

The Whole Dog Journal™



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The Whole Dog



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Do Something

This holiday season, take a few minutes and do something – anything! – for dogs less fortunate than your own.

BY NANCY KERNS

My friends and family members know that I have a standing offer: If they know anyone who is looking for a dog – any sort of dog – I will keep an eye out for the dog of their dreams at my local shelter. And if I find a particularly good candidate, I will even take the dog home and foster him for a few weeks. I do this so I can work with the dog a little, to make sure he knows a few basic behaviors to impress his new owners (and fit in well in his new home). This way, too, if they have questions about a training or behavior issue down the road, I'm familiar enough with the dog that I can offer the most appropriate advice for dealing with that dog.

I love doing this. First and foremost, because I get the satisfaction of getting *one more dog* out of a shelter – and prevent *one more person* from naively supporting a puppy mill or backyard breeder. I also relish hearing how much my friends or relatives are enjoying their new dogs. And I love helping one more dog get off to a good start in his forever home. It's deeply satisfying to me.

But many of my friends express the same concern about the time I spend combing through the shelter kennels: "How can you spend that much time in the shelter? It's too sad!"

It *can* be sad. I've had some really bad days in the shelter, where the sheer size of the pet overpopulation problem temporarily overwhelmed me, or some of the animals' tragic circumstances – visited upon them through the negligence of irresponsible, ignorant, and/or uncaring humans – made me lose faith in mankind.

But then I look at the people who work at the shelter. Somehow, they manage to face horror *every day* and still do everything they can to make the animals in their care as comfortable as possible. From the director of the shelter, who after 20-plus years of shelter work can still cry over an "owner-surrendered" 7-year-old Labrador howling with a broken heart in the kennels, to the people who have hundreds of kennels and

cages to clean every day but still manage a kind word and caress for every animal at their fingertips – the people who do this work full time are an inspiration to me. So I try not to be a burden, or make their jobs harder by exclaiming about every sad case that I see. I try to just do my little bit.

And my faith in humanity is restored a bit when I see other people doing what *they* can to help. The tottering elderly couple who buy a big bag of dog food on their fixed incomes every month, and come to the front counter of the shelter to ask if an employee can carry it from their car into the shelter. The breed rescue people who take heartworm-positive dogs for treatment (in our shelter, heartworm infected dogs are usually euthanized). The quiet lady who comes once a week and sits for hours in the cat room, petting and brushing cats and dispensing love. The brusque, sour-faced lady who comes every Tuesday and doesn't leave until she has taken every single dog in the kennels outside to potty. The veterinarian who works at the shelter for one week each month, performing spay/neuter surgeries and treating sick animals, for no payment whatsoever. There is no limit to the number or variety of things that people can do to help save lives and make things just a little bit better for the unfortunate animals in a shelter. And it all really does help.

NK

Thrift *and* Health

Five things to do to save money when feeding your dog a home-prepared diet.

BY MARY STRAUS

Feeding fresh food to your dogs can help make them healthy and happy, but it can also be expensive, particularly for those with large dogs. Whether you feed a completely homemade diet or just want to improve your dog's diet by adding fresh foods, there are many ways to reduce costs. Here are some ideas to consider:

1 BUY A FREEZER. Buying in bulk, or stocking up when you find good sales, is one of the best ways to save money on meat, but it requires having a place to store the food. A separate freezer gives you options that you won't have if you're trying to fit your dog's food into your refrigerator's small freezer along with your own food.

Buy the biggest freezer you think you might need; they fill up quickly. Chest freezers hold more, but it's easier to find what you're looking for in an upright model. Be sure to label food clearly, including the date it was frozen, so you don't lose track of what's in there.

If a new freezer is out of your price range, look for a used freezer on craigslist.org or other local listings. Keep in mind that older models are less energy efficient, so what you save in upfront costs may be quickly lost in your monthly electric bill.

