

Food and fitness for a healthy dog



Introduction

Just like people, pets need to eat the right diet and get enough exercise to stay fit and healthy. But as many of us know, it's not always easy!

In this handy guide, you'll find lots of information on feeding and exercise to help you keep your dog healthy and happy.



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From the *PAW Report*
Important facts from our latest
PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report



How do I know if my dog is a healthy shape?

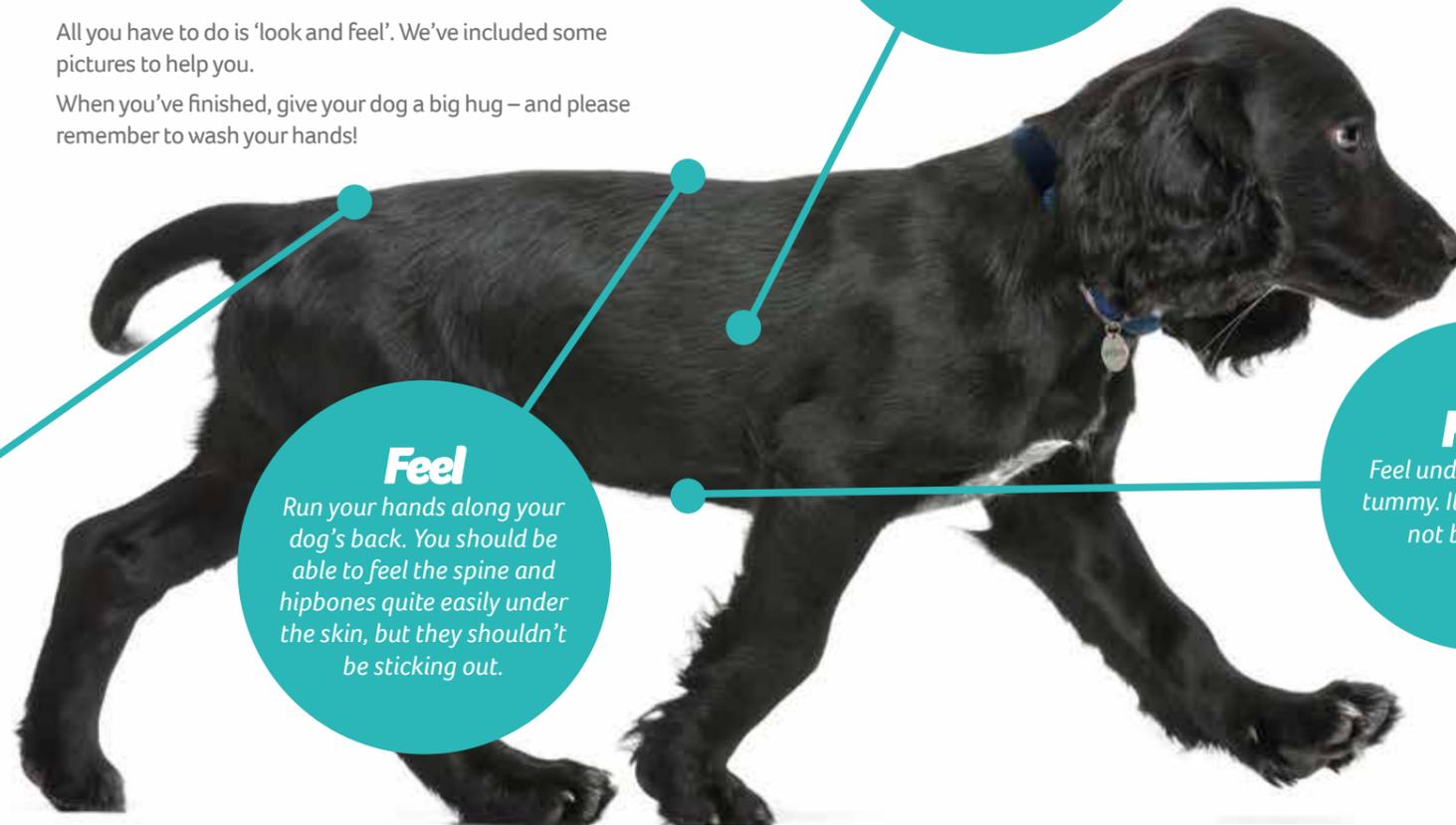
Why are we talking about shape?

