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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF – Nancy Kerns  
TRAINING EDITOR – Pat Miller  
PUBLISHER – Timothy H. Cole  
CIRCULATION DIRECTOR – Greg King

#### EDITORIAL OFFICE

E-MAIL: [WDJEditor@gmail.com](mailto:WDJEditor@gmail.com)  
ADDRESS: 1655 Robinson Street  
Orville, CA 95965

#### SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

PHONE: (800) 829-9165  
INTERNET: [whole-dog-journal.com/cs](http://whole-dog-journal.com/cs)  
U.S. MAIL: PO Box 8535  
Big Sandy, TX 75755-8535  
CANADA: Box 7820 STN Main  
London, Ontario N5Y 5W1

#### REPRINTS

For price quote, contact  
Jennifer Jimolka at (203) 857-3144.  
Minimum order 1,000

#### NEWSSTAND

Jocelyn Donnellon, (203) 857-3100

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# Where Does the Time Go?

*When marked in canine lifetimes, it's all too fast.*

BY NANCY KERNS

**M**y husband and I were lounging on our sofa the other night, when we both became aware of an odd background noise that didn't fit into the movie we were watching *at all* – a sort of growly, snorty, buzzy sound. We looked at each other for a moment, puzzled, before he reached for the remote and paused the movie so we could listen and identify the source of the noise. It was our dog, Otto, sound asleep on a thick dog bed next to the couch, and snoring like a hibernating bear. Or an oncoming train. It was *loud!*

"Yo, Otto!" my husband called, trying to wake the dog from his deep slumber. "You're snoring like an old man, man!"

It took a few moments for Otto to stir. He raised his head and looked at us groggily for a second – "What did you wake me up for?" – wagged his tail, and went back to sleep.

"Sheesh!" my husband remarked. "Is he getting old already?"

"No! For goodness' sakes, he's six!" I huffed. "He's in his prime! And besides, he ran five miles this morning! It's nighttime! He's tired!"

"But look at him," my husband persisted. "His muzzle is getting all grey. And if that whole thing about 'dog years' is accurate, he's around 42; he's middle-aged, at least!"

Brian was teasing – it's easy to bait me into defending our dog's perfection – but I found myself thinking about our exchange again the next day. Otto is a large dog, and large breed dogs don't generally live as long as smaller dogs. The idea that we have already spent half his life together is just unthinkable. The first couple of years went so fast! Especially since, in those early days, long walks were a daily chore, a requirement for any day that we didn't want the yard excavated, or something chewed up, or the neighbors annoyed by barking.

Training, too, was a formal and daily event for the first couple of years. We adopted Otto as a 7-month-old former stray, and he had been in the shelter for over two months.

He was not particularly knowledgeable about the world in general or humans specifically, and he was easily frightened by strangers, quick movements, and loud noises. I took him through several group training classes, and deliberately socialized him to all sorts of people in all sorts of places.

It was a *ton* of work, but it really paid off. For the past couple of years, he's been so good, I take it for granted that he's going to *always* be good. I trust him without reservation to behave appropriately with any other dog, whether it's a boisterous puppy, cranky old lady dog, or somewhat aggressive young male. He's reliable with strange humans, too, with one exception: toddlers and very young children still sort of give him the willies. There are very few of these in our social circle, so managing this particular thing, by keeping him at a safe distance from small children, has been far easier than working to improve his opinion of toddlers.

But guess what? Time flies for humans, too. My husband's son, who was 9 when I first met him some 17 years ago, has an 18-month-old son now. A grandson! And they are coming to visit soon, so we have some work to do, installing baby gates in the house and building a happier response to the sight of a toddler in Otto.

And speaking of time, WDJ starts its 17th year of publication with the next issue. It's been an honor to share this time with you – but where has it gone? *NK*

# Why Not Chews

*Five ways to protect your dog from potentially toxic chewy treats.*

BY NANCY KERNS

**T**he U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) began receiving reports in 2006 regarding dogs becoming ill – sometimes fatally ill – shortly after being fed dried chicken “jerky” treats. Most, but not all, of the treats mentioned in these reports were made or sourced in China. A small but steady number of reports continued to trickle into FDA, with the trickle becoming a flood in 2012 and 2013. Most of the cases reported to FDA involve chicken jerky, but increasingly, dried sweet potato treats and dried duck jerky have also been implicated. As of September 24, 2013, FDA has received reports of more than 3,600 dogs and 10 cats who have gotten sick after eating dried jerky treats; at least 580 dog deaths have been linked to these treats.

No single agent has been found to be responsible for the illnesses and deaths; the cause is still a mystery. According to FDA, about 60 percent of the reports are for gastrointestinal illness (with or without elevated liver enzymes); about 30 percent relate to kidney or urinary signs. The remaining 10 percent of cases involve a variety of other signs, including convulsions, tremors, hives, and skin irritation.

Here are five things you can do to keep your dog safe from whatever toxin or hazard may be present in jerky treats.

**1 DON'T BUY ANY DRIED JERKY TREATS!** Let's keep in mind that these cases all involve treats – not a vital staple in a dog's diet. There is no limit to the number of safe, healthy alternatives to jerky treats; look for them in your refrigerator! Give your dog tiny pieces of last night's roasted chicken, bits of sausage plucked out of the leftover pasta dish, tiny cubes of whatever cheese might be on hand, or a spoonful of yogurt.

However, if you simply cannot imagine not giving your dog dried jerky treats, read on.

**2 BUY ONLY THOSE TREATS THAT UNEQUIVOCALLY STATE THAT THEY ARE MADE, AND ALL INGREDIENTS ARE SOURCED, IN THE U.S.** It's no longer enough for a product to say that it's made in the USA; look for a clear statement on the label asserting that *all* the ingredients are sourced within the U.S.

**3 STOP FEEDING ANY TREAT IF YOUR DOG VOMITS, LOSES HIS APETITE, OR HAS DIARRHEA WITHIN HOURS OR DAYS OF EATING THEM.** Increased drinking and/or urination and decreased activity are other common signs of trouble caused by these treats. Retain the remainder of any treats you have – or at least the package.

**4 REPORT ANY PROBLEM YOUR DOG HAS FOLLOWING CONSUMPTION OF A JERKY TREAT.** The online reporting process is simple; go to [safetyreporting.hhs.gov](http://safetyreporting.hhs.gov). Alternatively, ask your veterinarian to help you file a report.

**5 MAKE YOUR OWN JERKY TREATS.** It's ridiculously easy. You can use a dehydrator (as described in “Dry It Yourself!” in WDJ May 2012) or a long stint (about six or seven hours) in your oven at a low temperature (170° F. works nicely). Cut meat or sweet potatoes into strips of even thickness; place on baking sheets (use non-stick spray); and check every hour or so, turning each strip over so that all of them dry evenly.

One advantage of making your own jerky is that you can stop the process when the jerky gets to the texture (chewiness) that you desire. Most commercial jerky products are excessively dry and hard; this is done to reduce the opportunity for bacterial growth. However, one area of investigation into illnesses caused by these treats focuses on the potential for physical injury caused to the digestive tract by extremely hard, sharp edges of jerky treats.

As long as you refrigerate and feed the treats within a few days of making them, or store them in an airtight container in your freezer before feeding, your homemade jerky treats will be a big improvement on the commercial products: chewier, more delicious, and far safer. 🐾



**Until the deadly contaminant is identified, don't buy or feed any jerky products made in China, or containing ingredients from China.**

## BETTER CHOICES FOR HOME-PREPARED AND SPECIAL NEEDS RECIPES

*These veterinary-developed meals use more whole foods to meet nutritional requirements.*

Three months ago, I asked, “Why can’t veterinary nutritionists design recipes that meet most nutritional needs through the use of whole foods, rather than synthetic supplements?” The question appeared in my article “Dishing On Diets” (WDJ September 2013), about a study claiming that most homemade diet recipes are incomplete and unbalanced. I pointed out that most veterinary nutritionist recipes consist of minimal whole foods and rely heavily on supplements to meet nutritional needs. My (secret) hope was to plant a seed that might someday bear fruit, but I didn’t realize that my challenge had already been met.

JustFoodForDogs was started almost three years ago in Newport Beach, California. The company is led by Dr. Oscar Chavez, DVM, whose focus has been clinical nutrition since graduating from the Royal Veterinary College in London. From 2010 to 2013, Dr. Chavez was director of the Animal Health Science veterinary technology program at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, and he remains an adjunct professor of canine clinical nutrition there. Dr. Chavez is also a member of the American Academy of Veterinary Nutrition.

