

Feeding Puppies and Pregnant/Nursing Dogs FAQs

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



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What should I feed a pregnant or lactating (nursing) dog?

PREGNANCY: Your adult dog should eat a healthy adult pet food such as Drs. Foster & Smith [Chicken & Brown Rice formula](#) or [Lamb & Brown Rice formula](#) prior to breeding, to ensure optimal health before pregnancy. Continue feeding an adult dog food for the first few weeks of pregnancy. Starting the fourth week of pregnancy, begin adding a puppy food such as Drs. Foster & Smith [Chicken & Brown Rice Formula puppy food](#) to her diet. Each week increase the amount of the puppy food and decrease the amount of adult food, so when she is in her final week of pregnancy, she is eating all puppy food. Increase the frequency of the daily meals to three by mid pregnancy. She may need to eat small meals every 3-4 hours during the last week of the pregnancy as the puppies continue to take up more room.

LACTATION: Within 2-3 days of giving birth, your dog's appetite will dramatically increase to 2-4 times her pre-pregnancy intake. She will need a near-constant supply of Drs. Foster & Smith Puppy Formula Food and water to maintain her weight and health while feeding the puppies. You can add cottage cheese, or cooked egg depending upon your veterinarian's recommendations. If her weight is properly maintained, she should not look gaunt or thin. Ideally, she should weigh the same at the time of weaning as she did when she was bred.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: If a high-quality food is being fed, a pregnant dog does not usually need any additional supplements. Poor diet or incorrect supplementation can cause problems for the developing fetuses or the mother. Over-supplementing with calcium during pregnancy, for example, predisposes the mother to a disease called eclampsia. If you have questions about diet or supplements, talk with your veterinarian.

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How is puppy food different from adult food?

Puppy foods are higher in protein (28%-30%), and are usually enriched with higher amounts of vitamins, minerals, fats, and other nutrients a growing puppy requires. A quality puppy food will have a controlled amount of calcium and phosphorus in a balanced ratio.

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What types of food should I feed my puppy?

We at Drs. Foster & Smith recommend feeding your puppy dry foods. Dry foods are typically economical, easy to use, store well, and satisfy a puppy's urge to chew. . We do not recommend feeding your puppy expensive, high-calorie, high-water-content canned food or semi-moist foods.

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When should I feed my puppy?

Your puppy's feeding schedule will be somewhat dictated by your own schedule. Do not leave food out for the puppy so he can eat it whenever he wants. You must be there for feedings because you can then put the puppy and his entire body (including his need to eliminate) on a set schedule.

This is best accomplished by feeding the pup at specific times on a specific schedule. In general, puppies under six months of age should be fed three times daily; between six and twelve months old, two times daily; and once or twice per day after twelve months of age.

Also, make it a habit to give your puppy 60-90 minutes of quiet time after his meal. This will help to avoid stomach upsets. Be sure to take him to his housetraining area, though. [\[Back to Top \]](#)



How much food should I feed my puppy?

You can start with the recommendations on the package. Adjust the amount of food according to your puppy's condition, activity level, and environmental temperature (puppies need a lot of energy to stay warm when it is cold). Your veterinarian can assess your puppy's weight during routine puppy exams, and help you adjust the quantity you feed. It is very important that puppies do not become overweight or grow too fast. After your puppy is spayed or neutered her/his calorie needs will decrease. Your veterinarian can help you determine how much less you may need to feed your puppy. [[Back to Top](#)]



Is my puppy eating enough?

Probably. One of the biggest concerns veterinarians hear from dog owners - especially those with animals less than 18 months of age - is that their puppy never seems to eat enough. Many owners feel their puppy is not putting on enough weight or growing fast enough. They are therefore tempted to somehow encourage their puppy to eat more. Resist this urge! Growth rates and appetites of young animals on a good-quality food are primarily dictated by their genetics. Do not try to make your puppy grow faster than he should or into something he is not. Artificially accelerated growth leads to bone and joint disorders. Your puppy should not become overweight. [[Back to Top](#)]



What about puppy treats?

Treats should never account for more than 10% of your puppy's caloric intake (which is not much in Toy breeds). Your puppy's food is his sole source for the nutrition he needs, so be careful not to "fill up" your puppy on treats.

Treats can be used during training to reward good behavior, but be careful not to overdo it.

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Should I feed my puppy extra calcium?

No. Feeding high-calcium diets with excess calcium may lead to bone problems in young, rapidly growing dogs.

There appears to be a link between the incidence of hypertrophic osteodystrophy (HOD), osteochondritis dessicans (OCD), and hip dysplasia, and the overfeeding of calcium. Researchers fed dogs calcium at a higher-than-recommended amount, and compared the incidence of disease in dogs that were fed normal or less-than-normal calcium levels. As would be expected, the animals that were overfed calcium showed increased incidence of skeletal problems including hip dysplasia.

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How do I feed my large breed puppy to prevent hip dysplasia? Must I feed a large breed puppy food?

Lower levels of fat (calories), protein, and calcium are often recommended for large-breed puppies versus smaller breed puppies to promote proper skeletal and muscle growth. In general, you will also want to avoid vitamin/mineral supplements.

Premium large-breed puppy foods appear to be of good quality and should do a great job of providing the needed nutrition. However, many owners of large-breed puppies often feed a more affordable general-purpose puppy food. To make things more complicated, some adult foods are also labeled for use in puppies. You will want to find a statement on the product such as: "Animal feeding tests using AAFCO procedures substantiate that (name of food)provides complete and balanced nutrition for growth of puppies."

Have your veterinarian look at the labels to compare the protein, fat, calcium and phosphorus levels of the prospective foods and help you determine what will be right for your puppy.

It is **extremely important** that puppies do not become overweight or grow too fast. Your veterinarian can assess your puppy's weight during routine puppy exams, and help you adjust the quantity you feed. Do not let your puppy become overweight.

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How long should I feed puppy food before switching to adult food?

Drs. Foster & Smith Puppy Food is recommended for small- and medium-breed puppies up to 12 months old. Large-breed and giant-breed puppies may continue to eat Drs. Foster & Smith Puppy Food until 18 months of age, depending on the breed and growth of the puppy. If you have questions regarding what to feed your puppy, or for how long, please contact your veterinarian.

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