

Exercise is Essential

- Except for dogs who are very sick, elderly, or have special needs, all dogs need some form of daily exercise. A walk around the block isn't sufficient exercise for most dogs. Many dogs require at least an hour of vigorous exercise each day. Your vet can determine the amount of exercise your dog needs.^{3,7}

- In addition to walking, you can exercise your dog by going biking or swimming together, building an obstacle course in your yard, playing hide and seek or fetch, and hiding food for your dog to find. Dog sports such as agility, flyball, canine freestyle, disc dog, herding, tracking, obedience, rally, and dock-diving can also provide outlets for active canines.⁴ (Visit akc.org or workingdogweb.com for info)

- Additional benefits of exercise for your dog include: less hyperactivity and behavioral problems as well as better mental health and increased bonding with you. You too will experience the physical and mental benefits of exercise.²

Sources: ¹"Obesity in Dogs, Part 1: Exploring the causes and consequences of canine obesity" ²dogfoodadvisor.com (courtesy of Best Paw Forward) ³*Good Dog! Improve Your Pet's Health and Behavior Through Diet and Exercise* ⁴"When Man's Best Friend is Obese" ⁵*Dog's Health From A to Z* ⁶petobesityprevention.org ⁷Interview with Judy Martinez DVM ⁸*The Everything Dog Health Book*

Reading a Food Label

- The first ingredient should be a human grade meat or meat meal, not a by-product.

- It should contain:

-- Purified fats and fatty acids (chicken fat, fish oils, flaxseed, walnut/ sunflower/ canola oil).

-- Easily absorbed carbohydrates such as barley, rice, and oats or, if it is grain-free, potatoes.

-- Alfalfa which helps with allergies, stomach ailments, and bad breath and cleanses kidneys.

-- Brewers yeast which contains 16 amino acids, 14 minerals, and 17 vitamins.

-- Amaranth which is a hypoallergenic and highly nutritional and digestible grain.

-- Fiber and antioxidant rich fruits like apples and cranberries.

-- Rice, preferably brown rice, but NOT brewers rice which lacks nutritional value.

-- Lots of vitamins and minerals.

- It should NOT contain ground corn, corn gluten meal, maize, or corn bran (especially in the first 6 ingredients) because corn is a filler that loads on bad carbs.

- As a general rule, don't feed your dog food that contains ingredients you wouldn't eat.

- Grocery stores only deal with low end brands of dog food so purchase yours from a pet store such as Friends of Nature or Pet Supplies Plus.²

- See dogfoodadvisor.com for brand reviews and more info.

Fluffy or Fat?

The Dog Obesity Epidemic

The Dangers

- Obesity can lead to endocrine disease, high cholesterol, heart disease, lung disorders, hypertension, orthopedic disorders, diabetes, and incontinence. It also increases the risk of cancerous tumors and immune dysfunction.^{1,2}

- Dogs who are only 20% overweight have a 50% higher mortality rate.³

- Research shows that dogs at an ideal weight live an average of 1.8 years longer than their overweight siblings.²

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The Facts

- Obese means 30% over the ideal weight.⁴
- Obesity occurs physiologically when the energy input is greater than the energy output (a dog consumes more calories than he burns).⁵
- A 2012 survey found 52.5% of American dogs to be overweight, yet only 17% of their owners realized that their pets were above their ideal weights.^{6, 2}
- Remember that many dogs are much smaller than humans so a gain of only 3 lbs. can endanger a 30 lb. dog.³
- One cause of obesity is that many Americans equate food with love. Feeding your dog more food and/or fattening foods and table scraps is not a proper way to display your love. Remember that if your dog is overweight, he will likely suffer from health problems (and the stress of carrying extra pounds) and will probably die sooner, cutting your time together short. Exercising your dog is a healthy way to give him pleasure while improving his quality of life.^{3, 7}
- Show your dog how much you love him by taking care of his health (giving him less food and more exercise). Repay a fraction of his loyalty by diligently managing his health because he can't advocate for himself.

Identifying Obesity

- The first thing to do is to consult your veterinarian. He or she can perform blood tests, weigh the dog, and take a Body Condition Score to determine your dog's health. Your vet can then help you set up a weight-loss plan if necessary.⁴
- You should always listen to your vet but here's a quick DIY way to see if your dog may have a weight problem: "Your pet's body should be trim and lean with a very thin layer of adipose (fatty cells) tissue beneath the skin, which should be supple and elastic in any dog. Run your hands over your dog's ribs: you should be able to feel them easily without having to press down. If his rib cage is swaddled in fat, chances are he's overweight." He should also have a noticeable tuck at his hips and not look like a sausage.³

Food and Dinnertime

- Buy a quality dog food; studies have shown that obese dogs are often fed a higher volume of cheaper brand foods.¹
- Still, note that more expensive isn't always better and learn to read a label.⁵ (see back panel)
- Always measure out the amount of food recommended by your vet (don't free-feed or blindly follow the bag's instructions).
- Don't feed table scraps. Begging is usually a behavioral problem, not a nutritional one.^{1, 3}

Treats

- Treats are almost always more fattening than kibble and should account for no more than 10% of your dog's daily food intake.^{3, 8}
- Store-bought treats are typically high in calories. Healthy alternatives include bits of carrots, green beans, lettuce, peas, apples, and bananas. For special occasions or high-value training treats you can use lunchmeat, hot dogs, cheese, peanut butter, and homemade treats.⁶ (see recipe below)
- All family members must agree on and follow their dog's diet because one person slipping the dog treats or extra kibble can greatly harm the dog's health.³

Homemade Treats

- 2 cups flour
 - 1 tbsp. baking powder
 - 1 cup peanut butter
 - 1 cup milk
- Preheat oven to 375°F. In a bowl, combine flour and baking powder. In another bowl, mix peanut butter and milk, then add to dry ingredients and mix well. Place dough on a lightly floured surface and knead. Roll dough to 1/4 inch thickness and use a cookie cutter to cut out shapes or simply rip off small blobs. Bake for 15 minutes on a greased baking sheet until lightly brown. Cool on a rack, then store in an airtight container or freeze. (Courtesy of Bullwrinkle.com)