

An Owner's Manual for:

PUPPY FOOD
& NUTRITION

by the
AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB



ABOUT THIS SERIES

At the AKC, we know better than anyone that your dog can't be treated like a car or an appliance, but we've named this series "An Owner's Manual" because sometimes you probably wish your lovable companions came with one.

These concise guides give you the tools, tips, and direction to be a responsible and confident dog owner who brings out the best in your dog. Give them a test drive!



WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

Before we get to the particulars of puppy nutrition, let's first consider the most common pitfall of canine feeding. In theory, keeping your growing dog properly nourished is simple: Serve sensibly sized portions of high-quality chow, avoid feeding "people food," and keep snacks to a minimum.



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This is no accident. During his long partnership with man, the dog has perfected cunning methods of exploiting the human neurosis that associates food with affection. In prehistoric times semi-domesticated canines first cultivated human beings as a food provider. As the two species grew closer, dogs modified begging behaviors to maximize results: The more pathetic a dog seemed, the more scraps were tossed his way. Dogs have since refined this approach into a low-risk, high-reward hunting technique.

It's a deceptive way to hunt, but don't be fooled: Begging is not an emotional crisis or a test of your love. It's what scientists might call an evolutionary survival strategy, or what the rest of us might call a scam. Allowing your dog to "guilt" you into overfeeding him, or serving him a steady diet of table scraps in a misguided show of affection, can have harmful or even fatal results.

So don't take it personally when the little con artist under the table goes into the old whimper-wheedle-and-whine routine. Simply ignore it, and find healthier ways of bonding with your pet.

Otherwise, you risk loving your puppy to death.



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THE FEEDING FOUNDATION: YOUR PUPPY'S FIRST YEAR

6–12 weeks

Growing pups should be fed puppy food, a diet specially formulated to meet the nutritional needs for normal development. Feeding adult food will rob your puppy of important nutrients. Four feedings a day are usually adequate to meet nutritional demands. Large breeds should be fed unmoistened dry food by 9 or 10 weeks; small dogs by 12 or 13 weeks.

3–6 months

Sometime during this period, decrease feedings from four to three a day. A pup should be losing her potbelly and pudginess by 12 weeks. If she is still roly-poly at this age, continue to feed puppy-size portions until body type matures.

6–12 months

Begin feeding twice daily. Spaying or neutering lowers energy requirements slightly; after the procedure, switch from nutrient-rich puppy food to adult maintenance food. Small breeds can make the switch at 7 to 9 months; bigger breeds at 12, 13, even 14 months. Err on the side of caution: Better to be on puppy food a little too long than not long enough.

After age 1, most owners feed adult dogs two half-portions a day.



Like human babies, puppies start out needing many small meals a day, of a food formulated for their special nutritional requirements.

Golden Retriever/Isabelle Francais for AKC



BIG PUPPY, LITTLE PUPPY

There are general rules for feeding any puppy, but there are differences between small- and large-breed dogs. Each has special nutritional needs.

The range of sizes among dog breeds is greater than in any other animal. For example, a 150-pound Newfoundland is 50 times the size of a 3-pound Pomeranian.

To put it in perspective, picture a 150-pound human being and then imagine a fully-grown person who weighs only 3 pounds!

Large-breed puppies will weigh more than 50 pounds when full-grown. It takes these big guys about 18 to 24 months to reach their adult size. If they grow too quickly, they can develop problems with their joints and bones. Reduced-calorie foods with less calcium help support the proper rate of growth in large-breed puppies.



Adult dogs who weigh less than 20 pounds are considered small-breed dogs. Puppies of these breeds grow quickly and may reach adulthood at 9 months.

Some dog food companies make a mini-size kibble for small-breed puppies because their mouths are so little. And because their tiny stomachs don't hold much, small-breed puppies require high-calorie foods to provide them sufficient nutrition.

Also, small dogs need more calories to maintain body heat: They produce less heat and radiate more of it from their skin than do large dogs.

But small-breed dogs tend to be more pampered and less active than larger breeds, so owners who feed a high-calorie food formulated for small breeds should be careful not to overfeed. A number of companies have worked with canine-nutrition scientists to develop special formulas for both large- and small-breed puppies.

