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How to Change Your Dog's Food Safely

By Dr Rob Zammit

This article by Dr Zammit is designed for general information only. The views and opinions expressed in this article are of Dr Zammit. For advice and information concerning feeding your individual dog, we recommend seeking the advice of your veterinarian.

Dogs in the wild change their food but do so SLOWLY. They tend to live in a certain region, moving gradually from one area to another. As such, they tend to consume the same food each day, changing as they migrate from one region to the next and with the natural progression of the seasons. An important realisation to consider when feeding your dog is they eat "cooked" vegetables when they are consuming herbivores. Therefore, in my view, all vegetable matter

you feed must be cooked. Indeed, good quality dog foods do add vegetables that are well cooked. The other realisation is that dogs in the wild will probably eat three to four days a week – and that's in a good season. Domestication has seen dogs eat once a day – and more often in most households.

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It's a myth your dog can eat anything. In fact, they have very sensitive stomachs. Changing foods must be done over a 7 - 14 day period.

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Consequently, when you elect to change food products for your dog, a couple of things occur.

Firstly, many biochemical pathways, that is, various enzymes and acids to digest food, may suddenly be inadequate or excessively produced. This is especially important in products that contain very different fat contents, or even fat from different sources.

Secondly, the bacterial content in the dog's intestinal tract will change. Some bacteria that live happy in the gut as "good bacteria" can turn bad, causing inflammation, infecting the gut of the host. These bugs are now called "opportunistic pathogens". Pathogens are bugs that result in infection and though they were once good bugs, they now take the opportunity of the new environment to attack the host.

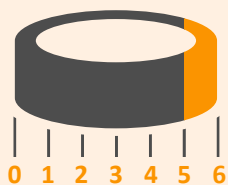
How do we change our dog's diet to ensure they don't have a bad reaction?

Ensure you do choose a good quality food. Certainly, the nutritional value of the food must be of high quality – a good source of high quality protein, digestible carbohydrates, the right mineral content with the correct balance for calcium and phosphorus as well as electrolytes and essential ingredients from which the dog's body can manufacture hormones and vitamins. This doesn't have to be the most expensive product on

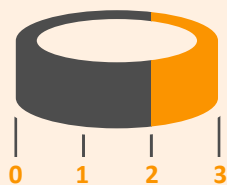
the shelves but ensure that it isn't just a filler – rather a food that is nutritionally complete, like Baxter's dog food.

Also, you need to make sure the food is palatable to your dog – offer a teaspoon of the new food to see if your dog likes it. Doesn't matter how good scientists tell us a food is – if your dog won't eat it, then it's pretty much not a successful change.

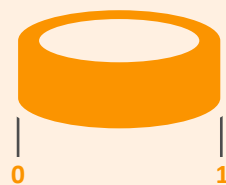
Make sure you buy the new product while you still have a reasonable supply of your old food. The change starts with



One-part new food mixed with five parts old food. And I do NOT recommend overfeeding under any circumstances. Remember, in the wild they only eat a few times each week.



If all is going well then after three days increase to one third new food and two thirds old food. This ratio should continue for four days then you can increase to a fifty-fifty.



Assuming things are still good, I recommend you keep increasing every forty-eight hours until you have made the change over a seven day or longer period.

Again, refer to the information on pack, often referred to as transition feeding. When in doubt, consult your vet. There is no compromise in that department – the gradual change is essential.

REMEMBER

1. When changing food do it very SLOWLY
2. No need to buy the most expensive food
3. Palatability (taste) of the new food is essential
4. Buy the new food while you still have a few meals of the old food so the change can be GRADUAL
5. Buy a product that sources good quality proteins



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