



Potter's Angels Rescue

Feeding Recommendations for your New Dog

Dogs may act like they have the mythical "cast-iron stomach" most times, eating objects and substances that make us shudder in disgust. And while it's true that dogs can consume these things blithely, it's also true that a sudden change of a dog's primary diet can be hard on both their stomachs and their eating habits. Changing the main ingredient of your dog's diet (ie: brand of dry dog food) should be done gradually and over a period of at least 7 days.

Many dogs that are brought into rescue are being fed cheap (crap) food and the new owners or fosters would like to get them right on to a good high quality diet. However, to do so abruptly could cause unnecessary stress on an already stressed animal causing GI upset and diarrhea. Keep in mind that if the animal is experiencing diarrhea they are not absorbing any of the beneficial nutrients that quality food provides, thus rendering it a complete waste of money to put them right on to a high quality (and high priced) diet.

To change their food correctly it is best to start with $\frac{3}{4}$ of the old "crap" food (as I call it) and $\frac{1}{4}$ of the new good food. Do this for 3 days and if there is no sign GI upset, you can proceed to $\frac{1}{2}$ of the good food and $\frac{1}{2}$ of the crap food for another 3 days. Finally, feed $\frac{1}{4}$ crap food and $\frac{3}{4}$ good food for 2 days before switching them over to 100% of the good food if there are still no signs of GI distress. If your animal is having some diarrhea or vomiting along the way then taper down on the good food until they do not display any signs of GI upset. Every animal's digestive system is different and some are more sensitive than others and may take longer to adjust to a new diet thus you will need to proceed with the transition accordingly.

If your animal does not seem to be adjusting to any change in diet or begins displaying itching or areas of redness, then you must consider food allergies (assuming fleas have been eliminated as a possible culprit). Dogs can develop allergies to chicken, milk, eggs, fish, beef, pork, horse meat, grains, potatoes, soy products, or dietary additives. This can come on suddenly so just because they have always been on the same food does not mean that they have not developed an allergy towards it. If you think this might be the problem you can try switching them to a hypoallergenic diet. A hypoallergenic diet is one that has a very limited number of ingredients. It should contain no added coloring, preservatives, or flavorings. Most important, it should contain ingredients that the dog is unlikely to have encountered in the past.

Your veterinarian can prescribe an appropriate hypoallergenic diet after carefully reviewing the composition of the dog's current diet. The test diet usually consists of a commercial hypoallergenic prescription diet such as salmon and rice or duck and potato, available through Hill's Pet Products, Purina, and Waltham. Once a good commercial hypoallergenic diet is found, the dog can be left on that diet indefinitely. All treats and chews will need to be eliminated during this crucial testing period. A reduction in itching may occur within a few days of starting the test diet, but in many cases it takes several weeks. The test diet should be continued for at least 10 weeks. Once improvement is noted, various foods can be added one by one until the offending allergen is identified by noting that it causes an increase in the amount of itching and scratching.