JustFoodForDogs offers cooked, frozen JustDailyMeals, made from high-quality whole foods free of hormones, preservatives, and artificial colors and flavorings. These meals include meat or fish, organs, vegetables, fruits, and oils, along with potatoes and sweet potatoes in their grain-free recipes, and white rice, brown rice, and macaroni in the rest. The company says that all the ingredients, including supplements, are USDA- or FDA-approved for human consumption. All these meals have plenty of protein, but the amount of fat varies widely, from low-fat fish to higher-fat lamb and beef. Delivery is available in parts of southern California, or foods can be shipped anywhere in the U.S. The cost ranges from \$3.60 to \$6.74 per pound, plus shipping.

Instead of using the same vitamin and mineral blend for all foods, JustFoodForDogs customizes a blend specific to each recipe. This is highly unusual in the pet food market; most companies use the same supplement premix for all their foods, as it’s more economical. The downside of using the same supplements for all foods is that there may be

far more than is needed of some nutrients, and ratios may not be properly balanced. Note that the nutrient guidelines established by the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) and the National Research Council (NRC) do not require specific ratios other than calcium:phosphorus, and their maximums allow for a very wide range of nutrients.

For example, beef and lamb liver are high in copper, so there’s no need to add copper to recipes that include either of those, but poultry meat and organs have little copper, so copper must be added to poultry-based diets. If the same premix is used for all foods, those that include beef or lamb

liver will have more copper than is needed, which will upset the ideal 10:1 ratio of zinc to copper. A study published this year in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* found increased copper accumulation in the liver of Labrador Retrievers, both with and without liver disease, most likely the result of increased exposure via their diets. This may be a side effect of feeding foods with more copper than is appropriate.

As another example, I’ve seen recipes that relied on Balance IT (a vitamin/mineral supplement used extensively by veterinary nutritionists) where twice as much of the supplement as would otherwise be needed was prescribed in order to ensure that there was more calcium than phosphorus in a recipe relatively high in meat (apparently

Balance It’s program doesn’t have an option for adding additional calcium separately).

The only other companies I know of using individualized supplement blends are Darwin’s Natural Pet Products and Raw Bistro Pet Fare. Both companies consulted with Steve Brown (founder of Steve’s Real Food for Dogs and author of *See Spot Live Longer*, seespotlivelonger.com), who insists on customized supplement premixes for the companies he works with, to ensure that their frozen raw foods are complete and balanced.

I was delighted to see that the company also offers JustDoltYourself kits, which include the recipe for each Daily Meal, along with their customized nutrient mixture, so that you can make the same meals yourself at home. The cost per kit, enough to make about 30 pounds of food, is \$18 (shipping is free).

JustFoodForDogs also offers Vet Support Diets, designed for dogs with kidney disease, cancer, digestive disorders, and allergies. I was pleased to see that their kidney diets are not overly restricted in protein, while still being low in phosphorus. All of the Vet Support diets except their ultra-low-fat Balanced Remedy require a veterinary prescription.



**JustFoodForDogs offers complete diets, as well as supplements custom-blended to “complete and balance” its home-prepared diet recipes.**

Unfortunately, the company does not currently offer JustDoltYourself kits for their Vet Support Diets, but may consider doing so in the future through veterinarians.

Not all dogs are willing to eat home-prepared meals with spoonfuls of added supplement powder, which change the smell and taste of the food. Another benefit to using whole foods to meet more of a dog's nutritional requirement, and to using customized supplement blends, is that less supplement powder is added to the food. Minimizing supplements makes the food more palatable, especially for sick dogs whose appetite may already be compromised.

The company will also design customized diets for dogs with health problems, including an individualized nutrient blend designed to make the recipe complete. Health issues commonly addressed include obesity, digestive disorders, pancreatitis, diabetes, liver and kidney disease, and more. A blood panel from your vet is typically required. There is a one-time fee of \$195 to cover the cost of formulating the recipe and nutrient blend. You can then choose to have the company make the food for you, or you can buy the supplement mixture and the recipe to make yourself at home. This is a much improved option for those whose

dogs have health issues than the typical recipe created by a veterinary nutritionist. It's also likely to be more palatable for your dog with more real food and less supplement powder per meal.

JustFoodForDogs offers other supplements and treats, including what the company claims is USDA dehydrated chicken breast, a safer option than the vast majority of chicken jerky products on the market that use chicken imported from China and have been linked to kidney failure in dogs.

Finally, I applaud the company's unique use of feeding trials using dogs living in family homes rather than a research environment. Cal Poly Pomona helped to develop feeding trial protocols that meet AAFCO guidelines, considered the "gold standard" for proving nutritional adequacy. The study tested their daily recipes over a six-month period, with all participants passing with flying colors. – *Mary Straus*

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

❖ **Just Food For Dogs**, Newport Beach and West Hollywood, CA. (866) 726-9509, justfoodfordogs.com



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# What Did I Say?!

*Your body language may send a different message to your dog than the one you intended for him to receive.*

BY PAT MILLER, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA

Perhaps the most common mistake that humans make when they want to make friends with a dog they don't know is to bend over him, looking him in the eyes and patting him on the head. What they don't realize is that everything about that interaction is – from the average dog's perspective – rude, rude, rude. For a supposedly intelligent species, we humans tend to be incredibly dense about communicating with our canine companions.

People who work successfully with dogs either have good instincts about how to interact with them, or they learn quickly. There is a real art to using body language to help a dog feel at ease with your presence. The most competent professionals make training look almost effortless, because all the messages they convey to their canine pupils are calm, clear, and consistent – and that means both the cues and rewards they use consciously, and the posture and movements they use without thinking.

But if your body language is unintentionally intimidating, erratic, or

contradicts the cues you are trying to give, the result can be a very confused, uncertain, frightened, or aggressive dog. A disconnect between what you want to “say” and what your body language actually expresses can also be quite threatening to some dogs.

In contrast, humans who send appropriate messages with their body language are far less likely to be bitten than those who are oblivious to the effect they are having on the canine in front of them. Good dog training and behavior professionals, and perceptive dog owners and lovers, are rarely bitten.

We spend a lot of time talking about reading and understanding dog body language. It's about time we took a harder look at the human side of the body language equation.

## BODY PARTS 101

Just as a dog's various body parts can send clear messages, so can a human's. The trouble is, as Patricia McConnell explains so well in her wonderful book, *The Other End of the Leash*, the message that primates (humans are primates) intend to *send* are very different from the messages that canids (dogs are canids) *receive*. In fact, our languages are so different, it's nothing short of a miracle that our two species are able to get along as well as we do. Let's look at the differences.

■ **EYE CONTACT:** In our culture, direct eye contact is admired. Someone who doesn't look you in the eye is perceived as shifty, untruthful, or weak. Our propensity to make direct eye contact with our dogs seems, to us, the right and honorable way to greet another sentient being. In a dog's world, however, direct eye contact is a challenge or a threat, while looking away is a sign of deference or respect. Dogophiles in-the-know approach dogs with soft eye contact or without making eye contact at all. At the same time, we make it a point to teach our own dogs that direct eye contact with a human is a highly rewarded behavior. Dog trainers from coast to coast go to great lengths to reinforce their dogs for making – and maintaining – eye contact. (See “The Eyes Have It,” facing page.)

**TIP:** When approaching a dog you don't know, or if your own dog seems wary of you when you approach her, try looking off to the side or over the head instead of directly into the dog's eyes. If the dog seems comfortable with you, try making brief, soft eye contact and see how she reacts. If her body language stays soft and she continues to approach you, she is probably comfortable with at least some eye contact. Take it slow.

**Sarah Richardson, CPDT-KA, CDBC, owner of The Canine Connection in Chico, California, demonstrates how to greet a dog in all the wrong ways – and the dog responds in a typical fashion!**



### HOW NOT TO GREET A DOG

- Direct approach
- Bent forward over the dog
- Hands reaching for dog
- Direct eye contact

### DOG SIGNALS HIS APPREHENSION TO THIS APPROACH BY:

- Raises one forefoot
- Lowers ears and tail
- Tongue licks nose
- Leans backward



Next, we subjected Otto to some mild rudeness, to demonstrate how we can unwittingly make dogs highly uncomfortable with body language that seems rather innocuous to us. At first, Otto attempts to politely avoid Sarah's direct gaze and full frontal posture . . .



Only about 30 seconds have elapsed since Sarah, a relative stranger to Otto, stepped in front and started staring at him. But as she maintains this direct stare and her full frontal position relative to his, Otto quickly begins to exhibit signs of stress, yawning and tensing his own posture.



Otto assiduously avoids eye contact and tenses his ears. He was told to "stay," or he would have moved away already. Dogs who are tied and unable to escape a similar encounter with a stranger might growl or snap to defend themselves for what they perceive as someone threatening them.

