



Maidstone Veterinary Clinic

Veterinary Surgeons: P.J. Warmerdam BVSc, MRCVS and Associates.
28 King Street Upper Hutt, Telephone (04) 5285-927, fax (04)5282-042

YOUNG ANIMAL NUTRITION

ci7.doc

What should I be feeding my puppy/kitten? Many owners ask this question or are confused about an appropriate diet. There are many choices available to us, so how do we ensure we are feeding the best option to our puppy or kitten?

Each individual puppy or kitten differs in the exact amount it requires depending on its breed, sex, age, weight, physical activity as well as their individual variation. But every puppy or kitten still has the same *basic requirements for growth*:

CARBOHYDRATE & FATS. These, along with some protein provide the energy for the animal's activity and metabolic processes.

PROTEIN. This provides amino acids which are essential for tissue growth and repair. Protein can be derived from animal (which is a more balanced amino acid content and more digestible) or vegetable sources.

Cats - require animal protein daily for essential amino acids and Vit A, Taurine etc. Dogs do not have such a compulsory requirement and if supplied with plant protein they can digest some of it.

VITAMINS, MINERALS & TRACE ELEMENTS. These are elements of which the body's skeleton is made up and that help the above metabolic processes - eg. calcium - Ca, phosphorus - Ph, iron, copper, Vit B, Vit D etc. Ca & Ph are two minerals that are of major importance in the structure of bones and teeth and are nutritionally closely related. Ca is also important in blood clotting and nerve impulses. Ph is also involved in the enzymes systems storing and transferring energy. The ratio of calcium to phosphorus is very important and is regulated by Vit D and several hormones in the body.

Thiamin (Vitamin B1) is destroyed by cooking and by thiaminases (found in a number of foods esp. raw fish). A deficiency will cause anorexia, neurological disorders, weakness, heart failure and death. Many commercially produced products add thiamine to their mix after processing.

WATER. The body is made up of 70% water and it has an important role in all the bodily functions. If an animal does not have water available, most metabolic and bodily functions will be disturbed. If an animal drinks too much water, it can be a symptom of a disease process in the body.

WHAT TO FEED and HOW MUCH? How much your cat or dog needs depends on many factors such as age, sex, exercise, breed, individual type, inside/outside pet etc. The first decision is whether to feed a homemade or commercial diet. In the past most pets were fed an unbalanced diet consisting of mainly meat and the occasional bone. These diets were deficient on calcium which was added as a supplement. However, there is now a wide variety of commercially prepared diets which contain the perfect balance of nutrition and vitamins and minerals and require no supplements. Therefore, most normal healthy pets are better off fed a commercial diet. If feeding a commercial diet it is not recommended to feed extra additives, as TOO MUCH can be as harmful as too little. This is especially so for calcium and Vitamins A & D.

For young animals, a puppy or kitten - a growth diet is best. This should be fed for at least the first 6 - 12 months of its life. Growth diets tend to contain more energy than adult diets and slightly more calcium for those growing bones.

After 12 months of age, your pet can go onto an adult diet and in its later years a senior diet can be used from 8 - 10 years onwards- depending on breed and type of animal.

An animal is said to be in energy balance when its intake of energy is equal to its expenditure. Commercial diets will have guidelines on the label about how much to feed, but you should always use your pet's physical appearance as a gauge. When viewed from above your pet should have an obvious waist and you should be able to easily feel the last 3 ribs and backbone under the skin. If in doubt of your pet's physical condition ask a vet or nurse to show you how to measure this.

If your dog is too thin - increase the amount fed by 20% and reassess in 2 weeks.

If your dog is too fat - decrease the amount fed by 20%, reduce the amount of fat in the diet, increase exercise and reassess in 2 weeks.

Chubby puppies may look very cute but be warned, it will predispose it to obesity as an adult. Overfeeding of puppies (esp. large breeds) can also cause serious bone and joint problems leaving your dog 'damaged for life'. Your dog is genetically programmed to reach a certain size and growing rapidly from overfeeding won't make him any taller in the end - just fatter.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I FEED MY PET? Up until weaning at 6 - 8 wks of age, puppies can be fed ad-lib. From weaning until 3 months old they should be fed 3 - 4 times per day. After 3 months of age this can be reduced to twice daily until 8-12 months of age. Thereafter they can be changed to once a day feeding if this is more convenient.

Cats are snackers and can mostly be fed ad-lib. Some are prone to over eating and will need to have a measured amount twice daily.

Types of foods: moist canned foods, moist dog rolls, biscuits large and small. Canned foods have a high water content, and may be comparably more expensive than dried foods which contain lower levels of water. Many brands have an economy and a "professional" type of food, with the economy type based on plant more than animal proteins, and the professional brands based on animal and good quality contents. These types are more expensive. Check the label on the food bag, the first 2-3 ingredients named will be the main ones and give an idea of the quality of the food. Dogs that tend to put on a lot of weight may maintain a lower weight on the economy type foods.

Chewing on bones can help to control tartar build up on teeth and it also gives your teething puppy something to chew other than your new shoes or furniture. **Large beef bones** that can be chewed on (but **not chewed up**) are best for dogs. Avoid cooked or any chicken bones as they may splinter. Raw chicken necks are good for cats to chew on.

What we recommend: You should choose brands of food that have been AFFCO tested. This means it meets all the nutritional requirements.

- For cats a premium dry food (Proplan, Hills, Iams) can usually be fed ad lib. Some cats need special diets for furballs, obesity, diabetes, bladder and kidney disease.
- For dogs feed at least 2/3 to 3/4 of the diet of your chosen brand. We recommend Proplan and Hills and if fed these then the balance can be made up with vegetables, pasta, rice, left overs etc.
- Avoid fatty or high energy treats.
- Avoid milk as it can cause diarrhoea in cats/dogs that do not have the enzymes to metabolise it.

The feeding of highly palatable (tasty) foods to pets disturbs the normal control of intake mechanisms. The presence of a full stomach would normally stop the pet from eating more, but if the food is tasty the pet will keep eating it! i.e. be aware of the smorgas board effect.

‘ It is not only important to feed the appropriate diet, but to feed the diet appropriately.’