2 FEED GRAINS. Many people who feed homemade diets, particularly raw diets, do not include grains. Sometimes this is necessary, as grains can contribute to inflammation, weight gain, and even seizures in some dogs. Not all dogs have problems with grains, however, and they



Freezers are not expensive. We quickly found this 5.5 cubic-foot freezer, capable of holding up to 175 pounds of food, for less than \$200 (not even on sale!).

provide inexpensive calories. If your dog is healthy and does not react to grains, there's no reason to leave them out of the diet. Healthy grains to feed include rice (brown rice is more nutritious than white rice), oatmeal, barley, quinoa, and millet.

Other starchy foods that can be used in place of or in addition to grains include sweet potatoes, winter squashes, pasta, and regular potatoes. Colored vegetables provide the most nutrition.

Grains and starchy vegetables should not make up more than 50 percent of the total diet. All starchy foods need to be well cooked in order to be digestible by dogs.

3 JOIN A GROUP. If possible, join a co-op or raw feeding group in your area. Some groups buy directly from suppliers in order to get wholesale prices and take advantage of bulk discounts. Others may just exchange information about where to find unusual items and get the best prices.

If there is no group in your area, consider starting one if you know of other dog owners who might be interested. Groups that are far away can still provide ideas and information about how they are run and their product sources.

4 LOOK FOR BARGAINS. In addition to keeping an eye out for sales, talk to

the meat managers at local stores to find out what they do with meat that is about to pass its "sell by" date. They might be willing to save them for you, especially if you buy regularly. Similarly, talk to the produce manager about how you might be able to pick up vegetables and fruits that might otherwise just be thrown out. Ask about egg cartons with broken eggs as well.

Meat managers may also be able to purchase cases of items for you that they don't usually carry, such as beef heart or chicken necks. These parts are often less expensive than those more commonly sold for human consumption. You will likely have to buy the whole case, but you should get a bulk discount.

Ethnic markets are a good source for unusual and inexpensive parts. And don't forget farmer's markets for fresh, locally grown produce. Talk to the vendors about purchasing products that might otherwise be discarded at the end of the day.

Hunters can also be a source for cheap (or even free) meat. While the hunters want the meat, other less desirable parts, such as the heart, liver, kidney, and tongue, may just be thrown away. As long as the organs are healthy, they're fine to feed to your dog. Contact your state wildlife department to find butchers who process wild game in your area if you don't have friends who hunt.

5 DON'T TRY TO BE PERFECT. Some dog owners won't feed fresh foods because they insist on feeding only organic food, and it's too expensive. While organic foods are great, even ordinary supermarket foods are healthier for your dog than processed dog food.

If you don't have time or can't afford to feed a complete homemade diet, you can improve your dog's overall nutrition by adding fresh foods to a commercial diet, or by feeding homemade meals once or twice a week. Healthy leftovers (not fatty trim) are also good for your dog and cost nothing to feed. 🐾

Mary Straus is the owner of DogAware.com; see "Raw Food Resources" on that site to find local co-ops and buying groups. Straus and her Norwich Terrier, Ella, live in the San Francisco Bay Area.

NEW FLEA AND TICK PRODUCTS HIT THE MARKET

What's new in the world of conventional flea and tick treatments?

Lately, it seems like new flea and tick control products have been popping up left and right. I suspect this is due to some of the original patents running out. When a patent expires, other companies can create generic versions of the same product, usually for less money. This inspires the original companies to create new products that they can patent anew. In some cases, new products are introduced because fleas and ticks may be developing resistance to the older products, lowering their efficacy. Most new products, including all those introduced this year, are just new combinations of older ingredients. Here's a rundown on these new options.

Bayer introduced **Advantage II** and **K9 Advantix II** in January 2011. The added ingredient in these new topical products is pyriproxyfen (Nylar), an insect growth regulator that inhibits the development of eggs and larvae, helping to break the flea life cycle. Other insect growth regulators used in flea control products include lufenuron (Program and Sentinel) and S-methoprene (see Certifect below). Pyriproxyfen was used in Bio Spot flea control products in the past, but was replaced with S-methoprene around 2007. These new products are also marketed under the name Advantage Plus and K9 Advantix Plus. Pyriproxyfen is also used on cats.

Other ingredients in Advantage products include imidacloprid, used to control fleas, and permethrin (K9 Advantix only), used to kill ticks. Permethrin is highly toxic to cats, and products containing permethrin are unsafe to use on dogs in households that include cats, particularly if the dog and cat share sleeping areas or the cat grooms the dog.

