

HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS FOR FEEDING YOUR NEW PET

Good feeding habits begin as soon as you get your pet. Your pet's diet will influence his or her health status, development, appearance and attitude. How you feed your pet will influence many behavior aspects, from house-training to begging. It is also important to prevent your pet from gaining too much weight as it is associated with many health problems. Here are some tips to get you off to a good start:

1. Choose the diet carefully!

There is excessive misinformation in the market regarding pet foods. We know it's confusing, particularly with all the advertising and marketing efforts by competing companies. The adage, "you get what you pay for" applies well to pet foods. We encourage you to not compare diets using the "guaranteed analysis" on the label - it is a chemical analysis only that measures quantities of ingredient types - it tells you nothing about the quality or digestibility of the ingredients. There is a big difference in the quality of pet foods. We generally recommend feeding your pet the most expensive food that you can afford on a regular basis. Please don't hesitate to ask us about any issues regarding your puppy, diet or otherwise.

2. Do not free choice feed your pet.

Free choice feeding is essentially feeding your pet as much as he wants to eat by leaving the food available at all times. Free choice feeding can contribute to digestive upset (vomiting and diarrhea), bloat, obesity and difficulty house-training. The best approach is to split your pet's daily allotment into two or three meals a day. If the food is not gone within 15 minutes of being put down, remove the remainder and continue with the same measured portion at the next meal. If you find that your dog is consistently not finishing meals, cut back on the total daily allotment. On the other hand, if meals are devoured it doesn't mean that you should be giving more. The body condition of your pet will indicate when you are feeding too much or not enough. By meal feeding your dog or puppy, you also have regular opportunity to train commands such as sit, come and wait. Also remember that as the pack leaders, humans control the food. If the dog is allowed to eat when he wants, he will begin to think that perhaps he is in control.

3. Avoid feeding your pet "people food".

Establishing from the start that human food is off limits will reduce begging and an increased opportunity for obesity. It also helps minimize the chance of pets becoming picky eaters. If you must feed some people food, stick to small amounts of low calorie options such as vegetables, but always put them in the pet's bowl. Never feed your pet from the table. This can lead not only to begging problems, but also to dominance problems in some dogs.

4. Familiarize yourself with healthy treats.

We all like to treat our pets. It helps us in socializing and training. There are several healthy options available and you shouldn't be afraid to ask regarding suitability of a treat in regards to fat levels. Quite often, treats that we consider favorites are the ones highest in fat or calories, and this is true of our pets as well. It is our responsibility to provide mostly healthy treats to our pets. Remember, many treats on the market have more calories than you would find in 1/2 cup of their regular food!

5. Use meals as a house training opportunity for dogs.

Puppies normally eliminate 5-15 minutes after eating a meal. Therefore, after you feed your puppy, take him outside to the appropriate place in the yard and wait for the 'magic moment'. Praise your puppy profusely, share a small treat, and use a word that it can associate with elimination. "Outside", "Pee pee time", "Go pee", and "Hurry up" are all things that we hear commonly. Puppies also need to eliminate after naps and play sessions.

6. Feed your pet in a quiet place and time.

Avoid feeding prior to or just after exercise. This helps to establish consistency, and reduces the incidence of serious gastro-intestinal upsets, especially in dogs. It is recommended that all dogs are fed after the people are done. In a group, the most dominant animals feed first, and the rest of the pack eat later. If you feed your dog during your meal, this can lead to confusion about who is boss "dog".

7. Change diets slowly.

If you are changing your pet's diet, mix the new food with the previous diet in small amounts for the first day or two. Then gradually increase the amount of the new food over a period of a week or so until there is only the new food being fed. This will reduce the likelihood of vomiting and diarrhea. Your pet's stool should be formed and easily picked up. If this is not the case, please inform us. How solid the stool is, as well as the frequency of bowel movements help to establish the health status of your pet, as well as the suitability of the diet to your pet.

8. Bones and milk.

Please avoid feeding your dog any bones. Digestive disturbances, bone fragments and their damage can result in medication and possible surgery for your dog. If you wish to give your dog bones, please ask us for our "Bone Rules" handout. We would be happy to provide you with suggestions for appropriate chew toys. Many puppies and kittens cannot digest milk, and it quite often results in diarrhea. Milk can also interfere with the absorption of some nutrients from the intestinal tract.

BEST OF LUCK WITH YOUR NEW PET! PLEASE CALL US WITH ANY QUESTIONS THAT YOU MAY HAVE REGARDING HIS OR HER HEALTH CARE. WE ARE HERE TO HELP!