

The Dangers of High Protein Dog Foods

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Choosing what to feed your dog can be an overwhelming decision. Pet food stores are packed with row after row of different brands of food all containing clever marketing slogans to convince you they are the best for your dog. Many of these dog foods boast about containing extremely high levels of protein that claim to satisfy your dog's instinctual need for meat as well as make them healthier and live longer.

Are Dogs Carnivores?

Marketing tactics by some pet food companies have fueled a common misconception among pet owners that dogs are obligate carnivores and require a diet that consists mostly of meat. This is not true. Dogs, like people, are omnivores and do best with a balanced diet of protein, carbohydrates, and fat. Excessive protein consumption is unnecessary for dogs at best and for some dogs with medical conditions can actually be harmful.

Proteins are the building blocks of the body and an absolute necessity for daily function. However, when a dog consumes too much protein in a meal it cannot all be utilized at one time, nor can it be stored for later. The body will then excrete the excess protein through the kidneys and out of the body via urine. Thus the quality of the protein actually becomes more important than the actual amount as a high quality protein is more bioavailable and can be better absorbed by the body.

Another issue is that the meat in these diets acting as the protein source contains other nutrients that you do not want in excessive amounts. For example, when a diet is mostly meat it becomes very difficult to maintain a proper calcium-phosphorus ratio. When this ratio is out of balance disruptions in bone growth or kidney damage can occur. Well formulated dog foods have an appropriate balance of protein, fat, and carbohydrates to prevent this from happening.

Is Excessive Protein in Dog Food Bad for My Pet?

Protein is a calorie dense nutrient and many of the high protein diets are extremely high in calories and can quickly lead to weight gain. With over 50% of dogs in the U.S. considered overweight or obese, dog owners need to be aware of where those extra calories are hiding. If a dog has kidney or liver issues consuming too much protein can increase the workload on these organs and upset the balance of nutrients leading to exacerbation of disease.

Rather than look for a dog food that contains excessive levels of protein you should find one that is specifically formulated for your dog's lifestyle, life stage, and size. A working sled dog, for example, will have significantly different nutrient and caloric requirements than the average pet dog that ventures outside for a few walks a day and spends the rest of the time lounging. These two dogs should not be fed the same diet.

Puppies, meanwhile, require more protein than adult dogs because their bodies are busy growing. Among breeds of puppies there are different requirements for nutrients as well. For instance large breed puppies like Labrador retrievers need a much different diet than a Yorkie for optimal growth. Feeding large breed puppies something that is too high in protein may make them put on weight too quickly causing abnormal joint development and making them more prone to issues like arthritis in the future.

The safest diets are those that have been developed by pet food companies that invest in scientific research, consult with veterinary nutritionists, and perform feeding trials to develop their diets. This will provide a pet food that is properly balanced without any excess nutrients that are unnecessary and in some cases harmful for your dog.