

Food For Thought

Dogs certainly are an every day challenge to make sure that all of their needs and requirements are met. Making sure they are on target in all aspects of their health can be quite daunting if you don't have the right information and know what to look for. Some dogs thrive on their daily routine and we sometimes become complacent about watching for signs that certain areas of our dog's life that needs to change. One area that does need to be monitored closely is diet. Diet affects a dog's energy, growth, general health, coat and many other areas such as behavior. Making sure all these areas are being looked after appropriately comes down to an owner really knowing what is and isn't normal for their dog and becoming educated when it comes to such areas as diet.

You may want to consider a diet change if your dog is exhibiting any of the following:

- Lack of energy
- Poor coat condition (dull, brittle feeling, dry flakes)
- Gassy
- Does not eat his/her food readily
- Split or brittle nails
- Cannot maintain his/her weight
- Chronic ear or skin infections (Consult a Veterinarian)
- Itchiness
- Poor or chronic loose stools
- Numerous bowel movements
- Activity level of your dog
- Breed and age of your dog
- Sudden behavior changes (Consult a Veterinarian, the food your dog is on may be causing stomach pain which will in turn cause behavior changes)

To switch the food, it is recommended to do this slowly. Start by mixing $\frac{1}{4}$ of the new food with $\frac{3}{4}$ of the old food for about 3-4 days. If your dog is tolerating this new mixture (ie. No adverse allergic reactions, diarrhea) then mix the food $\frac{1}{2}$ of the old and $\frac{1}{2}$ of the new for 3-4 days. Again, watching for anything out of the ordinary before switching to the next level, which would be $\frac{3}{4}$ of the new food and $\frac{1}{4}$ of the old food. If you are switching foods for health reasons, such as coat conditions, or intestinal problems, it can take up to 3 months after being on the new food completely before you will notice any significant changes.



A Bit About Labels

There are several products available to feed your dog. They come in a variety of choices based on the age, size, activity level, weight, and the special needs of your pet due to medical problems. Types of dog food range from canned, to various grades of kibble, to raw food diets. All have their own unique qualities by the way that they are produced, the ingredients that they contain, and how convenient they are for the consumer to use. This is one reason why it is important to read labels. Government regulations state that food companies must present the ingredients in descending order of weight and their analysis that are contained in their products. However, labels can be very confusing and it is not always clear what exactly is in the product. For example, the amount of protein in a can of wet food may appear to be lower but once calculated out properly to figure out the dry matter would present a much higher number. Or a meat may be listed as the first ingredient on the label but all the variety of grains add up fast actually making it weigh more than the meat. Also, by either listing ingredients singly or in groups the manufacturer can make it appear that one type of food is in greater quality than another. Check for the terms used as well. For example by using “derivatives” the manufacturer can also source whichever ingredient is cheapest at the time - the actual content of the food may therefore vary from batch to batch. This has implications should your dog have allergies or dietary intolerance.

Meat Definitions—Chicken Used as an Example

- If the label says “Chicken” this would be the best part of the product this is what you want to see listed first in the ingredients.
- If the label says “Chicken Meal” this is the rendered muscle tissue of the animal
- If the label says “Chicken By-Product” that is every thing else that isn’t “usable” such as feet, beaks, tails, organs etc.

Common Allergens

If you suspect that your pet has food allergies, contact your Veterinarian. Most common food allergies are to beef, chicken, and fillers. Grains such as wheat, glutens, corns, and grain by-products are most commonly used as fillers.



*****NOTE*****

Ideally you should always consult your veterinarian when considering a food change.

This paper is for discussion purposes and information sharing only. Any reproduction or use of any part or in it's entirety must gain permission by the writer. © Copy write 2008 Vicki Stafford Sammy's Pet Boarding Alberta, Canada.