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WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

- If your puppy occasionally skips a meal or picks at food, don't worry. It could mean she is ready to eliminate a feeding or that you have given her too much, in which case simply reduce the quantity served.
- Most, but not all, dogs finish meals quickly. To discourage picky habits, feed at regular times in regular amounts and don't leave food down for more than 10 to 20 minutes.
- Feeding your pup the moment you get home may encourage separation anxiety. Play or grooming is a more positive way to say hello.
- If you are working with your pup in treat-based training, adjust the amount you feed at mealtime accordingly. Whenever training with treats, keep the treat as small as possible.
- When medically necessary, you can purchase canned or dry prescription diets from veterinarians to feed dogs with kidney disease, heart disease, diabetes, and other serious conditions. These foods should never be fed without a prescription.
- Some vitamin or mineral supplements, when utilized incorrectly (such as extra calcium given to a large-breed dog on a good diet), will do more harm than good.
- Before making a major change in your dog's diet, consult with your veterinarian and, when possible, the breeder. Once the formula is chosen, stick with it. Sudden changes in food may cause digestion problems.
- Small portions of carrot or apple chunks are healthful low-calorie snacks most dogs love.
- Fresh water should be available at all times. During the summer months, consider setting up multiple indoor/outdoor water stations. To avoid a buildup of bacteria, wash the water bowl daily.



Pembroke Welsh Corgi/Isabelle Francois for AKC



WHAT YOU SHOULD DO:

CHART YOUR PUPPY'S CONDITION

A young dog carrying too much weight has an increased risk of orthopedic problems, due to stress on immature joints.

- Obesity can also lead to diabetes, diseases of the heart and other organs, and general lethargy.
- There are growth-and-weight charts available in print and online. Weigh the puppy weekly and record his progress, comparing him to breed-appropriate weight charts. Adjust his food intake to achieve an average rate of growth.
- Weighing a dog, even a squirming puppy, is easy. Just weigh yourself, then weigh yourself holding the puppy. Subtract the difference—that's the puppy's weight.
- Don't worry about an ounce or two either way; no two dogs, even within breeds, are built exactly alike.



Parson Russell Terrier/Isabelle Francois for AKC



HOLD THE FRIES

One little French fry will invariably lead to another, and another. Before long, an obese dog will be crowding you off the love seat.

Also, a steady diet of table scraps can create a nutritional imbalance, and certain ingredients and spices in your favorite dishes can cause upset stomach in dogs.

And remember: There is room for only one alpha dog in your house, and that's you. Allowing a dog to beg at the table undermines your status as pack leader, resulting in training and behavior problems.



GIVE HIM THE GOOD STUFF

Premium food has higher nutritional density, so you can feed your dog less to achieve the same results. Also, premium foods have stable ingredient profiles; the composition of bargain brands can vary from batch to batch.

The major dog-food companies invest heavily in product development and research, constantly upgrading formulas to keep up with their competitors. This means that feeding premium food puts you on the cutting edge of canine nutrition.



Parson Russell Terriers/Isabelle Francais for AKC



FIND THE CORRECT PORTION SIZE

Body condition, not the amount eaten or left in the bowl, should determine portion sizes. (There's a saying in canine feeding: Watch the dog, not the dish.) Portion sizes to achieve peak body condition depend on individual metabolism and body type. Nutritional requirements vary from dog to dog.



MAKE SURE EVERYONE GETS WITH THE PROGRAM

Your entire household must be committed to your dog's feeding regimen. If there's a soft touch for a handout in your family, your dog will find it and exploit it, thus undoing the good you are trying to do. Keeping a dog trim takes a conscious effort from everyone on your team.



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GIVE A DOG A BONE? CAREFUL!

As for bones, our best advice is caution. Poultry and pork bones, or cooked bones of any kind, are strictly forbidden. They splinter into shards that can cause choking and serious damage to the dog's mouth, throat, or intestines.

Any bone, in fact, once chewed into small pieces, can block the intestines and lead to a nasty bout of constipation, can cause lacerations of the mouth and internal organs, or can lodge in the throat with fatal results. It is important to note that bones have little if any nutritional value.

There are other ways to satisfy a dog's craving to chew. Commercially available chew toys and simulated bones are made for dogs of all sizes.



DRY FOOD, WET FOOD, OR BOTH?

Manufactured dog food is widely available in three types: canned, semi-moist, and dry (kibble).

- Canned food is the most expensive to feed, and dogs often find it most palatable. Be careful of “all-meat” claims. Your dog should have a complete, balanced diet to fulfill nutritional requirements. Meat alone won’t do it.
- Semi-moist food is available in one-serving packets. It is usually manufactured to look like hamburger.
- Kibble is the most economical, and the major makers offer a complete and balanced diet for dogs of all sizes and ages.
- There is an oral-hygiene advantage in hard kibble: The friction produced helps to keep gums and teeth healthy.
- Kibble can be moistened, either with water, broth, or canned food. Although unnecessary, such supplementation may make food tastier.



