

Veterinary

Q. This may be a very simple question, but how do you know how much and how often to feed an adult dog? We have a large mastiff mix named "Bonkers" we feed him twice per day – 1 cup of dry food with a few spoonfuls of canned. He eats it all and then always begs for more.

Our veterinarian says he is the perfect weight and we don't want to have him gain weight but he never seems satisfied.

Please help!!



Christopher A. Lindquist, VMD

A. Since dogs come in many shapes and sizes, feeding them all properly can become a very complex issue. Knowing how much to feed an adult dog depends on their size, conformation and metabolism. Studies have shown that keeping dogs at an ideal weight is a critical ingredient for their long-term health and comfort.

To maintain his current weight, a 30-pound dog requires one eight-ounce cup of dry dog food per day. Thus, if you are feeding a sixty-pound dog, you should provide two eight ounce cups of dry food per day. The trick comes when you start adding in biscuits and table scraps to your dog's daily diet. These additional food items contain calories and will impact your dog's waistline. If you feed a high quality dry food, then there is little need for any other source of nutrition.

Regarding conformation, I am referring to the unique shape of your dog. A greyhound has a very different conformation from a bulldog. There are breed standards to refer to if you have a pureland dog and want to know what their proper conformation should be. For the average mix breed dog, I like to refer to a dog's body score when attempting to determine the ideal weight. A body score of one is too thin, while a body score of nine is too heavy. A dog with the body score of five has a tapering waist when you look at him from the top and side. A dog with an ideal conformation has ribs that cannot be easily seen, but can easily be felt. If you feel a cushion between your dogs ribs and your fingers, then your dog is too heavy.

A dog's metabolism can change with age, hormonal cycles, and activity. An active dog will have a higher daily metabolic requirement than a couch potato. A puppy and a nursing mother have very high metabolic requirements, and an inactive adult that has been neutered may have a low calorie need.

Feeding your dog properly is feeding them enough to keep them at their body score of five. Measure the amount of food you feed, so you can easily adjust how much you are feeding if you find your dog is getting too heavy or too thin. For the average dog of thirty pounds, rather than feeding one cup of food once a day, I would recommend feeding 1/3 of a cup three times a day.

If "Bonkers" is an ideal weight on his current feeding regimen, you will see him gain weight if you increase his daily food intake. Low calorie foods would allow you to feed more without causing a weight gain. I hope I have provided you with the answers to keep "Bonkers" at a happy and healthy weight.

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4250 Black Horse Pike, Rte. 42

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