

## Puppy Nutrition

Puppies have a lot of growing up to do in a relatively short space of time. They have to develop their muscles, bones, skin and fur, teeth and internal organs very rapidly, as well as learn the important skills of socialisation. Getting the diet right from this early stage will set them in great stead for this amazing period of growth.

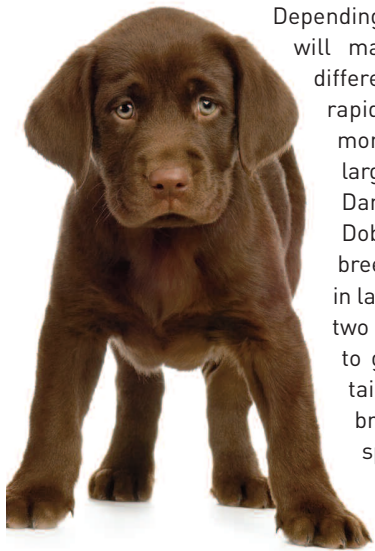


### Puppies have very specific nutritional needs

Weaning is the process of gradually moving on from a diet of just milk to solid food. Our nutrition experts highlight that in the first 6 months or so, puppies' nutritional needs are changing very quickly and that leaves very little margin for error. This often happens at the same time as neutering, which means they'll need fewer calories. It is important that the nutrients and calories he needs from his food are all present and correctly balanced for optimal development as well as being both highly digestible and palatable. By feeding a specially designed puppy food, owners can have complete confidence they're addressing all their puppy's nutritional needs.

### Do all pups have the same nutritional needs?

Depending on physical size and breed, puppies will mature at different rates and have different nutritional needs. For instance, rapid growth occurs during the first few months in all breeds but is prolonged in large and giant breeds, for example Great Danes, Labrador Retrievers, and Doberman Pinschers. Whilst most of the breeds mature around 12 months of age, in large and giant breeds it may take up to two years to reach adult size. In addition to general puppy foods there are diets tailored for small, medium or large breed dogs, along with a range of breed specific foods.



### Puppy diets for large breeds

Generally speaking, larger breed puppies need fewer calories per unit of body weight and mature at a slower rate compared to smaller breed puppies. Taking on too many calories can lead to an accelerated growth rate and excessive weight gain. Both accelerated growth rate and excessive weight puts increased stress on the skeletal system of growing large breed puppies.

Large-breed puppy foods are designed for gradual, healthy growth and are often lower in calcium and phosphorus than other puppy foods to help avoid skeletal problems developing in them.

Some large-breed puppy foods may contain special ingredients to help control appetite, which can help reduce the risk of developmental skeletal problems occurring due to accelerated growth.

Large breed puppies might be self-restricting but their food intake and weight needs to be monitored.

### Puppy diets for small breeds

Small breed puppies by comparison have a very fast growth rate and need up to double the amount of energy per unit of body weight compared to an adult dog. Often specific small-breed puppy foods will have increased levels of protein and fat, as well as increased vitamin B to help them with these elevated energy levels.



More advice on diets and nutrition can be found at [www.pfma.org.uk](http://www.pfma.org.uk)



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## How to feed

- Puppies need to be fed little and often, taking small portions from their daily food ration, which has been weighed out. This can be given at regular intervals throughout the day.
- Feed your puppy four meals a day up until the age of four months, and then reduce the feed to three meals a day until he is six months old, when you can change to two meals a day, and keep to this regime for the rest of his life.
- Any uneaten wet food should be taken and thrown away after about half an hour. The dish should be washed before used at another mealtime.
- Dry food can be left in the dish for longer but remember the food will become less palatable the longer it is left out.
- Make sure there is a constant supply of fresh, clean water always available.

## To supplement or not?

There is no need to supplement a complete and balanced commercial puppy diet. The term 'Complete' which you will see on the pet food packet is a legal definition and it means that the product must by law, contain all the nutrients a pet needs for healthy bodily function. Supplementation of a 'complete' diet can be risky and lead to growth abnormalities, especially in large and giant breed dogs. Always follow the manufacturers' guidelines.

There are many different types of puppy foods on the market. The most important factor in choosing a diet is that the product is clearly labeled as 'complete' for 'puppy' or 'growth' stage of life.

## Switching puppies on to an Adult dog food?

Once puppies have reached 90% of their expected adult weight, they should switch from a growth diet to one that's suitable for maintenance (an adult diet). Whilst most breeds mature around 12 months, small breeds may finish growing by nine to 12 months and for large/giant breeds it may take up to 2 years.

Avoid any sudden change of diet. A change from one food to another should be done gradually (over 7-10 days) with the new food increased day by day until that is the only food fed. The same goes for a switch from one brand to another – any sudden change may upset the dog's digestive system.

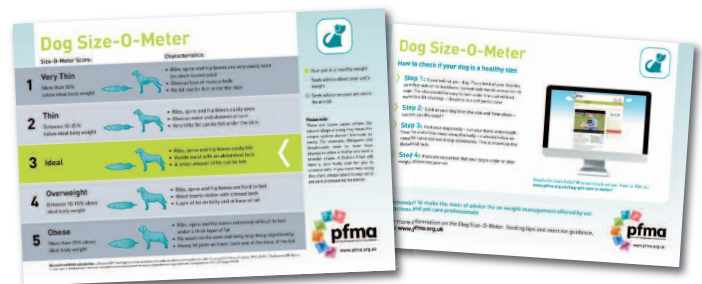
## Weight Management

Follow the feeding guidelines on the pet food packet when deciding how much to feed. Remember guidelines are a starting point and you may need to adjust the amount fed dependent on the needs of the individual dog. Factors such as age, weight, levels of activity will all affect how much you need to feed.

It's a good idea to weigh out the food at the start of the day. This can then be apportioned throughout the day dependent on your routine and the feeding recommendations.

Healthy treats should only be given occasionally to avoid excess calories. When treats are given regularly for training reasons, they should form no more than 10% of the total energy intake (meaning 90% energy from complete food and up to 10% from treats).

It's useful to monitor your dog's weight on an ongoing basis. Habits change frequently and it's good to keep an eye on their body size by using our Dog Size-0-Meter.



## Animal Welfare Tip

A puppy should be **at least 8 weeks** before it leaves its mother for a new home. If you're doing your research before buying a puppy, welfare charities such as Dogs Trust and RSPCA, provide tips and guidance on how to source one responsibly.

Please visit [www.pfma.org.uk](http://www.pfma.org.uk) for healthy pet tools and resources including weight logs, food diaries, with feeding tips and general information on a range of topics from pet food ingredients to pet food labels.

