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## Puppy Nutrition for Small-Breeds

The most rapid growth occurs in these first months of your puppy's life. The immune system is developing. Bones are growing. Muscles are getting stronger. This rate of growth requires just the right mix of nutrients. To make sure your puppy is getting optimal nutrition to protect and maintain health and well-being, here are some key points to keep in mind.

### Feeding Your Puppy

From the time your puppy's weaned until 4 months of age, you should feed your puppy 2-3 meals a day based on the guidelines of the food label. After 4 months of age, your puppy should be fed twice a day on a regular schedule. Always have fresh water available.

### More Energy, More Protein

Research shows that puppies need twice as much energy as adult dogs. Dramatic growth at this stage means your puppy requires an energy-rich, nutrient-dense, complete and balanced diet. Puppies also require more protein than adult dogs. High-quality, animal-based protein will help your puppy create new body tissue.

### One Size Does Not Fit All

Not all puppies have the same nutritional needs. Small-breed puppies have higher metabolism rates per pound and reach their mature adult weight faster than larger-breed puppies. And small-breed puppies need higher levels of protein, fat, calcium and phosphorus to support growth and development of bones, muscles and other tissues. So giving your puppy a food specially formulated for his breed size is the easiest way to make sure he's getting the right balance of nutrients for his growth rate.

Small-breed puppies have another special feature: small mouths and stomachs. Make sure your puppy's food has small kibble for easy chewing. A nutrient-dense formula will help make sure he's getting a complete and balanced diet even though his stomach can only accommodate what seems like a small volume of food.

### Choosing Foods

Aside from energy and protein, there are other important nutrients and ingredients vital to your puppy's diet:

- vitamin-rich fish oils to support overall health
- essential vitamins and minerals to help support the immune system and help your puppy stay healthy during this critical stage of growth
- animal-based protein sources to help nourish growing muscles, vital organs and skin and coat
- a fiber source that will help keep your puppy's sensitive digestive system healthy, so more nutrition stays in your puppy

- ideal levels of calcium and phosphorus to help your puppy develop strong teeth and bones

These are important building blocks of nutrition. Look for them when you choose dry or canned dog food and when you select treats.

### **The Switch to Adult Food**

A small-breed puppy reaches adult weight by 9-12 months—faster than large breeds that aren't fully mature until 24 months of age. You can probably begin feeding adult dog food at 10 months. Your dog may not welcome the change at first, but don't worry. You can help ease the transition by gradually introducing the adult food. Try mixing 25% of the new food with 75% of his puppy food then gradually change the proportions over the next three weeks until he's eating 100% adult food.

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