Whew! I’m tired. I just ran home from day camp. I like day camp. We do a lot of fun things there. I have also learned a lot. One time a speaker came and talked about why it is smart to eat a good breakfast every day. Now I eat a good breakfast daily.

I also learned I should listen carefully. Here’s why.

Two weeks ago our director, Mr. Salvato, announced there would be a chili-eating contest. I signed up immediately. No one likes chili more than I do!
There was a problem, however. I hadn’t listened carefully. Mr. Salvato didn’t say “chili-eating.” He said a “chili-cooking” contest. My ears heard what my stomach wanted them to hear.

After I signed up for the contest, I had more problems. First, as much as I love chili, I didn’t know how to cook chili—or anything. Second, if I signed up for something, I had to do it. Dad was clear on that point. And Dad also said that I had to cook the chili. He would not do it. So that’s how a guy like me got stuck in a chili-cooking contest.
You’re probably guessing how this story will end. You might guess that I made delicious chili and won the contest. That would be a marvelous story, but it wouldn’t be the truth. And telling the truth is something else Dad is clear about.

I did, however, attempt to make delicious chili. My plan followed four steps.
1. On the library computer, I searched the Internet for chili recipe contest winners. I discovered dozens of recipes from chili contests all over the United States.

2. I struggled to decide which recipe was best. That was a challenge, but I made a brilliant decision. I selected the recipe that had the most ingredients—twenty-two.

3. I gathered the twenty-two ingredients. Dad supplied some from the pantry. I spent my allowance to buy the rest from the supermarket.
4. I made the chili! The morning of the contest, I worked alone in the kitchen. When I had questions, I called to Dad in the family room. He always answered nicely, but I guess he was surprised by what I didn’t know. I think Dad was also surprised by how good the kitchen started to smell. When I peeked out of the kitchen, I saw him sniffing and smiling.
When I was finished, I had a gigantic pot of chili for the contest. The pot was heavy, so I had to pull it in a wagon to day camp. I was late, so I pulled it fast. I pulled it too fast. When the wagon hit a crooked crack in the sidewalk, the pot flew out of the wagon.
What a mess! Chili covered the wagon, the sidewalk, and me. As I was trying to figure out what happened, Chewy, a neighbor’s dog, came running over. Chewy licked the chili off the wagon, the sidewalk, and me. He also slobbered up chili that was still in the pot. If Chewy ever entered a chili-eating contest, he would win!
So I didn’t do well in the cooking contest. But I made an excellent friend in Chewy. He really loves my chili. Every time he spots me, he chases me just in case I still have some. That’s why I’m always so tired now when I get home. Whew!
Do you have a pet dog? Then you know something other people might not know. Your dog is an affectionate friend who is always happy to see you. And your dog is not afraid to show it. That’s why you’re often welcomed home by a bundle of tail-wagging, face-licking joy.

You know, too, that your dog will do all it can to protect you. A healthy dog hears and sees things before you and alerts you to possible dangers. If there is danger, your dog will be there with you. Many dogs risk their lives to protect their owners.
But think about this. Your dog depends on you for everything. Your family provides your dog with food, shelter, exercise, healthcare, and affection. And how you do these things is important for your dog’s happiness.

Like people, dogs can overeat and get too heavy. There are three ways in which your dog might put on too much weight.
You Overfeed Your Dog

You love your dog, and you know it enjoys eating. So you fill your dog’s bowl with too much food. Maybe you fill it too often. Or you give your dog leftovers from your supper or too many doggy snacks.

Be careful. Most adult dogs only require one good meal and one healthy snack a day. Feeding your dog too much is harmful. Scientists have learned that dogs that eat less live longer. But, of course, the food the dog is eating must be healthy food.
Your Dog’s Diet Is Poor

You probably know that people should eat healthy food. You also know that unhealthy foods can make a person weigh more than he or she should. It’s the same for dogs.

Dogs require a balanced diet that includes protein, carbohydrates, fat, vitamins, minerals, and water. Did you see the word *fat* in the list? Yes, dogs need some fat to keep their skins and coats healthy and to help them grow. But too much fat is unhealthy. So is too much or the wrong kind of protein or carbohydrates.
Some kinds of dogs are much more active than other kinds. Those dogs require more protein. Less active dogs require more carbohydrates. So even if your dog does not eat too much food, it may eat too much of the wrong kind of food. The result might be that your dog is too fat or even too skinny.

Does this sound complicated? Ask a veterinarian or pet store clerk to help you build a balanced diet for your dog.
Your Dog Gets Too Little Exercise

Dogs always seem to be running and jumping, but many dogs do not run or jump enough. They do not use the energy that food gives them. So the food just adds fat to those dogs’ bodies.

It is your responsibility to make sure your dog exercises. That may mean making your dog walk and run a little farther than it would like at first. Start gradually, but do get your dog to exercise more.
Remember, your dog will do anything to help you. Show your dog the same loyalty, and do all you can to help it. After all, you are your dog’s best friend!
These questions can help you think about the story and the article you just read. After you write your responses, discuss them with a small group.

What if?
How would the story be different if the chili had not fallen out of the wagon?

What would you do?
What would you do if a vacationing neighbor asked you to feed her dog but forgot to leave any food?

What did you discover?
After reading the article about the proper feeding of dogs, what information did you find surprising? What did you already know? Where could you learn more about the proper diet for a dog?