

Correct feeding can be the best present

Owners love to treat their pets at Christmas and New Year, but it's too easy to make mistakes. **Nicole Paley** from the Pet Food Manufacturers' Association has the answers

Research has shown that pet owners can't resist spending on their pets over the festive period. According to one survey, dogs come off the best, receiving an average of £23.33¹ worth of presents, compared with £17.48 on the cat's gift. Two-thirds of dog owners will buy food treats for their dog – the most popular present – with a toy closely behind in second place, followed by a piece of clothing.

This is a time to treat a much-loved family pet, but it's not the time to give a pet as a gift. As those in the pet trade know, there have been too many sad stories of pets needing to find a new home in the New Year. It is a busier and more boisterous time of the year, which makes it difficult to establish a new routine.

For those with a new puppy already in the household, or for those planning ahead for the New Year, here are the most frequently asked questions sent to the dedicated PFMA veterinary nutrition team on puppy nutrition.

1 There are so many dog foods out there – what should I be feeding my puppy?

The key starting point is to feed a puppy diet. These diets have been specially formulated to meet the specific nutritional needs of dogs at this life stage. As puppies are very active and growing, they need more calories than an adult dog. At certain stages of their development they can need up to twice the calories of an adult dog. The food needs to



provide all the right nutrients in the right proportions for their growing bones, joints and muscles, and all packed in to puppy-sized meals.

Tip for retailers: depending on physical size and breed, puppies will mature at different rates and have different nutritional needs. In addition to stocking general puppy food diets, you may want to consider diets that are tailored for small, medium or large breed dogs, along with breed-specific diets.



2 How much should I feed my puppy?

Guidelines on how much to feed are provided on every pet food packet and daily recommendations are given based on the weight of the puppy. To ensure accuracy, it helps to weigh the daily ration on scales and then apportion it throughout the day according to the feeding recommendations on the packet and your feeding routine.

Remember these feeding guidelines are a rule of thumb or a starting point and the amount will depend on the puppy's age, activity, environment and body metabolism. Start with the feeding instructions on the packet, monitor the puppy's weight and adjust accordingly.

3 When should I feed my puppy?

Dogs thrive on a consistent routine and ideally they should be

fed at the same times every day. Young puppies tend to be fed three times a day and older puppies twice a day.

4 At puppy training class we are encouraged to use treats as rewards – which foods are appropriate?

Positive reinforcement is really important when training and both praise and food treats work well when used properly. If treating with food it's important to be mindful of this source of calories and take it into consideration at meal-times. Avoid human foods that can be high in calories for dogs and use specially formulated treats. Treating should be limited as if too much is given it can affect the nutritional balance provided in the main meals.

5 How do I change from puppy food to adult 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. Small breeds

may finish growing by nine to 12 months; for large breeds, expect 12 to 18 months.

Avoid any sudden change of diet. A change from one food to another should be done gradually (over four to seven days) with the new food increased day by day until that is the only one fed.

The same goes for a switch from one brand to another – any sudden change may upset the dog's digestive system.

SEASONAL CONSIDERATIONS

'Tis the season to be merry – and remember that nothing makes a dog merrier than a consistent routine.

Please also remind owners there are a number of human foods that can be dangerous for pets.

While the message about the toxicity of chocolate for dogs and cats has become more widely known, many owners are surprised to hear that seemingly inoffensive foods such as grapes, sultanas and raisins, macadamia nuts and onions can be harmful. Christmas pudding, mince pies and chocolate coins all need to be kept well away from pets.

For a full list of these foods, please visit www.bva.co.uk

For more information on pet food nutrition, how to keep pets healthy and to access our toolkits for pet professionals, please visit www.pfma.org.uk

Reference:
1. Sainsbury's Pet Insurance 2014