

# Proper nutrition for training

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*By Judy Jasek, DVM*

Proper nutrition is a very important factor in how your dog behaves and in its ability to learn and perform. Think about it – do you feel differently after you have eaten certain foods? Do you feel better when you eat a ‘healthy’ diet as opposed to a ‘junk food’ diet? Your dog will also behave differently when it eats certain foods. How does diet affect behavior? Grains will cause wide swings in your dog’s blood glucose level. Do you ever get grumpy when you get hungry and your blood sugar drops? Your dog will too. Neurotransmitters are essential for proper brain function and proper mood and attitude. These are formed from essential amino acids that are present in meat. A grain-based diet may be low in certain amino acids unless they are added back in with a supplement containing them. In addition, many neurotransmitters are actually produced in the intestines. Inflamed intestines will interfere with this process, and in my experience, I see a great deal of intestinal disease related to corn and wheat in the diet.

Now the question – what is the best diet to feed your dog? Unfortunately, a large portion of the pet food industry is more interested in selling food than providing optimal nutrition for your pet. Through creative advertising, they try to convince you that diets that are inappropriate for dogs are the best you can do for your furry friend. This is far from the truth – you can provide your dog with much better nutrition than the average grocery store food will offer.

What makes certain commercial diets unhealthy for dogs?

Many commercial pet foods are grain-based, not meat-based. Why is this a problem? Dogs are carnivores and need to eat a meat based diet to maintain optimal health, both physically and mentally. Go to the pet store and read some labels – do you find ingredients such as corn meal, wheat, gluten, and soy? Do these sound appropriate for a carnivore? They most definitely are not. This even holds true for many of the ‘prescription’ diets that you will get from your veterinarian. Wheat and corn are inexpensive substitutions for meat that allow the protein content in the food to remain at an acceptable level. I see so many dogs that have adverse reactions to corn and wheat that these are the two ingredients that I always recommend avoiding. A diet with fresh meat and bones, including organ meats is the healthiest choice for your dog.

Processing always destroys the nutritional value in foods. This is the case in our foods as well as our pets’ foods. The typical dry food is processed at very high temperatures to create kibble and many of the nutrients are destroyed in the process. Most companies simply spray the vitamins and minerals back onto the kibble after processing, along with some meat flavoring to tempt dogs to eat the food. Canned food is still highly processed, but at a lesser temperature than dry food.

The best ingredients for your dog are fresh, whole foods – it is no different than what is best in your diet. So, how to do this without spending a lot of time or money that you don’t have to spare? It is not difficult and does not need to be expensive or time consuming. If you are interested in cooking for your dog or preparing a raw diet, that is certainly doable. There are many alternatives that will give your dog the benefit of fresh food in the diet without spending a great deal of time or money. Here are some simple suggestions:

1. Start by feeding a quality commercial diet that does not contain corn or wheat and ideally is grain-free. You can use a combination of dry, canned, dehydrated raw, or commercially prepared raw diets. See the handout on pet food resources for suggestions on brands. If you feed at least 70% of your pet's diet as a commercial food that is complete and balanced, you will not need to add additional supplements.
2. If you eat meat, simply feed your pet some of your leftovers. Yes, people food is not only safe, but is actually quite healthy for your dog. You can feed up to 30% of the diet as cooked meat, vegetables, eggs, or fish without upsetting the nutritional balance of the commercial food you are feeding. Your dog will still get all the basic vitamins and minerals it needs without additional supplementation.
3. Home-prepared food supplements. This is basically creating a 'stew' cooked at low temperatures either on the stovetop or in a crock pot. It should be about 2/3 meat, and if possible include some organ meats such as liver, kidney, or heart. You can add in any mixture of fruits and vegetables that your dog enjoys. Avoid feeding onions, grapes or raisins. This mixture can be a complete diet with some additional supplementation, or you can feed it up to 30% of the diet without shorting any vital nutrients.

These are some simple ways to add more fresh food into your pet's diet. It is also possible to exclusively home-prepare diets for your pet, but that requires more discussion about balancing and supplementation. The most important thing to remember is that any amount of fresh food in the diet will improve the health of your pet.

What about cost? Depending on what you are currently feeding, the above recommendations may cost you a bit more to feed your pet. I can assure you, from my own experience, that your pet's better health will save you much more in veterinary bills than you are spending in food.

Here is my final recommendation: Don't believe anything I have just said without trying it yourself. I challenge you to try the above suggestions for 30 days and see if you notice a difference in your pet.

Best of health to you and your pet,  
Judy Jasek, DVM

# Nutrition and your dog

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By Jennifer Skiba, Namastay Training

Dog food and treats that are built on inferior protein sources and laden with unhealthy chemicals, preservatives, and excess sugars can contribute to issues such as **hyperactivity, restlessness, and nervousness**. A healthful diet will go a long way toward allowing your dog to feel **physically calmer**, which will set the stage for a tranquil emotional state, **making them easier to live with and to train**. Making wise nutritional choices will also result in better overall health for your dog, which will help him age better.

