

Nicole Paley



There are many ways to create the best diet for your dog, says **Nicole Paley**, deputy chief executive of the Pet Food Manufacturers' Association

Puppies have a lot of growing up to do in a relatively short space of time. They have to develop muscles, bones, skin and fur, teeth and internal organs very rapidly, as well as learn the important skills of socialisation, so getting the diet right will set them in great stead.

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 such as Great Danes, Labrador Retrievers, and Doberman Pinschers.

While most breeds mature around 12 months of age, large and giant breeds 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 breeds

Puppy diets for large breeds

Generally speaking, larger breed puppies need fewer calories per unit of body weight and mature at a slower rate than smaller breeds. Taking on too many calories can lead to an accelerated growth rate and excessive weight gain, putting increased stress on the skeletal system. Large-breed puppy foods designed for gradual, growth are often lower in calcium and phosphorus to help avoid skeletal problems.

Puppy diets for small breeds

Small breed puppies have a very fast growth rate and need up to double the amount of energy per unit of body weight than an adult dog. Often, small breed puppy foods will have increased levels of protein and fat, to help with elevated energy levels.

To supplement or not?

There is no need to supplement a complete and balanced commercial puppy diet. By law, the term 'complete' means the product must contain all the nutrients a pet needs for healthy bodily function. Supplementation of a 'complete' diet can be risky and lead to growth abnormalities.

“ Too many calories can lead to an accelerated growth rate ”

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. Avoid any sudden change of diet.

A change from one food to another should be done over 7-10 days, with the new food increased gradually until that is the only food fed. The same

goes for switching brands – sudden change may upset the dog's digestive system.

Weight management

Follow the feeding guidelines on the pet food packet but remember you may need to adjust the amount depending on the needs of the individual dog. Factors such as age, weight and levels of activity will all affect how much to feed. Weighing feed at the start of the day means you can apportion through the day.

Only give healthy treats occasionally and, if for training purposes, should form no more than 10% of the daily intake. ■

How to feed

- Puppies need to be fed little and often, taking small portions from their daily food ration, which has been weighed out.
- 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.
- Any uneaten wet food should be taken and thrown away after about half an hour and the dish washed.
- Dry food can be left in the dish for longer but will become less palatable the longer it is left out.
- Make sure there is a constant supply of fresh, clean water always available.

Getting the puppy diet right

“Any sudden change may upset the dog's digestive system”

