

Holistic science in veterinary medicine, animal husbandry and management

## TECHNICAL INFORMATION

### FEEDING PUPPIES

There is a wealth of information and mis-information available on feeding puppies. In general the subject is 'over-scienced' and there is no wonder people are confused about their actual nutritional requirements. It is quite understandable why people are anxious to do the best for their new companions and the 'what if' factor seems to play a large part in this. The main concerns are about too much, or too little, of various dietary components such as protein, calcium and vitamins. Owners of large breeds are understandably concerned about growth rates and bone formation which can be a problem if certain basic principles are not adhered to. Whatever the breed, starting off puppies according to Natural Feeding methods are an opportunity to provide them with the best start in life giving them the benefit of a robust digestive system provided through food sources which they designed to eat.

Natural Feeding methods are not difficult provided one guided factor is kept in mind. The focus should be on how the wild dog rears her puppies and the rest will look after itself. After they are born and during the time that the pups are still on the teat they will get all the nourishment they need from the mother's milk, which has been produced from the normal food she eats. So let's go one step back and look at the natural diet of the mother, which consists largely of parts of the prey which has been brought down and killed by the pack - meat, part digested carbohydrate and bones. She may also forage for fruit, small rodents and roots. Every thing she requires is available to her and her pups through her diet. Pregnant and lactating bitches always need more nutrients of course because they eating for their pups as well as themselves but they are inherent in the whole raw materials she eats as part of her diet.

As the pups begin to grow the mother will still be giving them milk and also introducing some solids in the form of her own food which she part digests and then vomits up for pups to eat. This is exactly the same food that she needs but in a form that is easily digested by the youngsters. Gradually the pups are weaned off the milk and onto the mother's vomited food together with some fresh scraps of undigested meat and perhaps some fresh bones for them to gnaw on. Gradually they become less reliant on the vomited food and milk, and under the watchful eye of the mother are allowed to feed for themselves on the carcass of the prey, being brought bits and pieces of extras as the mother sees fit. From then on they gradually become more independent of the mother as they start to integrate into the rest of the pack as young adults.

The pups also need extra nutrients because they are growing and the two main considerations are extra proteins which are the 'building blocks' of the body and the right sort of calcium as they are laying down a lot of bone. The protein is best supplied as raw meat because the dog digests this well and the calcium is best supplied as raw uncooked bone, for which there seems to be an effective substitute; calcium added to commercial puppy foods is not the same. Raw chicken wings are absolutely ideal for this as they provide both good quality protein and calcium. Until the puppies have their big teeth and can grind up the bone, they have to be reduced to a form which mirrors the mother's vomited digest, or they can't digest it properly. Preparing chicken wings is relatively easy; they can be persuaded first with a rolling pin and then gently reduced to porridge with an ordinary food liquidiser. If the puppy is not used to bones they should be introduced gradually so as not to upset the digestion. For the more serious raw meat feeder there are some good meat grinders on the market. There are also some good frozen meat products on the market which include bone – but make sure it is not cooked because the calcium is not the same in the cooked form. Puppies also do well with liquidised raw vegetables such as cabbage, sprouts and broccoli. Small quantities of carbohydrate such as oats, barley and rice should also be given but these have to be cooked or the puppy cannot digest them properly.

Feeding bones is another contentious issue amongst health professionals, but it should be encouraged. There are risks of course, which can be reduced to almost negligible if the rules are followed and they are far outweighed by the health benefits. The rules are mostly common sense; first never give cooked bone of any description, they are not digested properly and are more prone to splintering; second don't give bones to a group of dogs who are likely to fight over them because they will not chew them properly. Raw bones provide calcium in the right form, introduce beneficial bacteria into the gut, keep the teeth and gums spotlessly clean and healthy, and help keep the anal glands functioning as they should. Puppies should be introduced to large raw bones, such as knuckle bones, which they cannot eat, but it gets them used to the idea. Even though they will not be able to get much nutritional value from them they will pull off bits of meat and grind off tiny bits of calcium with their needle sharp teeth. They are usually highly delighted with them and it keeps them amused for hours and hours. As the teeth get stronger of course they learn how to crunch them into manageable sized pieces with their immensely powerful molars.

For those wishing to go down the Natural Feeding route for puppies and want to get hold of suitable commercial products in order to save the time and bother of sourcing individual raw materials, there are some good BAHNM Certified Holistic products available.

**For free technical information on integrated medicine and advice in specific circumstances contact: [tech.help@bahnm.org.uk](mailto:tech.help@bahnm.org.uk)**

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