## THE EYES HAVE IT

There's sometimes an occasional moment during shelter dog behavior assessments when the dog being assessed makes deliberate, direct, soft eye contact with the person performing the assessment. When this happens to me, my heart warms and I get a little teary-eyed. "This," I think to myself, "is a dog who has had meaningful relationships with humans."

What this undoubtedly means is that the dog has learned that there is a value in making eye contact with humans. It's a behavior that most humans strongly value; it makes most of us feel as if the dog is communicating something to us.

If your dog doesn't already know the value of eye contact with humans, you can easily teach him. This is an *operant conditioning/positive reinforcement* exercise, whereby your dog learns his behavior can make good stuff happen:

1. Holding a tasty treat in your hand, have your dog sit in front of you.
2. Show him the treat and move it to the corner of your eye. When his eyes meet yours, click a clicker (or use another "reward marker," such as the word "Yes!") and give him the treat. Then repeat.



3. Say the cue "Watch!" just before you move the treat to your eye. When he makes eye contact, click and treat. Repeat.
4. After several repetitions (the number of repetitions needed will depend on the dog), pause after you give the "Watch!" cue and see if he looks into your eyes. If he does, click and treat. If he doesn't, move the treat to your eye, and click and treat when he makes eye contact.
5. Say "Watch!" Move the treat halfway to your eye, and wait. Just wait. His eyes may lock onto the treat and follow it at first, but eventually he will glance at your eyes in order to gain information about what you are doing. When he does, click and treat. (If he *never* looks at your eyes, do several more repetitions of Step 4.)
6. Say "Watch" and hold the treat at arm's length out to the side. Wait. When he makes eye contact, click and treat.
7. When your dog has come to realize the value of eye contact, he will sometimes offer the behavior without being cued for it. Be sure to reinforce eye contact that he spontaneously offers throughout the day, in addition to the eye contact that you cue him for.
8. To help him be comfortable with eye contact from other humans, ask your friends and family members to play the "Watch" game with him as well. Monitor the game to make sure it's always rewarding, not uncomfortable.



■ **HANDS:** What's the first thing you're likely to do when you're introduced to a human stranger? Reach out boldly and shake hands with a firm, assertive grip. What's the first thing many humans are likely to do when they meet a dog? Reach out boldly and pat him on top of the head. Non-dog-savvy humans, that is. Those in the dog-know are well aware that many dogs *hate* being patted on top of the head, some dogs tolerate it, and a small minority may actually enjoy it.

**TIP:** If you are trying to make a good impression on the canine you are meeting, you might do best not to reach out at all. Rather, allow the dog to offer the first contact with you. If you *must* reach toward the dog, offer your open hand, palm up, below his chin level, and let him reach forward to sniff. If he invites closer contact, try scratching gently under his chin or behind his ear – most dogs love that. Just in case he's one of the few who doesn't, or he's not yet ready for that much intimacy from a stranger, watch his response to your touch. If he pulls away, respect his message and stop trying to touch him.

■ **BODY ORIENTATION:** Remember that approach for the handshake with another human? You probably stood tall and offered a full-frontal presentation at the same time; you would think it quite weird if another person crouched and/or sidled up to you to say hello. However, along with direct eye contact, to a dog, a face-front direct approach *screams* "Threat!" Equally offensive to many dogs is the human habit of bending or hovering over a dog. If you watch a



dog-pro making the acquaintance of a new canine friend, you are likely to see them kneel sideways while avoiding eye contact, and either keeping hands close to the body, or offering an open hand low to the ground.

**TIP:** Take your lead from the pros. The more wary of you the dog seems, the more important you turn sideways and make yourself small and non-threatening. Of course, if you're greeting an enthusiastic Labrador Retriever who is happily trying to body slam you at the end of his leash, you're probably safe to stand up and face front. But still no hugs, head-pats, or hovering, please.

■ **MOVEMENT:** Dogs, especially dogs who aren't completely comfortable with humans, are very sensitive to our movement. Fast, sudden, and erratic movements can be alarming, especially if

When Sarah demonstrated all the wrong greeting behaviors, Tito first cowered and then ran from her. But when she used non-threatening body language (low position, upright posture, soft eyes, low hand), Tito came back to investigate . . . and quickly decided he really liked her!

they are combined with direct eye contact and inappropriate hand-reaching.

**TIP:** Slow, calm movement – or in some case no movement at all, is a better approach with a dog you don't know.

■ **HUGS:** C'mon now, even in the world of humans, you'd be offended if someone you didn't know walked up and wrapped their arms around you in an intimate hug. Lots of dogs are equally offended, even by hugs from someone they know well. Sure, there are dogs who invite hugs and snuggles, but they are the exception, not the rule.

**TIP:** *Never try to hug a dog you don't know* (and don't let your children do it, either!).

If you are in the habit of hugging (or allowing your children to hug) your own dog, video some hugs in action and take a good hard look at her body language. If your dog leans into the hugs with a relaxed body and soft expression, you're on solid ground. If you see your dog ducking, looking away, lean-

ing away, tensing up, or offering other distance-increasing signals, you might want to rethink your hugging program.

If you're dead set on hugging a dog who doesn't *love* it, then make a commitment to a counter-conditioning program that can teach her to love (or at least calmly accept) hugs; see "Must Love Hugs," facing page.

■ **DEMEANOR:** This is tricky. Often, when someone tries to avoid eye contact, move slowly, speak softly, turn sideways, and control the movement of their hands, they end up looking awkward or weird. And *that* can be very alarming to a dog who isn't sure about the approaching human – or humans in general.

**TIP:** Video yourself with your own dog while you train yourself to control your eye contact, hands, and body postures. Practice until you can act naturally



while employing all the approach and greeting behaviors that are very unnatural to primates (but reassuring to dogs). Then ask your friends if you can try these behaviors with *their* dogs. Get really good at them before you try them with random dogs you meet in public or at your local shelter. And always remember to ask the dog's owner first for permission to greet – and respect their wishes if they say “no.”

## BOTTOM LINE

Primates will be primates. As much as we work to educate humans about

appropriate ways to interact with dogs, there will always be those who do all the wrong things in their misguided efforts to love dogs. *You* can do better, by making sure you use appropriate body language with the dogs you meet. And you can help your own canids survive in a primate world by teaching them that eye contact, reaches over the head, hugging, and other stupid human behaviors all make good stuff happen. 🐾

*Pat Miller, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA, is WDJ's Training Editor. She lives in Fairplay,*

*Maryland, site of her Peaceable Paws training center, where she offers dog training classes and courses for trainers. Pat is also author of many books on positive training, including her newest, Do Over Dogs: Give Your Dog a Second Chance at a First-Class Life. See page 24 for more information.*

*Thanks to trainer Sarah Richardson, CPDT-KA, CDBC, owner of The Canine Connection in Chico, California, for demonstrating polite and rude body language. See page 24 for contact information.*

## MUST LOVE HUGS

I'm a primate, and I love hugging dogs as much as the next human. Of the four Miller dogs, only one loves to be hugged; Bonnie actively and routinely solicits close contact, so most of my dog-hugging needs are met by hugging her. Of the remaining three, one *tolerates* hugs, so I occasionally inflict one upon him. The other two have made their no-hugging preferences clear with avoidance behaviors, so I don't even try. I can pick up the smallest dog as needed to carry him places, but it's not a warm-fuzzy hug-fest event. If we didn't have a dog who loved hugs, I would use the following process to teach one of them to at least tolerate them!

This process involves either *classical conditioning* – giving a puppy a positive association with something he doesn't already have an opinion of, or classical *counter-conditioning*, which gives the dog a *new* association with something he already has a negative opinion of. Either way, the process is similar, but it may go more slowly if you are working to change an existing opinion, rather than simply installing one where none previously existed:

1. Sit next to your sitting dog, a handful of tasty treats in the hand farthest from your dog. (Assuming your dog is on your left side, have treats in your right hand. If you prefer the other side, just flip the following directions.)
2. Touch the top of your dog's shoulders (the withers) briefly with your left hand. While your hand is touching him,

immediately deliver a high-value treat to his mouth with your right hand. Remove both hands at the same time.

3. Repeat the brief-touch-then-feed process until you see your dog brighten happily and turn to look for the arrival of the treat when you touch him.



**Sarah's dog Rhodie loves being on the receiving end of a human hug. You can tell by the way he leans in and maintains the physical contact.**

**Note:** If your dog doesn't look happy at this step, don't go any further. You have three choices: **a)** Seek the help of a positive reinforcement-based trainer to help you with the process. **b)** Resign yourself to hugging other humans instead of your dog. **c)** Look to adopt a second dog into your family who clearly loves being hugged.

