

# Nutritional Needs of Older Dogs

*Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff*

Older dogs are undergoing many different physiological changes. To keep up with these changes, it is recommended that a diet suited for older dogs be fed.

The older dog is going to need a good, well balanced diet that is lower in calories, protein and fat, and higher in fiber. For some older dogs, we can continue to feed their regular food but in a smaller quantity.



[Specially formulated senior diets](#) are lower in calories and help to create a feeling of fullness while providing fewer calories. Commercially prepared senior diets have a protein of around 18% where diets for dogs in renal failure are around 14% protein. If your dog has significantly decreased kidney function, then a diet that is lower in protein will lower the workload for the kidneys. Lower fat usually translates to lower calories so many senior diets have a fat level of around 10 to 12%. Older dogs are more prone to develop constipation so senior diets are higher in fiber at around 3 to 5%. Wheat bran can be added to regular dog food to increase the amount of fiber. If your older dog will eat dry food, it will help to control tartar build-up and reduce gum disease.

## Tendencies to be overweight

Because of decreased activity, many older dogs will gain weight. Obesity is a common problem in the older dog, and because they don't exercise as much, weight loss can be very difficult. It is much better to not let your dog get overweight than to try to make her lose weight when she gets older. But if she is overweight, then work very hard to get the extra weight off. It is one of the single most important things you can do to increase the quality and length of life for your pet.



## Getting older dogs to eat

Some older dogs suffer not from obesity, but from the other extreme: lack of weight gain and disinterest in food. If your dog is getting thin and not eating well he should have a complete veterinary exam to rule out any possible disease problems.

If everything checks out, then trying to get the dog to eat is the next challenge. If a dog normally eats dry food he may have decreased consumption because he has a hard time chewing the large kibble. By feeding a kibble with smaller pieces or

moistening the food with water it will be easier to chew. Adding canned food or gravy to the food will make it more appealing.

Some dogs can tolerate a small amount of milk or eggs added to the food. Homemade diets of boiled rice, potatoes, vegetables and chicken or hamburger works well with others. Some dogs prefer cat food and will eat that readily, but this is often quite high in protein and should be avoided, if possible.

With an older dog that won't eat, it may be time to break the rules to get him to eat. Better that he has table scraps than nothing at all. Use common sense, however, and stay away from fatty foods.

### **Supplements for older dogs**

Aging dogs have special nutritional needs and some of those can be supplied in the form of supplements. If your dog is not eating a complete, balanced diet then a vitamin/mineral supplement like our [Lifestage Select® Senior Dog Multivitamins](#) is recommended to prevent any deficiencies. Some owners like to feed anti-oxidants like our [Premium Plus® AntioxiTabs®](#) supplement to help prevent cancer. As mentioned earlier, a fiber product such as wheat bran may help to reduce the incidence of constipation.