As with many flea and tick control ingredients, permethrin may also be more likely to cause problems for small dogs, according to the EPA's Review of 2008 Incident Reports for Pet Spot-on Pesticides. Shih Tzu, Bichon Frise, Chihuahua, Yorkshire Terrier, Maltese, and Pomeranian are breeds that appear to be overrepresented in adverse incidents. Bayer also makes Advantage Multi, which combines imidacloprid with moxidectin for heartworm prevention.

Also in January, Elanco (a division of Eli Lilly) introduced **Trifexis**, a new *oral* product that combines spinosad (Comfortis), used to kill fleas, with milbemycin oxime (found in Interceptor and Sentinel), used to prevent heartworm infection and intestinal parasites. Comfortis is a newer flea-control product introduced in November 2007 that appears to be more effective than either Advantage or Frontline (likely due to fleas developing resistance to these older products), but it may also have more side effects, such as vomiting, particularly when the medication is first used. Spinosad should not be combined with the very high doses of

ivermectin (Heartgard) or milbemycin oxime (Interceptor) used to treat demodectic mange, as it increases their neurological effects, but should be safe when used along with the normal heartworm preventive dosage found in this new product. Spinosad is not recommended for dogs with seizure disorders.

Unlike most flea and tick control products, Comfortis and Trifexis are administered orally rather than topically, via a pill that is given once a month. Neither product is recommended for dogs weighing less than 5 pounds. Comfortis is not recommended for puppies under the age of 14 weeks, and Trifexis warns that younger puppies may experience a higher rate of vomiting. These products are not approved for cats, but a similar product to Comfortis called Assurity, marketed for cats. Comfortis is also marketed under the name AcuGuard.

In July, Merial introduced **Certifect**, likely as a result of the patent on their Frontline products expiring. Certifect contains fipronil (the active ingredient in Frontline, used to kill fleas and ticks, and to help control sarcoptic mange) and S-methoprene (Precor, an insect growth regulator also found in Frontline Plus). Certifect adds amitraz, one of the most effective, but also more toxic, methods of tick control. Amitraz is also used in the Preventic tick collar, and in Mitaban, used to treat demodectic mange.

Amitraz should not be used on dogs with diabetes or heart problems, and older amitraz products warn against using them on puppies less than four months of age and very small dogs. Amitraz, a monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI), can also be dangerous when combined with certain other drugs, including antidepressants (such as those used to treat separation anxiety), Anipryl (used for canine cognitive dysfunction and Cushing's disease), and DL-Phenylalanine (DL PA), used to treat chronic pain in dogs. While Frontline and Frontline Plus are safe to use on cats, Certifect is not, as amitraz is toxic to cats.



The only product using a new ingredient (rather than a new combination of older ingredients) is **Vectra**, introduced in 2007 and sold only through veterinarians. Vectra products (there are several) all include dinotefuran, a newer insecticide that kills fleas on contact. Vectra also contains the insect growth regulator pyriproxyfen (see Advantage II above), and Vectra 3D adds permethrin to kill ticks (similar to K9 Advantix). Vectra is also sold as FirstShield and SimpleGuard. Vectra products are made by Summit VetPharm, originally a subsidiary of the Hartz Mountain Corp. (Summit was sold to CEVA Animal Health in 2010).

We'd advise caution in using any of these new products. Adding more chemicals and using more toxic ingredients may make these products more effective, but it also increases their potential for adverse effects. In some cases, such as when nothing else is effective for dogs with flea allergies or regular tick exposure, the benefit may be worth the risk, but we wouldn't recommend switching if what you're using now is working.

For those who want to try the new generic versions of older products, there are a few things to keep in mind. First, these products may not be identical to the original product. While the active ingredient is the same, other inert ingredients, such as those used to spread topical applications across the body, may differ. The generic product might not be as effective, or might cause problems for your dog that didn't occur with the original product. Watch for any signs of adverse effects, or of products not working as well, whenever you try anything new.