4. Gradually increase the length of time you touch him. As you increase the duration of your contact with him, feed him a treat, pause, then feed him another. Feed him multiple times as you increase the duration of your touch.

5. Now touch your dog on his *far* shoulder, on the other side of the withers, and immediately give him a treat. This will start to move your arm over his back as if you are beginning to hug him.

6. Repeat this touch as you did with the withers touch, gradually increasing the duration of your touch and giving him several treats as he looks happy about the process.
7. Slowly increase the approximations of your touch toward an actual hug, making sure you get a consistent positive response at each step before proceeding further.



🐾 NUTRITION 🐾

# Wet Your Dog's Appetite

*Canned food's benefits to your dog may offset the higher cost of this type of diet.*

BY NANCY KERNS

**W**et dog food, a.k.a. “canned” dog food, is not nearly as popular as dry food. The total sales figure for dry pet food in the U.S. last year (more than \$12.7 billion) was more than 2½ times that of wet pet food (almost \$4.8 billion). I understand the reasons for this, but wish it wasn't so. Canned food is actually a much healthier diet for dogs than kibble.

Price is the most commonly cited reason that people prefer to feed dry food to their dogs; canned food is *far* more expensive to feed than dry food. Owners of large dogs or multiple dogs rarely feed

canned food as anything other than an occasional treat, for this reason alone.

Of course, there are other objections, too. Many dog owners report that they don't like the odor of wet food, or

**All of these products are far better (and way more expensive) than the canned foods you'd find in supermarkets. When it comes to food, you get what you pay for, and health and safety are worth the price.**

the extra work involved in opening the container and serving an appropriate amount – and the hassle of having to store any amount still in the container in a refrigerator for the next meal. And a persistent minority of dog owners worry that dogs who eat only canned food will have more dental problems (such as a buildup of tartar and resulting gum inflammation) than a dog who eats kibble.

These concerns vary in validity.

It's impossible to counter an objection to the high cost of wet food; it simply *is* far more expensive to feed canned food than it is to feed kibble. Wet food obviously contains a lot of water, so you have to feed more of it (in terms of weight and volume) than dry food to deliver the nutrients your dog requires. Because it's so heavy, it's far more expensive for the pet food companies and distributors to ship wet food than dry food, too.

That said, the cost of feeding top-quality canned food is comparable to the cost of feeding commercial raw frozen or dehydrated diets – and lots of people find a way to pay for those foods.

I'm not sure I could sympathize very

deeply with someone who didn't want to feed wet food to a dog who would clearly benefit from that type of diet due to the off-putting aroma of the food, or the inconvenience of opening cans or storing opened-but-not-emptied pouches. Maybe if the owner was pregnant or chronically nauseated, and there was no one else to take over the dog-feeding job?

The dental objection, though: That one is bogus. I know that at least one of the dog food companies have conducted studies demonstrating that dogs who eat special "dental health" kibble end up with less tartar on their teeth than dogs fed another diet. But it's pretty widely recognized that few (if any) dogs chew kibble well enough to scrape anything off their teeth – and especially off the exterior sides (cheek sides) of their teeth, where tartar is most likely to accumulate. If anything, crunching kibble can lodge pieces of the carbohydrate-laden food between the dog's teeth, where those carbs get broken down into sugars and contribute to the development of dental plaque.

Wet food lacks any sort of abrasive material, but the better products also contain far fewer (if any) carbohydrates, the main contributor in a dog's diet to the accumulation of dental plaque. Ideally, dogs chew and scrape their teeth clean by being given regular opportunities to chew appropriately sized fresh, raw bones in a supervised setting.

## LET'S TALK PROS

Enough about why people might not feed canned food to their dogs; here are a lot of reasons why they should.

■ **MEAT.** Animal protein is a staple – the most important ingredient – in the evolutionary diet of dogs. It may make up as much as 95 percent of what's in a "complete and balanced" canned food. Even lower-quality canned foods that contain several grains or other carb sources generally contain more animal protein than some high-quality dry foods, because there is a mechanical limit to the amount of animal tissue that can be incorporated into kibble in the manufacturing process. That limit has increased

significantly in the past decade or two, as technological innovations (and a demand for grain-free dry foods) have enabled pet food companies to push past former manufacturing limits. But high-protein, high-fat dry foods are highly vulnerable to oxidation. In contrast, canning is a near-perfect preservation system for foods with a high meat inclusion.

■ **THE HIGH MOISTURE CONTENT** is one compelling reason to feed canned food. On average, wet dog foods contain about 78 percent moisture, though the lower-quality products that contain grain may have as little as 65 percent and some of the soupier varieties may contain as much as 85 percent or more. A high-moisture diet is especially helpful for dogs who are prone to urinary tract infections – or, in fact, for dogs with any sort of urinary tract or kidney disorder.

■ **PALATABILITY.** Most dogs love canned food. The high meat (and moisture) content and the fresh (not rancid) aroma probably accounts for this. Even very old and sick dogs who have lost their appetites can usually be tempted into eating canned food.

■ **SAFETY.** The canning process kills any pathogenic bacteria that may have been in the food. Of course, as we learned during the massive pet food recalls in 2007, bacteria isn't the only potentially harmful thing that can be in pet food; if an ingredient is adulterated with something toxic (such as melamine, an

industrial chemical), canning won't render the ingredient safe.

■ **FAR FEWER ADDITIVES.** The canning process itself preserves the food, so preservatives are not needed or used. Artificial colors are used only rarely in canned food (and generally only in the lowest-quality products).

■ **DIGESTIBILITY.** Most dogs digest canned food well, with a reduced volume of stool, and often, a lower production of intestinal gas.

## QUITE VARIABLE

All things considered, good canned foods have a lot to offer our dogs. But the products offered by the pet food industry as a whole aren't at all equal; there is much more variety in this category of dog food than in dry food.

For example, as previously mentioned, the moisture content in canned foods varies quite a bit, from as little as 65 percent to as much as 85 percent.

That range will be reflected in the appearance of the food. Some canned foods look like soup or stew, with chunks of meat (or shredded meat) and other ingredients suspended in a gravy; these obviously contain the highest amount of moisture. The lowest-moisture canned foods are generally referred to as "loaf" type products; these are the products with a more or less uniform consistency (if you opened both ends of the can and dumped out the contents, you'd have a perfect can-shaped loaf of food).

A canned dog food may contain no carbohydrates whatsoever, consisting of just animal protein and some vitamins and minerals to "complete and balance" the diet. (Remember, dogs have no biological requirement for carbohydrates; all of their nutritional needs can be met with protein and fat sources.) At the other end of the spectrum, a canned food may contain lots of grain or other carbohydrate sources.

Another huge variable in this type of food is the amount of fat present. Products that contain a lot of carbs are likely to contain less fat than the carb-free foods, but most canned foods contain more fat than the



## WHO DO YOU THINK THESE FOODS ARE SUPPOSED TO APPEAL TO?

Industry analysts frequently observe that “humanization” has been a hot trend in pet food for the past few years. The term is used to describe products containing ingredients that are popular in the human food industry, as well as those that are manufactured and/or packaged to resemble human food.



Both “humanizing” strategies – using trendy ingredients and making pet foods look like human foods – are being used with great success to market pet food. And nowhere is this strategy being used to greater effect than in the canned food category. Because – soup! stew! yum!

As always, you have to read the ingredients list to determine whether a product has received a flattering makeover, with label art and language that make prosaic ingredients appear better – or whether the food does actually contain whole, healthy, “real” food ingredients.

Don't fall for pretty pictures of ingredients on the labels of pet food; be advised that the “chicken” that is used in pet food doesn't look anything like those gorgeous whole roasted chickens you see on some labels. Beautiful photographs or illustrations of dewy spinach leaves and robust whole carrots, glistening slabs of beef steak, or fat cubes of chicken breast, don't indicate that those ingredients are present in that form, amount, or proportion.

Similarly, don't allow adjectives to influence your perception of the ingredients. “Poached salmon” and “baby carrots” sound terrific, but “salmon” and “carrots” are the same thing, and laudable in their own right. Also, watch out for the word “flavor” – it doesn't necessarily mean the food contains whatever food the word “flavor” is attached to; it means only that the food contains a flavoring agent!

I expect marketing efforts to be disingenuous, so I don't take offense at these obviously manipulative tactics. However, there is one application of the term “humanization” that I find incredibly patronizing: when analysts credit humanization for the sales success of foods that contain genuinely top-quality, healthy ingredients, as if anyone who bought anything other than the least-expensive foods on the market was being silly and anthropomorphic.

