

# FEEDING ADULT DOGS

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## HOW TO FEED

“Obesity is the most common nutritional disorder of adult dogs, is more common in neutered dogs, and is more easily prevented than treated.” In adult dogs free-choice feeding is absolutely not recommended; portion-controlled feeding is the method of choice. Portion-controlled feeding enables the owner to carefully monitor the pet’s food consumption and immediately observe changes in food intake or eating behavior. As a result inappropriate weight gain or weight loss can be corrected at an early stage. Portion-controlled feeding allows weight to be strictly controlled by simply adjusting either the amount of food or the type of food that is fed.

Although dogs can be maintained on once-a-day feeding, this is not nutritionally sound, and the better recommendation is to divide the total daily ration into two meals per day. Most good brands of food will have a table on them that provides starting guidelines. However, remember these are just guidelines and are not appropriate for all dogs. *Individual response may vary significantly!* Weight should be monitored monthly any time diet type, brand, variety or regimen is changed until the pet’s weight is determined to be stable to avoid inappropriate weight gain or weight loss.

## WHAT TO FEED

At *Friendship Springs Veterinary Care* we recommend feeding only premium foods from premium companies. This includes *Purina Pro Plan*, *Hill’s Science Diet*, *Iam’s Eukanuba*, and *Royal Canin* (no, this is not a misspelling and, yes, they also make food for cats, too). Young adult dogs should be fed weight-specific foods (i.e. small breed food for small breed dogs, and so on). Older healthy adults should be a dental diet (see below).

## DENTAL DIETS

One of the worst myths propagated by veterinarians, breeders, and pet owners is that dry food is inherently better for dogs’ teeth. Nothing could be further from the truth. Many relatively young dogs are running around with few teeth because of this myth. Because every dog will at some time in his/her life have dental disease, we

recommend very strongly that all mature adults be fed a *dental diet* unless there is a confirmed medical reason to do otherwise. Adult dogs should be started on a dental diet once they reach skeletal maturity (usually between one-and-a-half to three years of age depending on breed). There are very few true dental diets, but each of the companies noted above have such diets.

## WHAT NOT TO FEED

We do not recommend feeding diets for specific problems, such as sensitive skin, sensitive stomach, urinary tract disease, etc., unless these problems have been specifically identified in the dog in question. Considering that almost every dog will experience dental disease in their lifetime but only a fraction will have problems of the skin, gastrointestinal or urinary systems, it seems inappropriate to feed diets to prevent a problem which might not occur and to neglect a problem that is very likely to occur (dental disease). If problems do occur with one of these other systems, a veterinarian should be consulted before changing the diet.

## LAMB-BASED DIETS

There is nothing wrong with lamb-based diets; however, there is nothing inherently better about them either. A common misconception is that lamb-based diets are “hypoallergenic.” The only time any food can be considered *potentially* hypoallergenic is when the pet in question has never had that food before. Once a pet has been exposed to any food, if the right mechanism in the dog’s immune system is triggered, the new food can produce as much allergy as any other food. The only reason that lamb was ever “hypoallergenic” was because, historically, lamb was not found in pet foods. But, in the last twenty years a plethora of lamb-based diets have been produced and now we are seeing dogs with allergies to lamb. Unless your pet has had documented issues with food allergies, we recommend feeding one of the “regular” diets previously discussed until there is a documented reason to feed something else.

## Reference

Bistner SI, Ford RB, Raffe MR: book. *Handbook of Veterinary Procedures and Emergency Treatment*, 7<sup>th</sup> Ed, Pg 794-802. Philadelphia, PA 2000.