

### **How much do you feed your pet:**

A well-balanced diet with the proper nutrition is important for a happy, healthy pet. Most commercial pet foods (those purchased in pet stores, not the brands sold in supermarkets) are good. They can vary significantly in nutritional value, however, so if you have questions please consult your vet.

- Don't feed your pet table scraps. "People food" is not formulated to meet the nutritional needs of your pet...and it's often too greasy or rich. This can cause your pet to become overweight - and with it, develop health problems related to obesity. Your pet may also refuse to eat regular pet food once he or she has developed a taste for human food.
- Limit the treats. Treats are often salty and fatty, and once again, they can make your pet fat.
- Homemade diets are not recommended. It's hard to provide all the nutritional requirements for your pet; it's better to leave that up to the big pet food companies who expend huge sums of money researching this very thing. Homemade diets are also hard to provide for pets who may be kenneled from time to time.
- Do not feed cat food to your dog, or dog food to your cat. Cats and dogs have very different nutritional requirements. Your dog most likely loves cat food, so try to keep kitty's food out of his reach.
- Don't feed bones to your pet. Bones can potentially cause serious problems such as intestinal blockages, internal punctures, choking, vomiting, and so on.
- Dry food or kibble is best. It's nutritionally balanced, the least expensive and most convenient food, and it helps to keep teeth and gums healthy. If you have a finicky eater, you can mix a small amount with your pet's dry food to make it more appealing.
- Feed kittens and puppies food that is specifically formulated for their needs. Growing animals have special needs.
- Resist "free-feeding". All this means is leaving food out for your pet all time, leaving it up to them when they want to eat. This method may encourage overeating and obesity in your pet.
- Set a feeding schedule. Kittens and puppies should be fed several

- times a day, with the number of meals decreasing as they get older. Adults need only be fed once or twice a day. Establish a schedule and stick to it.
- Use feeding guides as just that: a GUIDE, and not a rule. Pet food bags and cans often recommend that you feed your pet a certain amount of food per day. This is only a guide; adjust the amount you feed your pet by watching him carefully. If he gains weight, decrease the amount you feed. If he's always hungry, carefully increase his food intake a little, being sure not to overfeed.
  - If you need to change your pet's diet, do so gradually. Sudden diet changes can cause diarrhea. Change your pet's diet over several days. For example, mix 3 parts of your pet's regular food with 1 part of the new food. The next day, split it half and half. On the third day you can feed 3/4 new food and only 1/4 old food. And finally, you switch your pet to eating all new food.
  - Always provide fresh water. Leave the water out so that your pet may drink whenever he or she likes.

Consult your vet if your pet has special needs. Some pets require "senior's" food; others a low-calorie diet; still others are allergic to certain foods. Your vet will be able to advise you on what food may be best for your pet.

### **Is your pet obese:**

Just like people, pets can become "a little too healthy". All kidding aside, obese pets can have serious health problems - including arthritis, heart and respiratory problems, and shorter life spans. Your pet is overweight if you cannot feel his ribs or backbone when you lightly run your hands over him.

Although it's no doubt hard to ignore the pleading eyes of your adoring pet, it's best to turn away and not give in to his pleas for more food.

- Use feeding guides as a recommendation only. Pet food packages will often recommend how much to feed your pet. However, this really depends on your pet's age, activity level, and size. Use your own judgment.

- Try not to use the "free-feed" method. In other words, resist leaving food out for your pet all day long. This can contribute to overeating.
  - Provide your pet with more exercise. Take him out for an extra little walk, or play with her in the house for half an hour. Every little bit helps.
  - Severe weight loss or gain should be checked by your vet. If you think you're feeding your pet adequately but he loses weight, or your pet suddenly starts gaining weight, consult with your vet.
- Older and overweight pets may be switched to special diets. There are lots of high-quality pet food formulated especially for senior pets, as well as plenty of low-calorie diets. You may want to consult with your vet to get recommendations

#### **Does your dog or cat 'scoot':**

For those of you who know what I'm talking about ... you'll also know why this is not exactly my favorite topic.

For those of you who don't know what I'm talking about ... lucky you.

"Scooting" is the delicate term for your dog or cat dragging its bum along the floor (and yes, usually on the carpet you work so hard to keep clean!).

This is sometimes a symptom that they may have anal gland problems. Anal glands are small glands located at the side of the anus and produce and contain an atrociously stinky liquid (used for territorial marking).

If your pet has this condition, he or she may need some help in emptying these glands (yeah, I know, not the most pleasant thing...). Some people have it done when their pets are at the groomers, others bring their pets to the vet. And most people are more than happy to pay someone else to do this for them!

If your pet requires more frequent anal gland expression, you may want to ask your vet how to do this yourself.

I do this regularly for one of my dogs. The first time I tried it (under my

vet's watchful eye), I was too timid and scared of hurting my dog. Each time I tried it, it got easier. Now it's routine - when my dog thinks he needs his anal glands expelled, he runs and sits by my feet and scoots his butt along the floor. ;-)

It sounds disgusting (okay, it is disgusting), but learning to do it yourself - if your pet requires it done frequently - will save your pet the stress of having to go to the vet or groomer too often ... and it will save you a few bucks while you're at it.

If you think your pet may have anal gland problems, please talk to your vet. He or she will be able to diagnose the condition and recommend treatment.

**Reptile tips:**

Please visit: <http://www.anapsid.org/>

**Reptile tips for teachers and parents:**

Please visit: <http://www.anapsid.org/mainparentteach.html>