

New pup predicament: "What's for dinner?"

Your puppy is your new best friend, and you want to give him the best foundation to grow and thrive. You certainly don't want to unknowingly contribute to anything that might be harmful or inadequate for him. This is where nutrition can come in! We all know that there are pet food brands and varieties stacked to the ceiling at pet stores and grocery stores, so how do you know what your puppy really needs as he grows?

Here are some common questions and a few important tips to help you put the perfect portion on your pup's plate, peppered with advice from Dr. Joe Bartges, a board-certified veterinary nutritionist and internist.

What's the most important thing to know about feeding a puppy?

Dogs are omnivores, like people. Puppies are trying to build healthy bones and muscles, as well as brains and organs. The right nutrition is critical for the building blocks for development. A balanced diet really does matter. It's important that your puppy get a diet that is labeled for "growth" or at least says "all stages of life." These diets have been shown to be adequate for growth for an average dog. But beware, your puppy might not be average, so be sure to ask your own veterinary team to weigh in about the ways your pup might be unique.

Should I give my puppy vitamins?

Since it's especially important that puppies have what they need while they are growing, be aware that

high-quality diets should provide all the nutrients needed, making vitamin supplements unnecessary. In fact, giving supplements to growing animals can be a bad idea. Excessive or abnormal mineral balance can impact normal growth. Ask your veterinary team for their favorite food brands, and keep in mind that the best brands might not be the most expensive and rarely are the most advertised.

How much do I feed my puppy?

It's important that your puppy have adequate calories during growth, but you do not want to begin a trend toward obesity. Your veterinary team is the best resource for telling you if your puppy is growing appropriately or is overweight, and they can give you an accurate feeding guide. It's important that you measure the amount of food you offer and set up feeding times so that your puppy does not overeat or snack excessively from boredom. Puzzle feeders or multiple feeding sites can provide mental stimulation to help build your puppy's brain too.

Isn't some vomiting and diarrhea normal for puppies?

Even if your puppy feels great, he should not be throwing up or having loose stool. It's critical to have puppies with these issues evaluated right away by a veterinarian. There are lots of causes of these issues, and only a veterinarian can diagnose and treat them.

Should I feed my puppy a homemade or raw diet?

Raw diets are in the news, but Dr. Bartges thinks that raw and homemade diets are risky for young animals. He thinks that the risks for nutrient imbalance and infectious disease are too high during such a critical phase of growth.

The best advice for having your puppy's nutritional needs met is to take advantage of your veterinary team's treasure trove of information that they'd love to share with you.