Many of us buy pet foods with human-quality ingredients because we truly believe that fresh, clean, whole or lightly processed ingredients from reputable domestic sources are more likely to benefit our dogs and less likely to harm them than low-quality by-products from the other side of the globe – *not* because we want our dogs' food to *appear* to be as good (or better) than ours.

**These foods do not contain filet mignon or scrambled egg & sausage; they contain “filet mignon flavor” and “scrambled egg & sausage flavor.”**



average dry food. You may have difficulty finding the perfect canned food if your dog tends to gain weight easily, has trouble digesting fatty foods, or is prone to pancreatitis (or is one of the breeds that is prone to pancreatitis).

Keep in mind that fat contains more than twice the amount of calories per gram than protein or carbohydrate. (Fats contain 9 calories per gram; proteins and carbohydrates contain 4 calories per gram). High-fat foods, then, are also high-calorie foods. This is ideal for highly active dogs or canine cancer patients suffering from cancer cachexia (a condition that alters the dog's metabolism, causing the loss of body fat and muscle mass). Normal dogs, however, may experience alarmingly fast weight gain if switched to a high-fat food without a reduction in the amount of food given.

### HALLMARKS OF QUALITY

The “macro” traits discussed above – the amounts of moisture, carbs, and fat – are factors to keep in mind when choosing a food for your dog (and budget). But none of those factors qualify a product as a “good” or “bad” food. In our opinion, the quality of a food is revealed in its ingredients.

And since the main advantage of canning is its ability to deliver a much higher percentage of animal protein than kibble is able to, in a much more shelf-stable and bacteria-free form, the first and foremost indicator of a canned dog food's quality, in our opinion, is the amount and type of meat included in the formula.

Water (or broth) as required for processing is often among the first few ingredients listed on a canned food label, but a whole, named animal protein (or two) ought to be right next to it.

“Whole” means no by-products – although you should be aware that it doesn't mean only the muscle tissue you might ordinarily associate with chicken breasts and beef steaks; the official definition of each type of meat includes fat and

“the portions of skin, sinew, nerve, and blood vessels which normally accompany the flesh.” The legal definition of poultry (chicken, duck, and turkey) includes flesh and skin, with or without accompanying bone.

“Meat by-products” include lungs, spleen, kidneys, brain, livers, blood, bone, fat, and stomachs and intestines that have been “freed of their contents.” Poultry by-products include heads, feet, viscera (“free from fecal content and foreign matter except in such trace amounts as might occur unavoidably in good factory practice”). We do not consider foods that contain animal by-products for our “approved food” lists.

“Named” means a specific animal species – chicken, beef, pork, lamb – as opposed to “meat,” which can be just about anything.

Because we are looking for products with the highest possible inclusion of top-quality animal proteins, we’d choose a product with meat first on the label over one that listed water first and meat second.

If vegetables, grains, or other carb sources are used, we prefer to see them in their whole forms, rather than by-products (potatoes, rather than potato starch, for example).

The use of grains and other starches should be limited in a canned food; there is little sense in paying canned food prices for carbs. Otherwise, just add meat and water to a dry food! So a food that contained just one grain or vegetable by-product (such as oat bran) would be preferable to a product containing several (such as potato starch, oat fiber, and tomato pomace).

## TRAITS OF LOWER-QUALITY FOODS

There are a number of traits that automatically disqualify a canned food from our consideration. The first and most important is the inclusion of an *unnamed* animal source, such as:

- “Meat” or “meat by-products”
- “Poultry” or “poultry by-products”
- “Animal fat”

Wheat gluten is the next disqualifier. Wet foods often contain some sort of thickener or binder. Various types of “gum” (such as guar gum, from the seed

of the guar plant, and carrageenan gum, from seaweed) are common thickeners. Whole grains, potatoes, and sweet potatoes also can be used to thicken wet food. But wheat gluten (and some other glutens) are generally used in wet foods both to augment the protein content of the food (albeit with lesser quality amino acids) and to act as a binder, to hold together artificially formed “chunks” so that they resemble chunks of meat. In other words, it’s a cheap replacement for a greater amount of animal protein. If chunks of meat are present in a wet dog food, they should be *actual* chunks of meat.

Sugar, molasses, or other sweetener used in a canned food is another automatic strikeout. A food that contains quality meats shouldn’t need additional palatants to entice a dog’s appetite.

Finally, as ever, we disqualify foods that contain artificial colors, flavors, or preservatives. These are rare in wet foods, but do appear from time to time.

## THE RIGHT PRICE

The cost of canned food will undoubtedly factor into your purchasing decision. In general, the more meat that’s present in a canned food, the higher the price; also, higher-quality ingredients (such as organic or grass-fed meat sources) will increase the price of the food. In fact, some of these foods are *crazily* expensive; but some of you are willing and able to spend any amount for a suitable, top-quality food for your dog.

The local availability of these foods varies quite a bit and can also affect your buying options. Some are national brands that can be found in chain pet specialty stores (such as Petco and Petsmart); others are distributed only through independent pet specialty stores and perhaps natural food stores. Many can be purchased online, but shipping of canned food adds even more to an already high relative cost.

## HOW TO CHOOSE

Many readers would appreciate it if we would present a rank-ordered list of recommended foods. But this is an impossible task, since it would have to be customized for each individual dog, owner’s budget, and local availability. Plus, what’s “best” for my super-active, large-breed dog is not what’s “best” for your couch-potato Pug who is allergic to chicken.

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All of these products can be called “canned foods” – even the foods that aren’t packaged in a can! Canning refers to foods that are cooked (and, in fact, sterilized) inside a sealed container, whether it’s a can, pouch, or tray.

No, only *you* can identify appropriate prospects for your individual dog, keeping in mind the macro factors discussed above (the amount of moisture, carbs, and fat that you think will best suit your dog).

What we *will* do, however, is supply you with a list of potential candidates, companies that make canned foods that meet our basic requirements, and do not contain any disqualifying attributes. This “approved foods” list is a good place to start looking for foods that might be “best” for *your* dog.

**Please note that the products are NOT rated or ranked; they are listed alphabetically by COMPANY.**

It’s best to know what sort of attributes you are looking for before you walk into the pet supply store. For example, if your dog is overweight, you should be searching for a relatively lower-fat food with a higher protein content than the one you currently feed. Though pet food makers are not required to list the caloric content of their foods, many of them report this information voluntarily, and this can help you determine whether you might need to feed more or less of a particular food.

Some other selection tips:

■ If your dog is itchy (the number one symptom of allergy in dogs), look for a



limited ingredient food (a single protein and a single carb source, preferably not a grain) that contains *none* of the ingredients that his current food contains.

■ If your dog is too thin, or acts hungry all the time, look for a food with a higher fat content, particularly if the food you’re feeding now is low in fat.

■ If your dog seems to be losing condition as she ages, look for a food with *more* protein and *higher-quality* protein sources than the one she’s eating (i.e., chicken, rather than chicken by-products or “meat”).

■ If your dog is a picky eater, try rotating foods more often, and offer foods with different protein sources to see which are most appealing.

### ADJUST AS NECESSARY

You may have been told that it’s bad to switch foods, or you may have had a bad

experience when your dog ate something different and unauthorized (by you) and erupted in gas or diarrhea. Don’t be afraid to change foods frequently! It’s true that when a dog is fed the same diet for weeks and months on end, the amount and varieties of digestive enzymes and bacteria in their digestive tracts decrease. But the more frequently you change their diets, the more robust and capable their digestion becomes. You can also help your dog adjust more quickly to variety in his diet by giving him digestive enzyme, probiotic, and prebiotic supplements, to help his gut recolonize itself with digestion-aiding agents.

Then, watch your dog! Let him tell you how the new food works for him. Keep track of what foods you’ve tried and what has and has not worked on a calendar dedicated to this purpose or in a diet journal, so you can continue to make adjustments and, we hope, improvements in your dog’s diet.

## ANALYZING LABELS

Many dog owners would prefer us, or someone else, to tell them what to buy – “What’s the best food for my dog?” is the most frequent question we receive from readers. We can’t answer that! No one except your dog can do that.

However, we *can* tell you what to look for and what to look *out* for on a food label, so you can determine whether or not that product might be appropriate for your dog.

Blatant appeal to human appetites or accurate depiction of what’s inside? Only the ingredients list will reveal the truth.



Remember, “grain-free” does not mean the food is carb-free. Check the ingredients list.

Don’t pay any attention to pretty pictures or illustrations, or to the nice adjectives. An apple is an apple; a potato is a potato.

