

Transitioning to a New Food and Preventing Overfeeding.

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When bringing home a new bag of dog food, it can be tempting to quickly fill up your pet's bowl in the excitement of having them enjoy a new food. However, it is important to remember that most dogs are not accustomed to changes in their diets, and that sudden differences in dietary moisture, fat, fiber, and even total calories can result in stool changes, potentially leading to diarrhea. Similarly, this is one of the main reasons why human babies and young children also must be slowly introduced to new foods. Your canine may be enthusiastic about the new food, but it is important that you do not overfeed.

Try these tips for transitioning your canine companion's food over time.

Feeding a New Food

Three food nutrients — moisture, fat, and fiber — commonly have the largest effect on transition feeding and diarrhea, and must be carefully controlled during diet changes. If a new food is rapidly introduced, the result can be undesired stool changes, but this can be avoided or minimized by using a transition period in which the new food is slowly introduced while the old food is phased out.

The transition period required will vary based on the degree of differences between the new and old foods as well as individual pet differences. In general, one week is a good minimum length of time to transition to a new food, as outlined in the table below.

If at any step in the transition the pet experiences undesirable stool changes, the previous transition step should be extended for at least an additional two days. If the pet continues to have undesired stool changes, especially if poor appetite preceded the diet change, a veterinarian should be consulted to ensure that no underlying problems need to be addressed.

Feeding the Appropriate Amount

In addition to affecting nutrients, feeding excessive calories can result in undesired stool changes. Therefore, it is important to adjust the amount of the new food to match the dog's current caloric intake.

For example, if the animal was previously fed two cups per

day of a food providing 300 kcals/cup (for a total of 600 kcals/day),* a new food providing 400 kcals/cup should be fed at one and a half cups per day to provide an equivalent amount of calories and prevent overfeeding.

Signs of a Healthy Dog

So how do you know if your new dog food is working? Commercial pet food selection criteria are many, but the most

important is how the food performs in your particular animal. Luckily, there are several noticeable indicators that can help pet parents know if their food is working.

Body Condition Maintenance

The number one criterion for selecting a dog food is whether or not it can maintain your pet with an ideal body condition. Just like humans, our animal companions need to maintain a healthy weight in order to maximize their quality and quantity of life.

Coat Luster Many nutritional deficiencies manifest themselves in a pet's fur, decreasing its luster. An overall healthy pet's coat will have a nice sheen.

Volume and Form of Feces Stools should be firm, but more importantly the volume should be minimized. If volume increases significantly with a new food, then it might not be as digestible — costing you more money with less nutrient intake. With several premium brands, you feed less

because the formula contains more nutrients per cup or can, creating a cost-effective solution.

Palatability Your canine should enjoy her food and readily finish each meal.

Most importantly, pet parents need to look beyond the label to verify that the ingredients on the back of the package offer the right balance for optimal nutrition. Whatever pet food you choose for your animal companion, make sure you make the most of your best friend's dining experience.

With the right food, transitional period, and amount to feed, any pet can happily and safely make the transition to a new food. Before changing your dog's diet, always speak with your local retailer, your veterinarian and your dog-loving friends. 🐾



Photography by Anna Cooke. Shot on location at Enterprise Dog Park, Clearwater.

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