A dog's shape is a better way to tell if they're carrying extra weight rather than relying on the scales alone. That's because the ideal weight is different for every type and breed – but a healthy shape is the same for all dogs.

It's good to get into the habit of checking your dog's shape every few weeks, starting when they're a puppy. That way, you'll know what's normal for your dog – and they'll enjoy the extra attention!

How to check for a healthy shape

All you have to do is 'look and feel'. We've included some pictures to help you. When you've finished, give your dog a big hug – and please remember to wash your hands!



Look

Look at your dog from the side, and from above. You should be able to see a waist; if not, your dog may be a bit overweight.

Feel

Run your hands over your dog's side. The skin should move freely over the ribs, which ought to be easy to feel.

Why is your dog's shape important?

- A dog with a healthy shape is more likely to enjoy a long and happy life.
- Overweight dogs get old before their time, and you'll have less fun with them.
- Being overweight can lead to other problems, including arthritis, diabetes and heart disease.
- Operations are more risky for dogs that are overweight.

Feel

Gently squeeze the base of your dog's tail where it joins the spine. There shouldn't be any build-up of fat.

Feel

Run your hands along your dog's back. You should be able to feel the spine and hipbones quite easily under the skin, but they shouldn't be sticking out.

Feel

Feel under your dog's tummy. It should go in, not bulge out.

Your vet or vet nurse can show you how to check your dog's shape.

BODY CONDITION SCORE

THE FIVE WELFARE NEEDS



1 VERY THIN

- Very little muscle
- Easily seen ribs, backbone and hipbones
- No body fat

2 UNDERWEIGHT

- Clearly seen ribs and backbone
- A little fat over hipbones
- Obviously tucked-in waist

3 IDEAL

- Can feel ribs, backbone and hipbones, but not prominent
- Smooth, curved, tucked-in waist
- Base of tail smooth

4 OVERWEIGHT

- No waist and back broader
- Ribs, backbone and hipbones difficult to feel
- Fat at base of tail

5 OBESE

- Bulging pot belly
- Cannot feel ribs, backbone or hipbones
- Thick fatty pads at base of tail



Diet

Dogs come in many shapes and sizes. The type and amount of food they need depends on their breed, species, age, health and lifestyle. For example, a working sheepdog needs much more energy than a small dog that spends most of the day indoors. Your dog needs fresh water to drink at all times.

What should I feed my dog?

'Life-stage feeding' matches your dog's diet to what is needed at different ages and stages of development. For example, puppies need different food from older dogs, because their bodies are still growing. Many companies make food especially for puppies, juniors, adults and seniors.

Feeding your dog a complete commercial pet food is the easiest way to make sure they get all the nutrients they need.

- You'll find guidelines on how much to feed on the packet.
- You can check you're feeding the right amount by weighing the food out.

It sounds obvious, but pets that eat too much get fat! If you feed your dog a lot of treats as well as their normal food, most of the extra calories will turn into fat. Dogs don't need treats to know you love them: playing and spending time with you are what they enjoy most of all.

How often should I feed my dog?

Dogs like routine. They're happiest when they have regular mealtimes – it also helps you make sure they're getting the right amount of food, and that they're eating it all.

Our vets recommend that you split your dog's daily food into two equal-sized meals. This is because:

- A shorter time between feeds (12 hours, not 24) means the dog will be less hungry, and less likely to gobble the food too quickly.
- A second meal gives the dog something to look forward to, so the day is less boring.
- Dogs often sleep after a meal – ideal if you need to leave them at home.
- Dogs on two meals a day usually get fewer treats and titbits.
- Two small meals are easier for dogs to digest than one large meal.
- For some small dogs, feeding more often – up to four times a day – can help prevent problems like low blood sugar.
- Remember that each meal is half your dog's daily food: feeding twice a day doesn't mean giving twice the amount!