**ARTEMIS PET FOOD COMPANY, INC.** — Carson, CA; (800) 282-5876; artemiscompany.com

Artemis has two different lines of foods: **Fresh Mix**, available in 3 varieties, all containing meat and vegetables; and **Osopure**, available in 3 varieties, containing only meat and a vitamin/mineral mix.

**BLUE BUFFALO COMPANY** — Wilton, CT; (800) 919-2833; bluebuffalo.com

Blue Buffalo has six different lines of foods (it's a bit much, really): **Blue Basics** (3 varieties, including 1 for large breeds); **Blue Family Favorite Recipes** (6 varieties); **Blue Homestyle Recipes** (11 varieties, including 3 for small dogs and 1 for large breeds); **Blue Longevity** (3 "life-stage" varieties); **Blue's Stew** (5 varieties); and **Blue Wilderness** (6 grain-free varieties).

**CANIDAE CORP.** — San Luis Obispo, CA; (800) 398-1600; canidae.com

Canidae has two lines of foods: **Canidae Life Stages** (6 varieties, including 1 puppy and 1 senior variety); and its **Grain Free Pure** line (4 varieties).

**CANINE CAVIAR PET FOODS** — Norco, CA; (800) 392-7898; caninecaviar.com

Canine Caviar has two grain-free varieties.

**CASTOR & POLLUX PET WORKS** — Amarillo, TX; (800) 875-7518; castorpolluxpet.com

Castor & Pollux was purchased by Merrick Pet Foods a few years ago, but its products have retained their original formulas and separate identity. The Castor & Pollux lines remain: **Organix**, (4 varieties, all featuring organic ingredients); **Organix Grain-Free** (4 varieties, all featuring organic ingredients); **Natural Ultramix** (4 varieties); and **Natural Ultramix Grain-Free** (4 varieties).

**CENTRAL GARDEN & PET** — Walnut Creek, CA; (888) 500-6286; central.com

Central Garden & Pet bought Breeder's Choice a few years ago. It discontinued some of the old Breeder's Choice products, but still offers the original **AvoDerm** line of foods (11 varieties, including 1 puppy, 5 "stews," 1 "weight control," 1 vegetarian); and its **Pinnacle** line (3 varieties).

Bring some reading glasses – or a magnifying glass to the store! We chose this label to photograph because it is one of the more legible ones we could find. The print on some labels is far too small to read with the naked eye (and we asked some young people to back up our initial "cranky middle-aged" impression).

Look for whole, named sources of meat, with the water or broth (required for processing) appearing second or third, ideally (it's most commonly listed first).

This food contains several animal protein sources, thickening agents, and vitamin/mineral sources –that's all. That's great – if you are looking for a high-protein, high-fat food.



It's important to check and compare these percentages. Canned food tends to be high in fat, and many high-quality foods are far *too high* in fat for sedentary dogs.

The caloric content is not required to be on the label, but it's helpful to know, and may be easier for some owners to understand than the percentage of fat.

CANIDAE® Grain Free PURE Sky® Wet Formula is formulated to meet the nutritional levels established by the AAFCO Dog Food Nutrient Profiles for All Life Stages.

Look for an AAFCO statement, verifying that the food has met a requirement for a "complete and balanced" canine diet.

**DIAMOND PET PRODUCTS** — Meta, MO; (800) 442-0402; chickensoupforthepetloverssoul.com; tasteofthewildpetfood.com. Diamond makes a number of lines, including some that do not meet WDJ's selection criteria for an "approved" canned food. The Diamond lines that do meet our selection criteria are: **Chicken Soup for the Pet Lovers Soul**, (3 life-stage varieties); and **Taste of the Wild** (5 grain-free varieties).

**DOGSWELL** — Los Angeles, CA; (888) 559-8833; dogswell.com

Dogswell has two lines: **Happy Hips** (3 grain-free varieties); and **Vitality** (3 grain-free varieties).

**DRS. FOSTER & SMITH** — Rhinelander, WI; (800) 562-7169; drsfostersmith.com

Drs. Foster & Smith has three varieties.

**EVANGER'S DOG & CAT FOOD COMPANY** — Wheeling, IL; (847) 537-0102; evangersdogfood.com

Evangers is another company with too many products to keep track of: **Classic** (10 varieties); **Grain-Free Game Meats** (12 varieties); **Grain-Free Hand-Packed** (7 varieties); **Organics** (2 varieties); **Signature Series** (5 varieties); **Super Premium** (9 varieties). Note that many of these offerings are for supplemental feeding only; check with the company to identify the "complete and balanced" varieties.

**FROMM FAMILY FOODS** — Mequon, WI; (800) 325-6331; frommfamily.com

Fromm has two lines: **Fromm Four Star** (3 varieties); **Fromm Gold** (3 varieties).

**HALO, PURELY FOR PETS** — Tampa, FL; (800) 426-4256; halopets.com

Halo has three lines: "Original" **Spot's Stew**, with 4 varieties; **Spot's Choice "Shredded Recipes"** (4 grain-free recipes); and a vegan variety ("Vegan Garden Medley").

**HILLS PET NUTRITION** — Topeka, KS; (800) 445-5277; hillspet.com

Hills has several lines that do not meet our selection criteria, but recently launched a line that does: **Hills Ideal Balance**, with 6 varieties.

**HOUND & GATOS** — Manhattan, NY; (888) 896-2951; houndgatos.com

Hound & Gatos has 8 varieties. The company claims that all meats used in the formulas are "human quality."

**KENT NUTRITION GROUP** — Muscatine, IA; (877) 367-9225; bynaturepetfoods.com

Kent has two lines: **By Nature Entrees** (2 varieties); and **By Nature Organics** (8 varieties).

**LOTUS NATURAL FOOD** — Torrance, CA; (888) 995-6887; lotuspetfoods.com

Lotus has three "stew" varieties.

**MERRICK PET CARE** — Amarillo, TX; (800) 664-7387; merrickpetcare.com

Merrick has three lines: **Merrick Classic 5-Star Entrees** (25 varieties); **Merrick Grain-Free** (6 grain-free varieties); **Whole Earth Farms** (3 life-stage varieties).

**MULLIGAN STEW PET FOOD** — Jackson, WY; (888) 364-7839; mulliganstewpetfood.com

Mulligan Stew offers six varieties.



**NATURA PET PRODUCTS** — Fremont, NE; (800) 532-7261; naturapet.com

Natura was purchased by Procter & Gamble several years ago, but has retained its original formulas. Natura has four lines: California Natural (3 varieties); Evo (6 grain-free varieties); Innova (7 varieties); and new Innova Farmhouse Stew (4 varieties).

**NATURAL BALANCE** — Pacoima, CA; (800) 829-4493; naturalbalanceinc.com

Natural Balance was purchased by Del Monte Foods earlier this year. No changes to the original Natural Balance products have been seen so far. Natural Balance has two lines: LID Limited Ingredient Diet (8 varieties); and Ultra Premium (6).

**NATURE'S VARIETY** — St. Louis, MO; (888) 519-7387; naturesvariety.com

Nature's Variety has three lines: Homestyle by Prairie (7 "stew" varieties); Instinct (6 grain-free varieties); Prairie (4 varieties).

**PETCUREAN PET NUTRITION** — Abbotsford, BC, Canada; (866) 864-6112; petcurean.com

Petcurean has one line of canned food: Go! Natural (7 varieties, including 2 grain-free)

**PETGUARD** — Green Cove Springs, FL; (800) 874-3221; petguard.com

Petguard offers 13 varieties, including 2 vegetarian and 2 organic.

**PET-TAO** — Fairview, TN; (615) 934-3832; pettao.com

Pet-Tao offers 3 varieties.

**PETROPICS, LLC** — Sequim, WA; (360) 797-1421; petropics.com

Petropics has one line, Tiki Dog, with 10 varieties. These products are made in Thailand.

**SOLID GOLD HEALTH PRODUCTS FOR PETS, INC.** — El Cajon, CA; (800) 364-4863; solidgoldhealth.com

Solid Gold offers 5 varieties, including 2 grain- and gluten-free.

**SPRING NATURALS** — Mitchell, SD; (866) 868-0874; springnaturals.com

Spring Naturals offers two lines: With Whole Grains (4 varieties); and Grain-Free (7 varieties).

**THREE DOG BAKERY** — Kansas City, MO; (800) 487-3287; threedog.com

Three Dog Bakery has 4 varieties of "Gracie's Gourmet" food (in pouches).

**VERUS PET FOODS** — Abingdon, MD; (888) 828-3787; veruspetfoods.com

Verus has 11 varieties, including 4 new varieties utilizing Green Lipped Mussel.

