

## Nutrition for life

When you welcome a puppy into your home a lot of emphasis is placed on socialising, and so it should be, but equally an important aspect of caring for your new companion is providing the nutritional needs of the puppy and all through his life. Feeding your dog a diet with the right nutrition is vital for his health and wellbeing. As your dog goes through different stages in his life his nutritional requirements will change and it will be necessary to adjust his diet to meet these changes to aid a healthy development and support good health. A high quality diet will be carefully balanced containing essential nutrients, Protein, Fat, Carbohydrates, Fibre, Vitamins and Minerals. There are many types of dog food to choose from, Dry Kibble, Canned, Semi-Moist, Raw, And Homemade. So when deciding which kind of diet to feed make sure it provides your dog with all the correct nutrition at each life stage. The amount to feed is also important to maintain a healthy bodyweight. The recommended amount to feed each day on the products packaging is just a guide so it is important to adjust the feeding amount if necessary to your dog's needs depending on his age, weight, environment and activity level. He may require more or less, but assess this regularly.

## Puppy Time

The growing period of a puppy is a critical phase as rapid growth and change is taking place. The diet of a German Shepherd puppy should be nutritionally balanced to meet the high energy level and control and maintain a slow and steady rate of growth to support the development of internal organs and help to avoid skeletal problems. High quality puppy growth food for a large breed will be specifically formulated and nutritionally balanced and will not need additional supplements added as this could have a harmful effect on the pups development, especially bone and joint conditions. Checking the puppy's weight and body condition is important to ensure he is growing properly. A fat roly-poly puppy with accelerated growth does not make a bigger adult, but the strain on his body is likely to increase the risk of malformations of his bones and joints. A puppy fed insufficient food or fed a nutritionally deficient diet will have a very narrow body

and feel very boney, or he may be pot- bellied and also feel very boney. Malnutrition of a puppy will have serious health implications.

## Early Days

The breeder is responsible for the early weeks, feeding the puppy's mother well, and then weaning the puppies onto a balanced diet making sure each puppy is fed the correct amount until he can go to his new home from 8 weeks old. A well reared puppy will be playful, friendly, and inquisitive, his eyes will be clean and bright, his ears and coat clean, his body should, feel firm and well covered, and his skin should feel supple and loose. The weight can vary at 8 weeks, so the appearance and feel of the puppy's body is a good indicator to the overall condition of the puppy. Please note an approximate weight of between 6kg and 8kg for an 8 week old puppy is just a guide.

## Adult Prime Time

As the puppy reaches adulthood the rate of growth slows down and at the end of the growth process at about 15mths to 18mths their nutritional needs will change to a diet formulated for an adult dog. The correct nutrition still plays an important role in your dog's overall health, skin and coat condition. The adult dog phase of life spans many years and because of this it may be necessary to adjust your dog's diet to provide the right balance of nutrition due to increased or decreased physical activity, the environment, his behaviour, or health issues. The food you feed him should be chosen to do more than just satisfy his appetite.

### Obesity

Over feeding the ideal daily amount of food and feeding too many treats and extra snacks will result in your dog becoming overweight. Although overfeeding may be unintentional it can cause weight-related medical problems. With increased body weight too much physical stress is placed on the joints and bones and muscles which in later life can result in severe arthritis. Increased amounts of fat can cause Diabetes, Heart and Breathing problems. Fat deposited around the

internal organs is a contributory factor in their reduced function, anesthetic and surgical risk is also increased. In an overweight dog it will be difficult to see or feel the ribs through the fat cover between the skin and bone.

### Underweight

Feeding your dog too little or a deficient diet with a poor nutritional balance for his needs will result in a poor condition underweight dog. His ribs, backbone and pelvic bones will be very visible with no fat cover between the skin and bone. He will have a lower resistance to infection and possible intestinal disorders.

## Senior Years

By the age of 8 years German Shepherds are regarded as entering their senior years. Hopefully the senior phase of life will continue for many years with the dog remaining fit and healthy, but over time the effects of age will be inevitable. The older dog may be less active, his sense of taste and smell may be reduced, internal organs may start to be less efficient and there may be other age-related issues. Because of these changes, caring for your elderly dog will require regular check-ups with the vet to detect and treat any medical issues. His nutritional needs require particular attention now. Feeding a high quality diet especially for the senior stage of life will help provide him with the correct nutrition in an easier to digest food to support his wellbeing and keep his weight in check through these very special years.

### General Feeding Tips

- 1) Store food properly to avoid health problems from feeding spoiled food. Opened cans, Fresh food, Defrosted food must be kept cold and refrigerated. Dry food open or unopened should be stored in a cool dry place. Once opened the bag should be re-closed tightly or the food kept in an airtight container.
- 2) Measure out the correct quantity of food for each meal.
- 3) If you have a multi-dog household make sure each dog is only eating their own food and not helping themselves to each others.
- 4) Know your dog's healthy weight and body condition, you should be able to feel

the ribs but not see them. Unexpected weight loss or gain, continual diarrhea or constipation, lack of appetite, or increased appetite or increased drinking over a few days are all reasons for a checkup with the vet.

5) Changes to your dog's diet should be done gradually to avoid possible intestinal upsets. Start with 25% of the whole meal as the new food then gradually increase this over a week until the meal is all the new food.

6) Food is a great motivator when training your dog. Try to use the more healthy varieties of treats and snacks available to avoid your dog gaining excess weight.

7) Fresh, clean cool drinking water must be available for your dog at all times.

Gill Ward M.I.A.C.E