



Pet Behavior Counseling

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ALTERNATING YOUR DOGS FOOD MAKES SENSE

By Kate Dutra

For several years I bought into the idea that it was not healthy for my dogs to switch foods, and that once I found a good, high quality brand that they liked, I should just stick with it. This is what the pet food companies and some of the experts were saying and after all, I had a dog that was living proof of the disaster that can occur when foods get switched. A long haired dog with diarrhea – what a mess! So, I threw common sense out the window, and year after year my dogs were fed the same thing day in and day out.

It was probably about six ago when I first started to do things a little differently. Like many people who are conscientious about their pet's weight, I found that I had to cut back on feedings during winter months, and increase during the summer, when my dogs were more active. I decided that rather than do this, I wanted to change food types based upon the seasons, a lower fat one in the winter and one that was more caloric in the summer. At that point, I was feeding Eagle brand which was very conducive to this as they have several formulas, ranging from Reduced Fat to Power.

As time progressed, I realized that my dogs did not have any difficulties switching back and forth between the various Eagle formulas, so I started to buy a different type of Eagle each time I ran out, rotating among the various formulas and flavors. It was my belief, that because I was staying within the brand, my dogs could easily handle the change, but I was still brainwashed enough to think that I could not switch to other types of foods unless I did so very gradually, mixing a little bit each day. What I finally grasped was that my first dog's diarrhea episode was not because of the change, but rather due to his systems lack of exposure to other food sources.

It wasn't until I read *See Spot Live Longer*, by Steve Brown, that I truly was able to comprehend the gravity of feeding dogs the same diet every day. (If you have not read this book yet I would highly recommend it.) Feeding the same food at every meal not only works against optimal health, but could potentially be fatal. We so often assume that just because the bag says 100% complete, that it is, but in fact we really do not know. If a nutrient is missing from a particular food, and a dog eats nothing else, then

that nutrient will always be missing from the dog's diet. Or if there is some type of toxin that is in a grain in a particular food, and the dog is exposed to that toxin every day for the duration of its lifetime, it may result in cancer or liver disease, to only name a couple of possibilities. While many of the higher quality pet foods do screen for toxins, what if there is a toxin they are unaware of? Is it really worth the risk when part of the solution can be so simple?

When I allowed my common sense to re-enter my thought processes, and take the place of the brain washing done so well by the pet food industry, it was a total "light bulb moment." I know that I would not be healthy if I only consumed one type of food, or food from only one manufacturer, and I know that my dogs will not be healthy either. So I bit the bullet and altered my dogs' diets again. I must confess that it does take some time, some level of organization, and costs a little more (I only buy small bags so the food stays fresh), but my dogs now have a different high quality dry food every morning. They also receive one meal a day of fresh, raw food. I did do a little mixing during the initial switch over, but nothing too excessive. I started with alternating between Wysong and Eagle. After a few days of this I threw Innova into the mix. Today, I rotate between Wysong, Innova, and Eagle's Duck, Fish, and Chicken formulas, and I am currently looking to add two more brands into the mixture. My dogs enjoy it because it is never the same thing every day, and I am happier because I feel that they are getting a broader amino acid base and their nutritional needs are met to the best of my abilities.

I am only saddened that it took me so long to allow my good sense to take hold. Recently, my twelve year old dog was diagnosed with chronic active hepatitis. While she is doing fine today, she requires a daily dietary supplement to aid in protecting her liver from further deterioration. It was reported to me that hepatitis was not necessarily uncommon in older dogs. After a little research, I learned that one of the possible causes of chronic active hepatitis is long term exposure to toxins found in the grains in pet foods.

A Note from Don & Paula Hanson

Due to health issues with our dogs we made the decision to switch to feeding them a 100% raw diet a year ago. Up until that time we did as Kate is doing; we fed dry food in the morning and raw food in the evening. We rotated our dry diet every few weeks, every time we purchased a new bag of food. Even feeding a raw diet, we regularly switch between meat sources and manufacturers. No matter how or what you feed your dog we believe that they will receive optimal nutrition when you alternate their diet. The only reason not to consider alternating your dogs diet is if they have intestinal issues which prohibit such a change.

Originally published in Green Acres Kennel Shop P^{aw} Prints, May 2005.

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