**VET'S CHOICE** — Melville, NY; (800) 992-9738; vetschoice.com

Vet's Choice has 5 Holistic Health Extension varieties, including 2 grain-free; 2 are for supplemental feeding only.

**WELLPET** — Tewksbury, MA; (800) 225-0904; wellpet.com

Wellpet has three lines: Wellness, with 29 varieties, including 6 grain-free "Core"; 8 "Complete Health"; 4 "Simple", 6 "Stews"; and 5 "95%" foods for supplemental feeding; the Eagle Pack line (4); and Holistic Select line (8).

**WERUVA** — Natick, MA; (800) 776-5262; weruva.com

Weruva has 17 varieties of grain-free "stews." These products are made in Thailand.

# Social Engineering

*Your job, as lead architect for this project, is to develop a well-adjusted puppy.*

BY DENISE FLAIM

**A**n unsocialized puppy walks into a bar ...

Actually, the joke ends there. Because when it comes to puppies who don't get lots of opportunities to interact positively with other dogs, new people, or novel situations, the end result usually isn't very funny.

While curiosity and the ability to learn don't have expiration dates, young puppies have an important behavioral "sweet spot" between the ages of 8 and 16 weeks. During this critical period, your dog builds her impressions and attitudes about what is normal and acceptable. At this time more than any other, positive experiences with the world around her build a solid foundation for the rest of your dog's (we hope) long life.

As recently as 30 years ago, trainers and owners didn't talk much about puppy socialization. But today, most people know about the importance of making puppies well-rounded little Renaissance hounds. And as they have gotten busy signing up for puppy kindergarten and arranging play dates with the dog next door, a new concern has developed: Fueled more by enthusiasm than knowledge, some people expose puppies to the world in a way that emphasizes its dangers rather than its delights.

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**Protect your pup!** If you take him to a place where he's likely to get swarmed by children (or even, in this case, dog-loving young adult athletes), be ready to intervene so he doesn't get overwhelmed by the attention. (The owner can't even see her pup in the middle of this scrum!)

Like anything in life, it's all about balance. Here are some tips to help you guide your puppy through this brave new world in a way that will broaden his horizons and build his confidence.

## PROOF POSITIVE

Socialization isn't just about exposing your puppy to new things. It's also about carefully monitoring these interactions to ensure they are positive ones. Though puppies can seem precociously unflappable – especially when they are gnawing your ankles – they are sensitive souls who can easily become overwhelmed. Your job is to gauge the tenor of a situation by reading your puppy's body language.

"If your puppy clings to you, if she's yawning or turning her head away, she's stressed. Forcing the puppy will just

make it worse," says trainer and author Teoti Anderson of Lexington, South Carolina. "Puppy emotions can be so fleeting. If more puppy owners paid attention to that, and just let the puppy go at his own pace, they'd avoid a lot of problems."

In the buffet of sensory stimulation that your puppy encounters, make sure his experience is a quick snack rather than a binge. A visit to your child's soccer game, for instance, can do more harm than good if you are distracted, a pack of kids swarms the cute new puppy, and someone's snarky Schnoodle meanders over to chomp instead of chat. Less really can be more.

"I like lots of frequent, short sessions. Some puppies shouldn't go out every day, especially if you have a puppy that's a little shy," Anderson says. "Instead, find five friends of different ages and ethnicities and have them over for 10 minutes." Your puppy will be exposed to a variety of new, interesting people, "and you've ended it before it can go badly."

Be sure to monitor the humans in this equation, too, especially if they are not very dog savvy: Something as simple as holding a puppy incorrectly – letting his legs dangle without supporting his bottom, for instance – can make him feel unstable and unsafe.

## NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Speaking of the home front, that's often one place that's ignored as people rush out to take their new puppies to Home Depot parking lots and the Petco treat



**An adult dog who is willing and able to play gently but firmly with a puppy is worth his weight in gold to the puppy's owner. Ideally, he will tolerate a certain amount of puppy hijinks but won't allow the pup to push or boss him around.**



aisles, hoping to imprint them with a zest for the outside world.

“People take their puppies out into the world to socialize them, but they forget to bring other living beings into their home,” says trainer and author Pia Silvani, assistant vice president and behavior specialist at St. Hubert’s Animal Welfare Center in Madison, New Jersey.

This doesn’t just apply to other people and children; be sure to invite some canine guests, too. “Many dogs are just not used to having other dogs coming on their property,” Silvani says. “The risk is that they can become territorial in their own home” because they’ve simply never had the chance to learn how to politely welcome a visitor.

## CLASS ACTS

Puppy kindergarten classes are a great way for puppies as young as eight weeks old to meet other dogs and people, provided it is in a controlled environment. A good class will require your puppy to have at least one vaccine, and will disinfect the classroom space before puppies assemble to cut down on the risk of communicable diseases.

Before plunking down your cash and signing up, visit a session without your puppy. Watch and see how the instructors manage the class. Are they watching out for different breed-specific playing styles? (Pairing a mouthy retriever with a chase-motivated herder might not end well.) Are they intervening and redirecting behavior that might escalate to something unpleasant?

Above all, these classes should not be a no-holds-barred romper room. Even if they don’t know it, when human kindergarteners play, they are being taught important social concepts like self-control and respect for others, and it should be the same with their furry counterparts.

“Some people have the misconception that they’re going to bring their puppy into class and it will be an hour of playtime. And they believe if they don’t have that their puppy is not getting socialized,” Silvani says. “But socialization

can mean sitting next to another dog in a calm fashion – it doesn’t have to entail wild, frenzied play. That’s a part of it, so they learn to read body language – but it’s a minor part.”

Veterinarian, trainer, and author Sophia Yin, DVM, reminds that avoiding inappropriate friends is just as important for four-leggers, too.

“People just think all play is fine because that’s a dog being a dog,” she says. “But if you had a child, you wouldn’t let him play with a bunch of kids who are swearing and hitting each other. Puppies can learn all kinds of unwanted behaviors” – and start morphing into the canine version of a schoolyard bully.

“For dogs who are having fun, one of the worst things they can learn is to play too roughly and have no impulse control,” Dr. Yin continues. “By letting them play in an ugly way, they get more and more practice being overly aroused. Over-arousal and aggression are on a continuum. If dogs learn to have no self-control and react without thinking, they can become aggressive.”

The lesson that Yin wants puppies to walk (or bounce!) away with is that calming down has tangible benefits. “I want dogs to be able to come when called, focus on me, and the reward is that they can go play again. It teaches the dog that, ‘Hey, it’s not that I can’t have these things. I just have to have a little self-control and be polite about it.’”

Anderson adds that while puppy kindergarten shouldn’t be a mosh pit, it shouldn’t be “a glorified obedience class,” either. “Obedience is the easy part,” she says. “But the time for that puppy foundation is finite.” Baby puppies should be learning more general life skills, she says, like how to accept handling and grooming (including the oft-dreaded nail cutting or grinding), and bite inhibition.

## ADULT ENTERTAINMENT

As their name suggests, puppy kindergarten classes are full of, well, puppies. But trainer and author Trish King of Marin County, California, points out that even more than playing with their peers, youngsters need positive interactions with older dogs who will help them understand and respect boundaries.

“Sometimes it’s really hard to find appropriate adults for puppies to play with,” she says. As a result, “many puppies have trouble learning how to play appropriately, show deference to adults, and back off.”

At all costs, avoid play dates with Cujo wanna-bes, which sounds easier than it actually is. Some people are utterly clueless about their dog’s social graces, or lack thereof. “You have to screen the other dog and be realistic,” Anderson reminds. “If the adult has a history of not liking other dogs, introducing him to a puppy will not miraculously make it better.”

After asking how social the potential playmate is with other dogs, it’s also important to inquire about his play style. “Does he play roughly? Is he mouthy? Is he a chaser?” asks Silvani, adding that breed-specific temperament differences, as well as size differential, are important, too.

Finally, absolutely, positively no dog parks, which can be magnets for undersocialized dogs of all ages and their benignly, but dangerously clueless, owners.

## DO NO HARM

One of the biggest obstacles to proper puppy socialization can come from a seemingly unlikely source: veterinarians.

While no veterinarian wants to see a carefree puppy develop into a growling hermit, his or her primary focus is

making sure that your puppy is not being exposed to infectious disease. As a result, many vets insist that their clients not take puppies out into the world until their booster vaccine series is complete and they are fully immunized, which is typically at 16 weeks – just when the vitally important socialization window begins to slam shut.

