the Puppy, Not by the Package
The key point to remember is that every puppy is different, and no single diet will work best for all of them. To ensure that your puppy has a healthy adulthood, seek professional advice, educate yourself about good puppy nutrition, and carefully monitor your puppy’s growth rate, activity level, and body condition.

Body Condition
When you visit your veterinarian, he or she can weigh and examine your puppy to help you determine if things are “on track.” In between those appointments, which become less frequent as your puppy ages, you should be able to monitor your puppy’s progress on your own. Many veterinarians and nutritionists use a body condition score to determine whether an animal is overweight or underweight. These scores usually rank a pet on a five- or nine-point scale. In general, your dog should score a 4 on a nine-point scale or a 3 on a five-point scale throughout his or her life.

One of the most important aspects of caring for your dog’s health is to maintain your dog at a proper weight. Studies have demonstrated that dogs maintained at the proper weight will live up to 2 years longer than overweight or obese dogs. Therefore, it’s best for all dogs—puppies and adults—to be a little on the lean side. That doesn’t mean your dog should be abnormally skinny. It means you should be able to feel—but not see—ribs when you run your hands down your dog’s sides. Your dog should also have a definite “waist” when viewed from above.

If you have any concerns about your puppy’s growth rate, condition, or eating habits, schedule a weight check.

Read the Label
Under federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations, every puppy food must include a label listing its ingredients and a guaranteed analysis of how much protein, fat, and other important nutrients are in it. Reading the percentages can get complicated, so one of the best quick ways to assess the quality of a diet is to look at the ingredient list. By law, the pet food manufacturer must list the ingredients by weight. For more information on reading pet food labels, visit www.fda.gov/AnimalVet/ResourcesForYou and click on “Pet Food Labels—General” under “Information for Consumers Fliers.”