

Question:

Our male puppy is 5 months old and weighs 25 pounds. He is having 3 cups a day (morning, noon and evening) of Fromm's Duck and Sweet Potatoes. What we are feeding him is what Fromm has suggested to us by personal e-mail. He appears though, to be constantly hungry. He is a lean dog, but we want to make certain we are feeding him the proper quantity. From your experience, do you suggest a larger amount of food? Also, when do you recommend dropping the mid-day meal and proportionally increasing morning and evening?

Answer:

He could've gone to 2 meals per day at 3 months of age. He can go to 1 meal a day at age 6 months, if that's easier for your schedule. Canines only *need* to eat once per day. Our dogs eat just once per day, in the evening. They get their supplements and a couple of treats in the morning. An evening meal after his daily run is preferable, especially if you are a hunter, because one generally hunts in the morning and you don't want to hunt/run your dog on a full stomach. It usually works well to feed your dog while you make dinner, that way he has already eaten when you sit down to eat your meal.

I always warn against feeding a dog based on what it says on the back of the bag. That information is simply a starting point for the "average" dog and I have yet to meet a dog that's average. Every dog's metabolism is different and with sporting breeds, every day can be different insofar as how active they are.

Your dog is too thin if you can see his ribs or hip bones. He is "just right" if you can feel his individual ribs when you stroke him down his sides with light pressure. He is too fat if you cannot feel his ribs with light pressure. Never judge whether your dog is too thin or too fat based on what the scale says. Check him with your hands periodically.

During the hot summer months, he may not be as active and he won't be burning calories to stay warm, so he may get a bit chubby. If that happens, reduce his food by about 20% until he loses the extra weight. If your dog seems hungry when you cut down the quantity, a good trick is to soak his dry food in water. You can also add some no-salt green beans to his food. Both methods add volume, but not calories. If you've really let his weight get away from you and he is fat, put him on the Green Bean Diet (see http://brushdale.com/training/Health_and_Nutrition/Green_Bean_Diet.htm). In the winter, if he's doing a lot of running outside, he'll be burning a lot of calories and he might get a bit thin. If that happens, increase his food by about 20% until he gains the weight back. If he won't eat enough to gain weight, switch him to a food with more calories (a "hotter" food: higher in protein and fat). If you are measuring your dog's food, you'll have to constantly monitor his body condition and adjust the quantity as necessary.

My recommendation for feeding puppies is to put an entire bowl of dry food down, let the puppy eat until he walks away (whether it's 2 bites or 200), then pick up the bowl and put it away until the next meal. What's great about this feeding method, is you don't have to guess how much or how little to feed him to keep him in good body condition. He'll adjust his intake himself, based on his activity level.

Unfortunately, you probably won't be able to feed him that way now, because he's already experienced having his bowl be empty when he's still hungry. Once that happens, a dog's natural instinct kicks in to eat as much as he can, whenever he can, because he might go hungry again soon. BUT, since his mom only eats as much as it takes to stay alive, he might not overeat, so it would be worth a try.

If you are allowing him to eat all he wants and he's still too thin, switch him to a hotter food. Similarly, if you are feeding him all he wants and he's getting too fat, first try switching him to a food with less calories. If he doesn't lose weight, you'll have no choice but to start measuring.

The next thing I'd like to mention is the choice of food. The best brand to feed your dog is the brand that works to keep him in excellent body condition. Most of us also want our dog to like the food we serve and not be hungry all the time. Unless you know your dog has a sensitivity/allergy to grains, there's no reason to feed him a grain-free food. You may actually be doing your dog a disservice by feeding him something with so few carbs. That may be part of why he still feels hungry after eating. The most easily metabolized protein for canines is chicken. Simply switching him to an all-stages, all-natural chicken & rice food might make a big difference and there are a lot of good brands of that type of dog food on the market. I would stay away from food that contains corn or wheat, only because dogs tend to poop a lot of it out. And I would also buy a "naturals" food, so you're not feeding preservatives or artificial colors/flavors.

A great resource for selecting a dog food is DogFoodAdvisor.com. If you're an analytical type, there will be an overwhelming amount of information available, so don't worry about reading all the info and reviews. If a food has at least a 3.5 rating, it's above-average in quality. The differences between 4 & 5 are few and probably not something you care about, such as whether the meat is from free range chickens. Just get something with chicken as the primary protein that has at least a 3.5 rating. Diamond Naturals All-Stages Chicken & Rice has a 4 rating. Since it's an all-stages food, so he can stay on it indefinitely. Diamond Natural Extreme Athlete has a 4.5 rating and is also an all-stages food. It's one of the hottest foods you can buy. I feed these varieties of Diamond to our dogs, as well as their Senior food to our old ladies.