



FEEDING

The purpose of this lecture is to discuss basic principles of canine nutrition as they apply to your Pilot Dog. This lesson will explain the following:

- Feeding guidelines
- Basic nutritional information
- Special considerations for working dogs
- Use of treats
- Changing food
- Water

Feeding Guidelines

- **Type of food**
 - Most dogs in advanced training at Pilot Dogs are fed FirstMate dry dog food. Most of our dogs do well on this food, and many people choose to keep their dogs on it when they return home.
 - You may switch to a different food; any type of food is acceptable as long as the bag is labeled "Complete and Balanced." This label indicates that the food meets nutritional requirements established by the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO).
 - Dry food is preferable to canned or semi-moist food because chewing dry food also provides dental benefits.
- **Amount of food**
 - The amount of food your dog is currently eating is based on the dog's current activity level and body condition score. If either of these things change after returning home, an increase or reduction in the amount of food may be required.

- Pilot Dogs generally recommends increasing or decreasing ¼ cup per day when a change in amount of food is indicated. If you change the amount, wait 2 weeks to determine whether the change had the desired result.
- **Food/water bowls**
 - Pilot Dogs recommends that you use stainless steel bowls similar to the ones used in class. These bowls are easy to clean, will not hold bacteria once washed, and are extremely durable.
 - You should clean them daily to prevent the buildup of residue and bacteria. Washing them by hand or putting them in the dishwasher are both acceptable.
 - If you notice hard water buildup, let the bowl soak with 50% water and 50% vinegar for about 20 minutes. You can then rinse and wipe clean.
 - If you would like, you may take home the bowl provided to you in class.

Basic Nutritional Information

An in-depth discussion of canine nutrition is beyond the scope of this lecture; however, as a Pilot Dog handler, you should understand some basic facts:

- Good-quality food is an important factor in choosing a diet.
- Consistency in the content quality is important.
- Protein will usually be the first item in the list of ingredients. If the protein source is listed first on the bag, that means that the food has a higher percentage of protein than any of the other ingredients.
 - Common protein sources used in dog food include chicken, beef, and lamb; less common protein alternatives include venison and salmon.
- Many dog foods, even very popular brands, list corn as the first ingredient. Some dogs will experience difficulty with gas, soft stools, and frequent skin/ear issues when eating foods high in corn. This is especially apparent if the food is changed quickly.
- Many veterinarians recommend that dog owners use a food with a common protein source such as chicken unless they are suspecting a food allergy, in which case they would try a food with a different protein source.
 - Food allergies may develop over time to a food the dog has eaten his whole life. Signs that a food allergy might be present include persistent problems with soft

stool and chronic ear or skin infections. Food allergies are often difficult to confirm. It is usually best to consult with your veterinarian.

Special Considerations for Working Dogs

Maintaining a healthy weight is important for all dogs, but especially for working dogs. A 14-year study done by Purina showed that over the course of a dog's lifetime, dogs that were kept at a healthy weight lived 1.8 years longer than dogs that were overweight. They also had less arthritis, cancer, and heart disease. This translates into additional time in a working dog partnership. **IT IS CRUCIAL THAT YOU MAINTAIN YOUR DOG AT A HEALTHY WEIGHT.**

During your dog's physical exam in class, our veterinarians will explain how to check your dog's body condition and make sure that he is at a healthy weight. The body condition is more important than the actual number on the scale. Another way to monitor your dog's weight is by paying attention to the girth strap on the harness. If you have to move to make the strap longer or shorter after going home, that may be an early sign that your dog is gaining or losing weight.

If your dog is gaining weight and reducing the food on your own does not fix the problem, you may need to consult your veterinarian. In some cases, the vet will prescribe weight management or senior food to help your dog return to a healthy weight.

Use of Treats

In most instances, Pilot Dogs recommends that you use your dog's regular kibble as food reinforcement; however, in the event that your dog is not highly food motivated, Pilot Dogs uses and recommends Charlee Bear Dog Treats as food rewards for our dogs. Charlee Bears are non-greasy and have only three calories each. Milkbone Minis, which have five calories each, are a good alternative if you have trouble finding Charlee Bears locally.

At the start of the training with your new Pilot Dog and once you return home, your dog will be on a high-ratio food reinforcement schedule. Since you will be using more food to reinforce the work, you should withhold the same amount of food from your morning meal so as to not overfeed your dog. Dogs on a random reinforcement schedule generally will not be consuming enough treats to affect their weight.

It is important to always have some dog food or training treats with you at all times, because you never know when you will need a higher-value reward. Pilot Dogs strongly discourages

either human food or high-calorie canine "junk food" for dogs as treats. Both of these things can lead to weight gain, digestive problems, undesirable behaviors during your meal time, and lead to scavenging (or looking for food on the ground) while working in harness.

Changing Food

If you choose to change your dog's food, it is recommended that you make the change gradually over a period of at least 4 days. On day one, feed 1/4 new food and 3/4 old food. On day two, feed 1/2 new food and 1/2 old food, etc. There may be a temporary change in the dog's stool, but this should not last longer than 48 hours. Frequent food changes are not recommended. Dogs do best on a consistent diet and do not require variety in their food.

Water

During class, you will make sure there is fresh water available throughout the day. Be aware that some dogs may drink excessively at first because of the stress coming from all the changes they are experiencing. This behavior usually decreases over time, but be aware that during the transition, more frequent relief times may be needed; the dog may also wake you up at night to relieve himself if you don't limit his water before you go to bed.