Can I feed my dog bones?

Our vets recommend that you don't feed bones to your dog. Bones can get stuck in your dog's throat, and splinters can damage the stomach and intestines.

What about food scraps?

Our vets advise owners not to feed leftovers, bits of meat and other scraps, because:

- Human food isn't always good for dogs: some, like chocolate and grapes, are poisonous.
- Dogs that get scraps may refuse to eat their normal food without them.
- It unbalances the dog's regular diet, and they often get overweight.
- Your dog may misbehave during your mealtimes, thinking they're going to get food, too!
- Too many vegetables can cause wind. Not a problem for your dog, but it could be for you!
- Fatty foods can cause tummy upsets, and contain lots of extra calories. To a medium-sized dog, eating a cube of cheese is like a person eating two scones – and a Christmas dinner would be the equivalent of 3,000 calories!



WE RECOMMEND
DIVIDING

YOUR DOG'S
DAILY FOOD

INTO

TWO
EQUAL-SIZED MEALS



Exercise

Regular exercise is important for any dog, but even more so if your dog is on a diet. Your vet will be able to advise you on the amount of food your dog, as again this will vary with the type of dog and the stage of life.

Some dogs will need restricted exercise. For example, dogs with arthritic joints usually need frequent short walks rather than one long one.

- Dogs enjoy regular walks, and playing off the lead whenever it's safe for them to do so.
- As well as keeping your dog fit, regular exercise is very important for their mental health too.
- Our vets recommend that you don't throw sticks for your dog to chase, as they can splinter and injure your dog's mouth and throat. If you throw a ball, make sure it's not too small, as your dog could swallow it.
- Walks and games are much better treats for dogs than food.
- 'Varied walking' can be good for you and your dog. This is where you speed-walk for about 30 seconds, walk at normal pace for about a minute, then speed up again, and so on. It's a really good exercise for both of you, and something you can do randomly throughout your walk.



- Work at your dog's own pace. If your dog isn't getting tired, or is still full of energy when you get home, more exercise might be needed ...
- ... but be careful not to overdo it. If your dog is struggling, gets home worn out, or refuses to go at all, you may need to cut back!
- Try to vary your route, to keep your walks interesting and exciting for your dog.
- Always allow your dog to have a good sniff around. This is really important for their mental health.

How long should I exercise my dog for?

- How much exercise your dog needs depend on its breed, age, initial fitness level and personality.
 - Young dogs can usually go further and faster than older ones
 - Dogs with short legs don't need to walk as far as those with long legs
 - Jogging isn't good for puppies or larger breeds, as it can damage their joints
 - Dogs with short noses, like Bulldogs and Boxers, may have trouble breathing if they work too hard.
- As long as you're both dressed for it, most dogs are happy to go out whatever the weather. Rain and even snow aren't usually a problem (for the dog, anyway!). In really hot weather, go out early in the morning, or later on in the evening, if you can so your dog doesn't get overheated.
- Your dog needs to stick to the programme, so it has to be a daily routine, not just something you do at weekends. This is especially important for older and overweight dogs. If you can't walk them yourself for some reason, ask a friend, or maybe a professional dog walker, so your dog doesn't miss out on a session.
- Always check with your vet that the exercise programme you've planned is suitable for your dog.

Guide to exercise times



* care needed when exercising due to dog's short nose
 ** care when exercising
 *** care when exercising when a puppy

From the PAW Report

Every year, we produce our *PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report* about how healthy and happy the UK's pets really are.

Diet

Our latest Report shows that too many people are still feeding their pets food that isn't good for them. More than 5.5 million pets are given things like crisps, cake, leftovers, cheese, chips and takeaways as part of their normal diet – and more than 2 million owners feed treats because their pets beg for them.

Not surprisingly, many vets tell us they now see many more overweight and obese pets – even though most owners know that obese pets have more health problems, and live shorter lives.

