



Guide Dogs for the Blind

Feeding Guidelines

All raisers should follow the [Puppy Raising Nutritional Policy](#) or the advice of the CFR or a GDB Veterinarian.

The amount of food provided will vary according to the puppy's growth rate, activity level and other factors (such as climate). Refer to the Puppy Raising Nutritional Policy to help set guidelines for amounts to feed. The instructions on the dog food bag are only general averages. They must be adjusted to meet the puppy's individual needs. Refer often to the [Body Condition Scoring \(BCS\) Guidelines](#) to help assess the puppy's current condition.

- As an approximate guideline, feed an 8-week-old puppy $\frac{3}{4}$ cup, three times a day and adjust the amount of food based on the puppy's BCS following instructions given by the leader.
- Pay attention to how fast the puppy is growing and its general activity level. Realize that puppies do not grow at a continuous rate even though it may seem so. They can go through several periods when their growth rate slows down for a time. Assess the puppy's condition before increasing its food. Do not increase its food based on its age alone.
- It is always better to keep the puppy on the lean side. Excessive weight can lead to serious bone, joint, and other health problems as puppies mature.
- Use a measuring cup (not a can, glass jar or coffee mug) to measure food.
 - As it grows, its needs will increase for a while. Adjust the amount of food accordingly.
 - As it starts to mature, decrease its food intake as growth tapers off.
 - If the puppy is altered (spayed or neutered) its nutritional needs may decrease after the procedure.
- Refer to the BCS Guidelines to assess the puppy's weight.
- When the puppy is in ideal body condition:
 - Each individual rib is easy to feel with fingertips.
 - Its waist will be obvious when viewed from above.
 - Its belly will be well tucked up behind its ribcage when viewed from the side.

Promoting Good Eating Habits and Growth

- Keep the puppy on a feeding schedule; pick up the bowl if the puppy has not finished within 5 minutes.
- Measure the puppy's food using a standard measuring cup.
- Feed the puppy away from other family pets to avoid developing potential food possessiveness issues.
- Clean food bowls at least once a day.
- Add a small amount of water to its kibble before serving it to make it more palatable. Do not "float" the puppy's food unless recommended to do so by the CFR.
- Nutritional, vitamin, or mineral supplements should only be used if recommended by CFR or a GDB Veterinarian.
- Poor appetite does not signal a need to change food brands.
- Rapid or continuous changes in the puppy's diet can upset its system.

Follow these general guidelines for timing frequency of meals:

- 8-16-week-old puppy's: three meals a day
- 4 months and older: two meals a day

Some possible reasons to change a puppy's food:

- Frequent diarrhea
- "Spitting up" or other types of vomiting
- Excessive gas
- Improper weight
- Overly rapid growth
- Excessive stool volume

Remember, lack of appetite is usually not an acceptable reason for changing the puppy's brand of food. Do not change foods without first consulting the leader; only a CFR or a GDB Veterinarian may approve a diet not listed on the [GDB Puppy Raising Nutritional Policy](#).

If a raiser's veterinarian recommends a change to a diet not on the [GDB Puppy Raising Nutritional Policy](#) or to a prescription diet other than Hills i/d, please consult CFR or GDB VFA Team.

Slowly change foods to avoid diarrhea that can result from rapid or frequent changes of food.

Feeding Tips

The puppy's regular diet includes all the nutritional value and calories it needs. Do not supplement diet with "people food" of any kind. Even very small amounts of an unusual or "rich" food can cause dietary upset and lead to digestive problems, vomiting and diarrhea. A high value treat might be suggested by the CFR for particular training issues; raisers will receive instructions on what type of treat is appropriate.

Teach the puppy not to be possessive of its food by following these steps:

- Always feed the puppy separately from other family pets – preferably out of sight.
- Do not hover over the puppy while it is eating.
- Do not touch the puppy while it is eating.
- Do not allow young children to pester the puppy while eating; it may inadvertently teach it that it must defend its food.
- Do not test the puppy by trying to remove the bowl or put a hand in the bowl prior to the puppy finishing its food. It should be allowed to eat without the concern of someone taking it away.
- If the puppy shows any of these behaviors during the feeding process, immediately notify leader:
 - Becoming tense in the body
 - Eating faster/shoving head deeper into the bowl when someone comes closer to the bowl
 - Growling/vocalizing

Some medical symptoms that people attribute to diet may be the signs of an infectious disease or symptoms of a gastrointestinal problem caused by eating something inappropriate. Any such maladies should be treated immediately. It may not be the food that is causing the problem.

Raisers should contact their leader if the puppy displays any of the following symptoms:

- Is underweight
- Has diarrhea, vomiting, or other symptoms of an upset stomach
- Has poor skin or coat
- Is a picky eater
- Loses its appetite suddenly
- Is unusually quiet for longer than an hour or two

If the puppy eats too fast and either gags or vomits its food back up while eating, try one of these tips to slow it down:

- Add a rock (much larger than the puppy can eat) or large Nylabones or Kongs to the pan to encourage the puppy to pick up a few pieces of food at a time instead of gulping it.
- Change to a different kind of feed pan such as a large rectangular cake pan or an "angel food" cake pan that has a hole in the center. For puppies that eat excessively fast, special feeding bowls are on the market; CFRs should be consulted.

Keeping Puppies Fit and Healthy

Periodically, club leaders or CFR will assess the puppy's body condition to see if it is in the desired lean condition. The puppy's BCS should be entered on the Monthly Report and is a good indicator of its basic health and condition.

The puppy should look like a young athlete; lean and healthy. Ideally the puppy should have a clearly visible waist behind its rib cage and a nice 'tuck up' in the abdomen. Each individual rib should be felt without pressing too hard, not just the barrel of the rib cage. A puppy that is too thin may have clearly visible ribs and its hip bones may stick out. Remember: lean not skinny!

Overfeeding results in not only overweight puppies, but it can lead to digestive upsets too. Too much weight makes the transition to GDB training more difficult. Additionally, studies shows that obesity in dogs can cause a variety of health problems and shorten their life.

If there are questions about the puppy's weight, check with the club leader.

Watering Guidelines

Puppies should have easy access to an unlimited amount of fresh, clean water. Free access to water is preferred, but when this is not practical it is acceptable to offer fresh water frequently throughout the day (minimum of 8 times per day, more frequently in hot temperatures).

It is not appropriate to limit the daily amount of water offered to a puppy unless directed by a veterinarian for a specific purpose (e.g. pre-surgical fasting or treatment of acute vomiting). Water is an essential nutrient for dogs. Limiting the supply of this essential nutrient can cause significant health concerns including life-threatening dehydration. This risk is especially concerning for younger puppies because their kidneys are not fully developed and functional until 4-5 months of age.

Raisers are advised to monitor the drinking and relieving pattern for each puppy. Changes in water consumption or frequency of relieving are sometimes indicative of a medical condition that needs to be addressed. Raisers with concerns about the volume of water the puppy is consuming or concerns about changes in the puppy's drinking or relieving patterns should bring this to the attention of their leader. We ask that leaders alert their CFR if there are any concerns regarding water consumption. CFRs will work with GDB Veterinarians in cases where possible underlying medical concerns are suspected. The amount of water offered to a puppy each day should not be limited unless directed to do so by GDB Veterinarians.