Veterinary objections to even a nuanced approach to puppy socialization – arranging play dates with known, healthy dogs, and avoiding well-trafficked areas such as parks – are “huge,” Silvani says. “A lot of times I hear vets in Manhattan saying, ‘Don’t let your puppy hit the ground until he’s six months old’” – leaving legions of urbanites to paper-train large-breed puppies in postage-stamp-sized bathrooms or terraces. In private, she continues, many vets will acknowledge the importance of socialization, but will also voice concerns that they will be liable if something does go wrong.

King understands why many vets are so cautious in this regard, but points out that they could be unwittingly creating a situation that is just as life threatening: “The number-one reason dogs are surrendered to shelters is behavioral problems.”

Keep up the good work after puppy class; socialization is not something you just check off and are done with.

In other words, the odds are greater that a dog might be euthanized for a serious behavioral issue than coming down with parvovirus or kennel cough.

Dr. Yin says many of her veterinary colleagues also don’t realize that the science doesn’t support their concerns. She points to a recent study published this year in the Journal of the American Animal Hospital Association that found puppies who had been vaccinated once and attended socialization classes were at no greater risk of parvovirus infection than vaccinated puppies who did not attend those classes.



**While puppy play is a hugely valuable part of a puppy kindergarten gathering, the class should never be a free-for-all. Occasional breaks from the action help calm and re-focus the puppies.**

Of course, says Dr. Yin, be sure the class follows good sanitary protocols: She knows of one that uses a steam cleaner on its floor several times a week to kill bacteria and other nasties. Requiring that puppies have at least one vaccination and be free from illness are other basic requirements.

Dr. Yin notes the American Veterinary Medical Association is working on a statement on puppy socialization. And the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior already has a position statement on the same topic, which concludes that the risk of contagious disease is the lesser of two evils compared to the effects of inadequate socialization.

“During [the first three months of life] puppies should be exposed to as many new people, animals, stimuli and environments as can be achieved safely and without causing overstimulation manifested as excessive fear, withdrawal or avoidance behavior,” the AVSAB paper says. “For this reason, the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior believes that it should be the standard of care for puppies to receive such socialization before they are fully vaccinated.”

Despite these welcome changes in attitude about the importance of socializing puppies, you might very well encounter resistance from your veterinarian. In the end, it’s up to you to weigh the pros and cons, sort out your level of comfort, and make the best decision for you and your puppy.

## THE DOCTOR IS IN

When it comes to your veterinarian, don’t forget to socialize your puppy to that office, and its strange smells and sights, when you have no other reason to go there! “Don’t go there only when your puppy needs his shots,” Anderson advises. “Have the vet techs give him a cookie and leave.”

To make bona-fide visits go smoother, Anderson suggests accustoming your puppy to stand on a mat at home – a rubber-backed bath mat is fine – so you can transfer that surface to the vet’s office. Placing it on the scale or exam table will reduce your puppy’s anxiety, “like Linus with his blanket.”

## VARIETY SHOW

Socialization isn’t just about exposure to new people and places; it’s also about acclimating a puppy to all sorts of experiences: loud noises like hairdryers and fire trucks; things that move oddly, like people on crutches or skates; strange surfaces such as manhole covers, deep sand, and wooden bridges; and all types of weather. The list goes on and on.

Anderson remembers babysitting a dog who would eliminate only on pine straw, because the only walks she had ever taken were in conifer-covered woods. “I had this huge, fenced-in backyard,” but her canine visitor insisted on pottying right next to the house – the only part of the property that had pine trees near it. Similarly, dogs who are accustomed to doing their business only on

grass will be stymied when visiting a city and encountering blocks of pavement and blacktop.

Silvani makes sure to expose her dogs to cats and wildlife, taking puppies outside to watch a nearby herd of deer, and rewarding them for their calm behavior and attentiveness to her. “It creates a positive association with wildlife,” she explains. “This way you don’t have a dog who’s out there chasing chipmunks and squirrels, which can be a real danger.”

Conversely, make sure they are introduced to modern conveniences, especially those that involve movement, such as elevators and automatic doors. If you live in a rural setting, find safe and controlled ways to expose your puppy to traffic and the noise of suburban and urban settings – sirens, horn honks, rattling trucks. If you don’t have easy access to the real thing, invest in a CD of city sounds. And while you’re at it, you might pick up a recording of thunderstorms, another behavioral bugaboo that you can defuse with a positive association, such as feeding your puppy dinner while the recording plays.

Socialization to water can be a literal lifesaver. At five years old, Silvani was walking a dog she rescued when he became dangerously overheated. She remembers trying to walk him into a nearby stream to cool him off, but he refused – no amount of pulling or cajoling would make him reconsider. Silvani learned her lesson those many years ago: Today, she takes all her puppies for riverside romps where they play, get treats, and learn to love the wet stuff.

## LEAVE FLOODING TO NOAH

Almost inevitably, your puppy will encounter a situation or person that frightens him. The answer is not to force the puppy to “deal with it,” but rather to give him the space to come to terms with his fear on his own.

“If a puppy is running from a tall man wearing a hat, don’t put the puppy in the man’s lap and say, ‘He has to get over it.’ That’s overwhelming,” Anderson says.

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**Just as you should be going out of your way to introduce your pup to a variety of people, you should make an effort to expose him to a variety of other animal species. Use a leash or other barrier to keep both parties safe and untraumatized.**

“But if you put the puppy on the ground, and the puppy chooses to go over and say hello,” that’s a better tactic. (Having the behatted man sit on the floor, with a pocket full of juicy treats, would nudge that encounter in the right direction.)

When a puppy is startled or concerned, some trainers advocate ignoring the fearful behavior and not comforting the puppy, lest you reinforce the reaction.

King thinks that kind of thinking is misguided – and that it misses the larger point. “It doesn’t do any harm to console, but I think it doesn’t do any good, either,” she says. “You want to switch over the brain, so he’s not thinking about how afraid he is, but rather how much fun he’s having.” Like a child who’s skinned his knee, you can go over, console him briefly and make sure he’s okay – then change the subject to something fun so the sniffing stops.

## KEEP THE WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY AJAR

While two- to four-month-old puppies are at the prime age for socialization, their ability to soak up new experiences doesn’t shut off like a faucet once they pass that landmark.

“Probably the most critical factor to me is, don’t stop after puppy class,” Silvani says. “Continue on in the first year” – especially into adolescence, when percolating hormones can create new behavioral challenges. “It’s going to benefit the dog for the rest of his life.”

Conversely, King notes that many people believe dogs can be socialized indefinitely, but at some point, it becomes an issue of reprogramming instead of programming, and breaking habits is

more difficult and time-consuming than preventing or short-circuiting them in the first place.

“The brain continues to grow for a while and then it stops – new connections aren’t made as fast,” she says. “Older dogs don’t learn as fast or take in as much.” By the time a dog is three or so, the odds of teaching him a new world view are not as favorable as they would have been when he was younger.

## JUST DO IT

We’ve arguably never lived in more dog-friendly times, which should make socializing new puppies a snap. But ironically, it’s that very same modern lifestyle – with its competing demands and time-starved schedules – that can derail the best intentions.

“Puppies are so much work, and I think we are creatures of ‘there’s always time later,’” Anderson says. “People come home, and the cute puppy is now peeing and chewing on oh-my-God-my-favorite-shoe, and the kids have soccer this week, and I had to work late, so we’ll do it next week. And the next thing you know, it’s a six-month-old dog.”

It doesn’t take much to shape your new puppy into a worldly and well-adjusted canine citizen. With the right supervision, that unsocialized puppy can walk into a bar, and – after getting a few scratches behind the ear and a handful of Chex Mix from the bartop – saunter right back out, pleased as punch. 🐾

*Denise Flaim of Revodana Ridgebacks in Long Island, New York, shares her home with three Ridgebacks, 9-year-old triplets, and a very patient husband.*



PHOTO BY HEATHER HOULAHAN

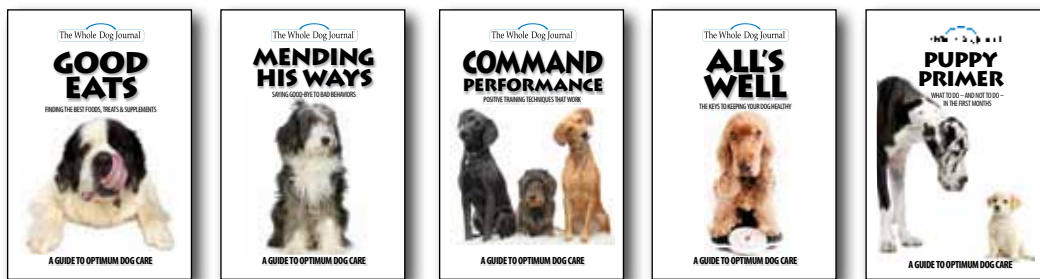
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