Be careful where you buy your flea and tick products, particularly online, where many counterfeits are found. Be sure that the seller is trustworthy. One solution is to look for the Veterinary-Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites (Vet-VIPPS) seal of approval (see "When Buying Veterinary Drugs Online, Look for Accredited Sites," June 2011). – *Mary Straus*

BACK INTO THE WATER

Record flooding in Thailand means epic disaster for dogs and cats.

When most of us hear about animal caught in natural disasters, we sigh and fret – and then move on. One close friend of WDJ has done more.

Rain has been falling relentlessly in Thailand since July, and many parts of the country are experiencing the worst flooding reported since World War II. Bangkok, the capital and the most densely populated city in the country (with more than 9 million residents) is suffering from particularly severe flooding. This is in part due to the fact that one of Thailand's major rivers, the Chao Phraya River, flows through the city, and the city sprawls over the plains and river deltas that lead into the Bay of Bangkok. Many inhabitants (human and otherwise) have nowhere to escape the flooding.

Bangkok is also home to one of the largest populations of stray dogs in the world. It's been estimated that as many as 300,000 stray dogs roam the city's streets at any given time. Thailand's citizens are mostly Buddhists; they don't believe in killing animals unnecessarily. Dogs are not eaten in Thailand. In fact, the street dogs are often fed by kind-hearted residents.

With the severe flooding, however, and people struggling to keep themselves and their families out of the water, dogs (and cats) are in dire straits. Mass evacuations of people are being carried out by the government, and people are not being permitted to take their pets. News reports show animals on roofs and in trees, and very few volunteers are available to help rescue, house, and care for them. Abandoned animals and permanently homeless animals alike are fending for themselves in the flooded city.

Sandi Thompson, a dog trainer and owner of Bravo!Pup Dog and Puppy Training in Berkeley, California (and frequent model for articles in WDJ), knows what it's like to be waist-deep in water with no help on the horizon. In December 2004, Thompson was vacationing on an island resort in southern Thailand when she was caught in the Indian Ocean tsunami that killed an estimated 230,000 people in 14 countries. She and her traveling companion lost all of their possessions, but thanks to their credit cards, were able (over the course of 5 days) to secure spots on boats and buses and eventually make their way back to the mainland and fly home to the U.S. She's been haunted by the deaths and devastation she witnessed during that ordeal, and admits to suffering post-traumatic stress, particularly when she is exposed to news like that coming out of Thailand right now.

Thompson couldn't just read the articles and move on. She started researching and contacting animal-welfare organizations that help the street dogs, and asking if they needed "boots on the ground" to help in animal rescue operations in Bangkok. She very quickly learned that yes, help would very much be appreciated. Thompson put her own dog (and training business) in the hands of friends and employees for three weeks and boarded a flight to Thailand.

Thompson is volunteering for the Soi Dog Foundation (Soi means "street" or "alley" in the Thai language), an organization that usually focuses on feeding and providing spay/neuter services for the street animals. The Soi Dog Foundation is one of a number of animal welfare groups in the country helping to rescue and evacuate animals in Bangkok. Using boats in the flooded streets, the Foundation has already rescued hundreds of animals and relocated them to a shelter facility outside of the city – and safe from the flood waters.



Photo of dogs rescued from floodwaters courtesy of Wildlife Friends of Thailand: wfft.org.

Thompson's familiarity with Thailand and her skill with handling dogs and other animals (she volunteers at the Oakland Zoo, working with numerous animal species) uniquely qualify her for this rescue effort; she emphasizes that what's needed the most right now are donations of dog and cat food, cages, crates, leashes, veterinary supplies – and money, so that all of these things can be purchased to help care for the animals until they can be reunited with their owners or new homes can be found for them.

Many of the dogs rescued by Soi Dog are being taken to a refuge 150 km from Bangkok that is run by the Wildlife Friends of Thailand. It's Thompson's understanding that this is where she will be helping handle and care for the rescued dogs. (For more about this group, see wfft.org.) We encourage anyone else who feels called on to help the unfortunate animals of Bangkok to donate what they can to the Soi Dog Foundation, telephone 081-788-4222; soidog.org. 🐾

– *Nancy Kerns*

Walking in Water

Hydrotherapy can improve a dog's balance, muscle tone, stamina, and strength, all without pounding or stress on his joints.