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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

There is a small library's worth of books on the topic of canine food and nutrition — everything from raw-food diets and homemade recipes to feeding the senior dog and studies that require a research scientist to understand. This guide is meant to give you general information and tips to add to your personal database of dog knowledge. If you have any questions or concerns about your dog's food, feeding regimen, or nutritional health, you should always consult your veterinarian.

As the preeminent food writer M.F.K. Fisher wrote, "First we eat. Then we do everything else."





THE AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB

WHO AND WHAT WE ARE:

The AKC is a not-for-profit organization and the largest purebred dog registry in the world. We are the sports-governing body for over 22,000 dog events a year, including conformation (dog shows) and exciting sports like agility, obedience, rally, tracking, lure coursing, earthdog, herding trials, among others.



THE AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB

But the AKC is so much more! Here are just some of the ways we support and enrich the lives of dogs—purebreds and mixed-breeds alike—and their families. We:

- Created the [AKC Humane Fund](#), which supports breed rescue activities, assists shelters that permit domestic-abuse victims to bring their pets, and educates dog lovers about responsible dog ownership.
- Offer the [Canine Good Citizen®](#) program: A 10-step test that certifies dogs who have good manners at home and in their community. Over 725,000 dogs across the United States have become Canine Good Citizens, and 42 states have passed resolutions recognizing the program's merit and importance.
- Founded [AKC Reunite](#), which has brought more than 400,000 lost pets back together with their owners.
- Created the [AKC Canine Health Foundation](#), which funds research projects and clinical studies. Since 1995 the AKC has donated over \$24 million to the CHF. (The AKC is the only registry that incorporates health-screening results into its permanent dog records.)
- Conduct thousands of kennel inspections annually to monitor care and conditions at kennels across the country and ensure the integrity of the AKC registry.
- Offer the largest, most comprehensive set of DNA programs for parentage verification and genetic identity to ensure reliable registration records.
- Support one of the world's largest collections of dog-related fine art and artifacts at the [AKC Museum of the Dog](#), and we have the world's largest [dog library](#) at AKC headquarters in New York, both of which are open to the public.



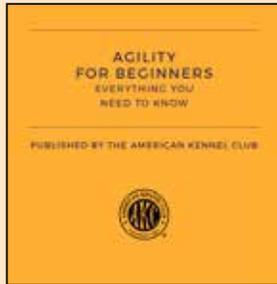
THE AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB

THANK YOU FOR READING!

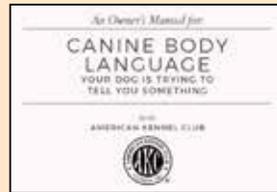
We hope this information was valuable to you in helping your puppy live a long, healthy, happy life. Below, find additional books in our Owner's Manual series designed to strengthen the bond between you and your furry family member.



5 TRICKS TO SHOW OFF



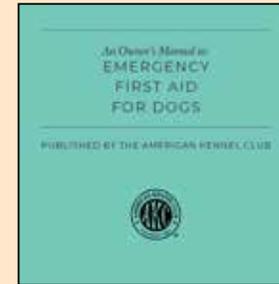
AGILITY FOR BEGINNERS



CANINE BODY LANGUAGE



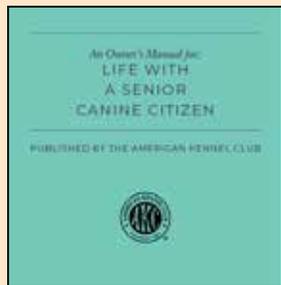
CANINE GOOD CITIZEN



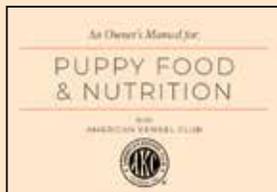
FIRST AID FOR DOGS



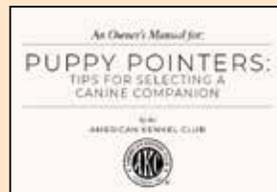
HOW TO CRATE TRAIN YOUR DOG



LIFE WITH A SENIOR DOG



PUPPY NUTRITION



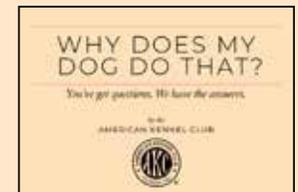
SELECTING A PUPPY



5 BASIC COMMANDS



RESPONSIBLE DOG OWNER TIPS



WHY DOES MY DOG DO THAT?



WHAT'S HE THINKING?



PUPPY SOCIALIZATION