## How to select a good food?

Read the label! By law, companies must list ingredients in descending order by bulk weight. Because dogs are primarily carnivores the first two ingredients should consist of meat. There are three basic grades of meat—meat, meat meal, and meat by products. The best choice is meat—i.e. chicken, turkey, beef etc. If the label says, “chicken” this indicates a whole meat source—the clean flesh of slaughtered chickens, limited to lean muscle tissue. A step below that is “chicken meal”, which is made from rendered muscle and tissue. The lowest grade of meat is “by-products”. Chicken by-products may include heads, feet, undeveloped eggs, and intestines. Dog foods with “by-products” are not a high quality food.

**Avoid foods that contain large amounts of corn.** It is often used as a protein source because it is cheaper than meat. However, it is a common allergen and can cause skin problems. Corn can also, through a series of chemical reaction in the body, affect serotonin levels. Serotonin has many functions including mood regulation. It is the “happy” chemical in your body and can reduce stress. Corn is high in the amino acid tyrosine, which makes it difficult for serotonin to pass through the blood-brain barrier. **This means your dog has a hard time being in a calm state of mind.**

Other ingredients to avoid include artificial colors or flavors, and any that are not identified by source. Keep an eye on the preservatives as well, look for vitamin E (sometimes listed as “mixed tocopherols”) and C (often called “ascorbic acid”). **The unhealthful, potentially cancer-causing preservatives are BHA, BHT, and ethoxyquin.**

Higher quality food cost more initially, but because they contain more nutrients you feed less per meal. An additional benefit—the body is able to absorb more nutrients so less waste produce is produced—less poo! Who doesn't love that?

Feeding a high quality food is an investment in your dog's health. Spending a bit more now might well save you the cost of veterinary visits in the future.

For more in depth information an excellent resource is The Truth about Pet Foods at [www.thetruthaboutpetfood.com](http://www.thetruthaboutpetfood.com). The Dog Food Project is another great website. [www.dogfoodproject.com](http://www.dogfoodproject.com). It has articles on nutrition, up to date food recalls, as well as ingredient lists so you can compare your current food to other foods easily. The Whole Dog Journal also has an annual review of dog food brands. Visit them at [www.whole-dog-journal.com](http://www.whole-dog-journal.com) for a list of past articles to download.

Remember, the only way your dog can tell you they don't like their food or that it doesn't agree with their system is by their behavior. They aren't trying to be difficult, they are just trying to communicate valuable information to you. Can you hear them?



- The quality of your dog food affects your dog's behavior •
  - Feed your dog the best food you can afford •
  - Become educated about your choices •
  - Don't be afraid to try something different •

# Crock Pot Cooking!

My dog's LOVE it when I make a crock pot meal for them. I love that they get whole foods without added additives and preservatives. Don't know how to get started? Just watch this great video.

[Video on crock pot cooking](#)



Crock pot cooking can be a full meal, a topper on dry food or stuffed into a food toy. Here are some recipes to get you started.

## Jen's Crock Pot Cooking for Dog's Recipes

### ♥Beef and Broccoli♥

- 3 lbs beef stew meat
- 1 lb beef liver
- 1 tsp fresh garlic
- 1 cup fresh or frozen broccoli florets
- 1 large sweet potato cut up
- 2 cups barley
- 1 cup carrots cut up

### ♥Chicken and Rice♥

- 3 lbs chicken quarters  
(You can remove the bones after cooking if you are concerned)
- 2 carrots cut up
- 2 apples cut up
- 1 sweet potato cut up
- 1/4 cup dry peas
- 2 cups brown rice
- 1 beet with tops cut up



### ♥Chicken and Liver♥

- 3 lbs chicken thighs or quarters  
(You can remove the bones after cooking if you are concerned)
- 1 lb chicken liver
- 3 white potatoes cut up
- 3 carrots cut up
- 3 apples cut up
- 1 cup blueberries
- 1 cup spinach
- 1 cup brown rice

### ♥Fish and No Chips♥

- 3 lbs cod
- 1 cup fresh or frozen broccoli florets
- 3 carrots cut up
- 3 apples cut up
- 3 white potatoes cut up
- 1 beet cut up
- 1 cup spinach



## Overall Guidelines

1. Pick a protein - beef, chicken, fish, etc.
2. Add offal if desired – chicken liver, chicken gizzard, beef liver, etc.
3. Pick a starch – white potato, sweet potato, rice, barley, dry peas, etc.
4. Pick 2-3 veggies – broccoli, carrot, beet, turnip, asparagus, spinach, etc.
5. Pick a fruit – blueberry, apple, etc.

Next layer it in your crockpot. Start with meat on the bottom, then rice/barley/dry pea, then veggies, then leafy greens, and then fruit.

If there is a bone in the meat I cook for 12 hours on low. If there is no bone I cook for 8-9 hours on low.

**Remember NO onions or grapes!**

Have fun! Mix, match, and create your own favorite recipes.

Your dog  
love you



will  
for it!



# Namastay Training

Teaching People to Listen, One Dog at a Time

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