BY CJ PUOTINEN; PHOTOS BY STEPHEN NAGY

Splish splash! These dogs aren't takin' a bath; they're working out in pools large and small to get in shape, stay active, or recover from accidents, illness, or surgery. Whether swimming breeds or those that prefer to keep their feet dry, dogs of all ages have gotten stronger, decreased lameness, loosened tight muscles, increased coordination, improved balance, hastened healing, and increased stamina and flexibility with hydrotherapy.

Because of its effectiveness, hydrotherapy, or water exercise, has become popular at veterinary clinics and canine rehabilitation centers. The first hydrotherapy equipment was built for horses and racing Greyhounds, but the treatment is now available to dogs and cats in the United States, Canada, Japan, Western Europe, and the United Kingdom. Typically performed in a swimming

pool or a plexiglass chamber holding an underwater treadmill, hydrotherapy stimulates the cardiovascular and lymph systems, strengthens muscles, and allows painful joints to move comfortably.

Hydrotherapy works because water makes exercise weightless. Swimming or walking in water exercises joints and muscles without the jarring effects of gravity and hard surfaces. Many patients

with arthritis, hip or elbow dysplasia, joint pain, cruciate ligament ruptures, and bone fractures have made significant improvements thanks to water exercise. So have patients with neurological disorders such as degenerative myelopathy or problems caused by spinal strokes. A spinal stroke or fibrocartilagenous embolism (FCE) occurs when an obstruction or clot blocks the spinal cord's blood supply, resulting in a loss of mobility.

In October 2010, Gracie, a nine-year-old Dalmatian who lives with Jeanne Stehno in Great Falls, Montana, suffered a painful back injury and underwent a hemilaminectomy, in which herniated disc material was removed from beneath her spinal cord. Manipulation of the spinal cord can produce neurological symptoms, and after surgery, Gracie's hind legs dragged and she couldn't walk. She was able to use a cart, but Stehno hoped for a more complete recovery.

At the animal hospital where Stehno works as a receptionist, an emergency veterinarian recommended Certified Canine Rehabilitation Practitioner Jennifer Hill in Helena, Montana, 90 miles away. Beginning in January 2011, Gracie and Stehno made the trip every 7 to 10 days for hydrotherapy.

"Gracie is *not* a fan of swimming," says Stehno, "but the minute she got in the water, her legs began moving. By June, when she took her last swim, Gracie had learned to walk again and her legs were strong. She can go up and down stairs on her own, and while she still has occasional moments of being unsteady on her feet, it is exciting to take her for walks and admire her improvement."

UNDERWATER TREADMILLS

In Portland, Oregon, veterinarian Carol Helfer, DVM, has offered hydrotherapy at her Canine Peak Performance Sports Medicine & Physical Rehabilitation Center for almost a decade.

"Because of our limited space," she says, "we use an underwater treadmill. Most dogs use their front limbs signifi-

Hampton, eight years old at the time of this photo, lived with Jennifer Offinga in Hillsboro, Oregon. In addition to performing with the "Superdogs" troupe in Canada, Hampton was a dependable flyball dog. The underwater treadmill increased his strength and stamina for the sport. Photo by Carol Helfer, DVM.



cantly more than their rear limbs while swimming, and since I see far more problems with the rear limbs, walking on an underwater treadmill is an effective therapy for most patients.”

At the beginning of a treadmill session, the dog enters an empty plexiglass chamber by taking a shallow step up. The speed is set to accommodate the dog’s size and condition. Warm water (usually 80 to 88 degrees Fahrenheit, approximately 27 to 31 degrees Celsius) enters the chamber and the dog is soon walking in water. The level is adjusted to whatever the dog requires, such as shoulder-high for extra buoyancy after surgery or to relieve joint pain, or knee-high for a more vigorous workout.

Some underwater treadmill systems include adjustable hydrotherapy water jets, a reversible treadmill, or adjustable ramp angles that alter weight distribution or target specific muscles.

