



Dish Up Variety

Treat Your Dog to Good Health and Good Taste

by Wendy Bedwell-Wilson

“Broiled chicken, brown rice and steamed broccoli again?”

When you sit down to dinner, you prefer some variety, and so does your dog, who may well inquire, “What, kibble again?” Day after day of the same mix of protein, carbohydrates, fats and veggies can hamper any appetite, human or canine. But a diet packed with different food types can make eating more enjoyable.

Before concocting your own dog food blends, it helps to learn more about potential ingredients and the benefits of a varied diet, as well as how to successfully introduce new foods.

Healthful Variety

By definition, a varied diet is dense in nutrients and changes regularly; a decided

departure from the stick-to-the-same-food routine encouraged by dog food experts of the past. Dr. Sean Delaney, a board-certified veterinary nutritionist in Davis, California, says that today’s varied diet for dogs should resemble a cornucopia, filled with healthy meats, whole grains, legumes, dairy, fruits and vegetables. “For optimum health, it’s better to have the food in a natural, unprocessed state,” he says.

To start, dogs require 12 amino acids in their diets, so foods that contain all of them would provide the best quality protein for dogs, advises Dr. Rebecca Remillard, Ph.D., a board-certified veterinary nutritionist and founder of Veterinary Nutritional Consultations, in Hollister, North Carolina. “Egg and liver are of the highest protein quality because of their amino acid profiles,” she advises.

A varied diet even reduces the chances of dogs developing an allergy to certain foods, like chicken or wheat, adds Delaney. “Feeding a dog food that’s not commonly used in the pet food industry—a food that he’s naïve to—reduces the potential that the animal will develop an allergic reaction to it.”

Shopping for Choices

Dr. Tracy Lord, a holistic veterinarian based at the Animal Clinic and Wellness Center, in Williamsburg, Virginia, says that older theories once claimed that dogs would become picky eaters or experience indigestion on a varied diet, but that perspective has since been questioned.

To the contrary, variety brings excitement and interest to the table—or the bowl. For instance, Lord points out, “If you feed your child a dinner of chicken, broccoli, brown rice and cantaloupe, you can pat yourself on the back for providing a well-balanced nutritious meal. But if you feed this same meal to your child three times a day throughout his life, you would start to see nutritional deficiencies.” Plus, no one would be surprised to hear that the child is tiring of it.

The same holds true for dogs, she says. Their bodies appreciate the different sources of nutrition, while their taste buds respond to delicious change-ups.

One popular type of varied diet centers on taking commercially prepared, top-quality, frozen, canned or dry foods and simply rotating them, as long as the owner provides a consistent number of calories. This approach will ensure that a dog receives the right balance of nutrients, says Remillard.

She explains that, “Federally regulated, commercially prepared foods have processing methods and quality assurance programs that limit the potential for food-borne illnesses in pets and offer guarantees, a nutritional profile and bioavailability of nutrients.” Remillard further notes, however, that not all products are equal when it comes to highly desirable ingredients, so as with any other processed food, consumers must read labels.

Varied diets also may be prepared at home. That’s where home chefs

can get creative with different types of meats, grains and vegetables, but they should follow guidelines prepared by a trained nutritionist, Remillard cautions.

“Unless properly formulated by a nutritionist, diets developed at home are not likely to be complete and balanced,” she says. “The nutritional profile of any diet—including homemade diets—depends on how the recipe was formulated, the nutrient content of the ingredients and how the owner prepares the food. Homemade diets may also contain contaminants and food-borne microbes if the owner isn’t careful.”

Sometimes, just adding a little something special to a dog’s bowl will

give him the variety he’s craving. For example, “If we’re making something our dog loves, like grilled salmon or ahi, we’ll cook a little piece for her and give her a little less kibble in her dish,” relates Alyce Edmondton, who lives in Redmond, Washington. “We always share our dog-safe leftovers with her. We figure that if it’s good for us, it’s good for her, too.”

Wendy Bedwell-Wilson’s healthy living pet articles regularly appear in national and international magazines. Her latest of six books on dogs, Shih Tzu, is part of the DogLife series. Connect at PetWriter@live.com.

What’s on the Menu?

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If you would like to incorporate a varied diet into your dog’s eating routine, here are five expert tips for doing so safely and successfully.

Choose different main ingredients: If you’re primarily relying on a chicken and rice diet, switch the pooch to something completely different, like a duck and sweet potato or bison and barley diet, advises Veterinarian Sean Delaney.

It’s okay to change brands: Although some food manufacturers have developed food lines designed to rotate among items, you can always try out different brands and formulas. Stick to the high-quality mixes for optimal nutrition, says Veterinarian Tracy Lord.

Change the menu regularly: If you plan to rotate a dog’s commercially prepared diet, consider buying a new blend each time you shop, advises Veterinarian Rebecca Remillard.

Switch slowly: For a smooth transition between foods, slowly increase the amount of new food while decreasing the old, counsels Lord. The process should take about a week.

Take note of portions and calories: Delaney advises that a good way to ensure that a dog stays youthfully slim and trim is to calculate an appropriate calorie count and portions of the new foods.