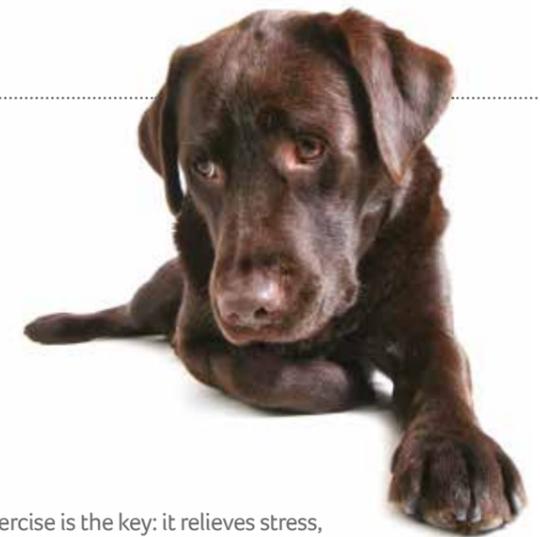
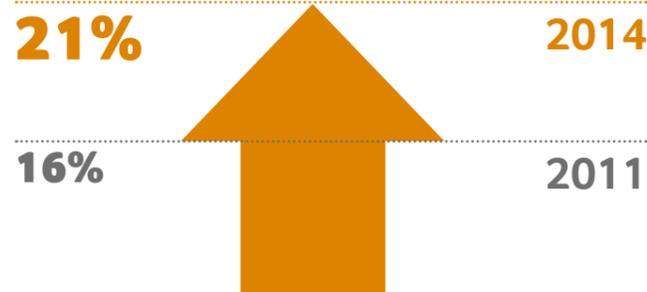
It's not all bad news, though. More owners are now feeding their dogs based on body shape and weight than they were in 2011. This is really positive, but there's still a lot to do. We can deal with the obesity crisis facing the UK's pets: it just takes time and effort from their owners.

80% OF VETERINARY PROFESSIONALS BELIEVE THERE WILL BE MORE OVERWEIGHT PETS THAN HEALTHY WEIGHT PETS IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

OVER 5.5 MILLION PETS GET TREATS AS PART OF THEIR DAILY DIET INCLUDING:



DOG OWNERS FEEDING DOG BASED ON BODY WEIGHT OR SHAPE



Boredom and exercise

Bored dogs are unhappy dogs. They can show their frustration through destructive behaviour, barking a lot, toileting in the house, or developing compulsive habits like excessive licking.

Millions of dogs are left alone for long periods every day, so the problem could be even greater than anyone knows. So what can be done?

Exercise is the key: it relieves stress, and is essential to a dog's physical and mental wellbeing. Yet 2.4 million dogs in the UK don't get daily exercise off-the-lead outside their home or garden – and over 800,000 of them never go for off-the-lead walks at all. Of those dogs that do go for walks, most are out for less than an hour a day.

2.4 MILLION DOGS DON'T GET OFF-THE-LEAD EXERCISE ON A DAILY BASIS

800,000 DOGS NEVER GO FOR A WALK OFF THE LEAD

MOST DOGS THAT DO GO FOR A WALK, ARE OUT FOR LESS THAN AN HOUR

ACTION NEEDED!

For most dogs, exercising in a garden just isn't enough. On a walk, they can do normal 'dog' things like exploring, sniffing around and meeting up with other dogs. This is very important for their mental health.

Learn more about the health of pets in the UK today by reading our *PAW Report*: pdsa.org.uk/PAWreport

PDSA is the UK's leading veterinary charity

In our 51 Pet Hospitals UK-wide, we have more than **300 vets** and **600 nursing staff**, who carry out **2.7 million treatments** on more than **470,000 sick and injured pets** each year.

We care for pets whose owners are in real need, and can't afford vets' fees: we also help and advise owners on everyday care for their pets.

Treating our pet patients costs us more than £60 million a year, with every penny coming from donations.

For more information on the charity and its work:

Email info@pdsa.org.uk

Phone **0800 917 2509**

pdsa.org.uk

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To find out if you qualify for PDSA-funded veterinary care, please call FREE on **0800 731 2502**.