

**Calories Count:**

**Nutrition and Exercise Tips for Your Guide Dog**

For many of us, including our dogs, sheltering in place has resulted in a reduction in both guide work and exercise. To keep your dog at a healthy weight during this period of reduced activity, you may need to adjust his or her food ration accordingly. Please note that we do not recommend feeding less than two cups of food daily. If your dog continues to gain weight on two cups per day, consider going to a lower calorie food, eliminating high calorie treats and increasing exercise. A friendly dog playmate in a safe and secure fenced in yard may be just the outlet and exercise your dog needs. Of course, please remember to adhere to all applicable social distancing mandates in your area when considering exercise options.

There are several ways to implement healthy treats for your dog without adding unnecessary calories. Apples, carrots, green beans and blueberries given in small quantities are good alternatives. Remember to avoid giving your dog any real bones, hooves or rawhide chews.

Our Support Center team has noted a few pockets around the country where folks are having difficulty getting their usual dog food formula. Although this has not been a major problem, we would like to address the issue proactively in case these incidents increase.

Our general guideline when changing your dog’s food is to make a slow transition to avoid diarrhea or other GI upset as a result of an abrupt change in diet. We recommend that, when possible, you buy the new food well ahead of running out of the old to allow for this slow transition. Our Veterinarians recommend that, ideally, the transition take place over a nine day period. For the first three days of the transition, feed a mix consisting of 75% old food and 25% new food; the ratio on days four through six will be 50% old and 50% new. For the last three days of the transition, feed 25% old food and 75 % new followed, finally, by 100% of the new food thereafter. While this schedule outlines the ideal transition, it may not be possible or realistic for your particular situation. If this is the case, do your best to make the transition as gradually as possible and please do not hesitate to call the Support Center for assistance.

Like many things, dog food varies in quality. We recommend you stick with a high quality food whenever possible. Common sources of protein in these foods include beef, lamb, fish and chicken. When changing foods, try to stick with the same protein source in the new formula. If your dog is on a prescription diet and a change of food is necessary you should seek a recommendation from your local veterinarian. There are lots of diets to choose from and we recommend choosing one from well-respected brands such as Eukanuba, Natural Balance, Hill's or Royal Canin because their diets are formulated by Veterinary Nutritionists. An FDA report came out in 2019 linking grain free diets to dilated cardiomyopathy; our veterinarians are not recommending grain free foods at this time.

As always, if you have any questions or need advice on weight management, food transitions or any other issues with which we can be of assistance, please do not hesitate to call us. Support Center staff are available Monday-Friday from 8:00 AM-5:00 PM and can be reached directly by calling 1- 800-295-4050. Your Field Service Manager is also available as needed.