“Most dogs start out with one to three exercise sets, each lasting two to three minutes, depending on how they tolerate the activity,” says Dr. Helfer. “In most cases my goal is to get them up to 20 minutes of continuous walking. The time it takes to get there varies widely depending on the age and condition of the dog. I start patients at 0.3 miles per hour (MPH) and seldom get above 1 MPH. On occasion I’ll work with a dog specifically for athletic conditioning, in which case I may use speeds of 3 to 5 MPH.”

Dr. Helfer has exercised tiny Yorkshire Terriers and super tall Irish Wolfhounds on her treadmill, and no dogs have been too big or too small.

THERAPEUTIC POOLS

Hydrotherapy pools can be anything from large or small swimming pools to endless-lap pools in which continuously moving water creates resistance. Except for healthy, experienced dogs swimming for recreation or general conditioning, patients wear life vests. In some hydrotherapy pools, swimming dogs are supported and directed by overhead wires attached to their vests.

When Apex Animal Hospital in Helena, Montana, was built last year, Jennifer Hill recommended installing a pool. “I am a licensed physical therapist and worked with human patients before I started working with dogs,” she says. “I spent my physical therapy internship in Hawaii, where I took aquatic therapy classes. I love being in the water with

CANINE HYDROTHERAPISTS

What credentials do canine hydrotherapists have, and how are they trained?

Two schools in the United States (the University of Tennessee and the Canine Rehabilitation Institute) offer certification to veterinarians, physical therapists, veterinary technicians, and physical therapy assistants in canine rehabilitation. Courses include canine anatomy and physiology; conditions and injuries commonly referred for rehabilitation; physical modalities and their application, contraindications, and equipment maintenance; therapeutic exercise; client education; sports medicine; and hydrotherapy.

Every state in the United States has its own licensing requirements, but Certified Canine Rehabilitation Practitioners usually work in coordination with veterinarians who refer patients for specific treatments. CCRPs work together with the veterinarians’ instructions, consult with them as needed during treatment, and provide detailed reports of their patients’ therapy.



Jennifer Hill (right) is a licensed CCRP; Adele Delp (with the cute Australian Shepherd, Lizzie) teaches puppy kindergarten classes in the hydrotherapy room at Apex Animal Hospital.

patients and like the flexibility that an endless pool provides. It’s wonderful for recreational swimmers, for targeted therapy, and for everything in between. The underwater bench at the edges of the pool and steps at the shallow end provide a stable surface for walking or standing. This is especially helpful for smaller dogs like Corgis and Dachshunds, which are the breeds most prone to back injuries. In addition, the pool’s adjustable water jets create a mild to strong current for swimming.”

Hill does more than help dogs swim in different directions. “If the hind legs are weak, which is often the case,” she says, “I present my hand as a target. Dogs appear to instinctively kick against whatever their feet touch. Active kicking is also good for the hips. If the front legs need work, I position my hands at the front feet. The harder I press against the paw pads, the harder the feet push away from my hand. I also tilt the dogs a little to the left or right, which shifts their center of gravity and creates an automatic adjustment.”

Hill lures swimming dogs with a tennis ball, toy, treat, or whatever they will follow so they turn left, turn right, and swim in figure 8s. “That’s so important for spinal motion,” she says. “Another thing I do for dogs with neurological damage from surgery or spinal strokes is

pinch their toes in the rhythm of walking or swimming. Alternating and simultaneous rhythmic pinching establishes patterns that help treat ataxia, which is a gross lack of coordination.”

Some of Hill’s patients have taken advanced obedience or agility training. “It’s fun to work with a dog who responds to voice instructions,” she says. “You can say ‘left’ or ‘right’ and the dog will do her own figure-8s.”

Another option in pools is the use of a small floating platform, like a boogie board or miniature surfboard. “This works very well for small dogs,” says Hill, “and they get a serious core workout just keeping their balance. The board dips forward, back, left, and right, and for an added workout we turn on the white-water jets.”

Dogs recovering from surgery, illness, or injury at first require Hill’s hands-on attention, but as they grow stronger and more experienced, they can be supervised by a veterinary technician. “On swim days we live in our wet suits,” says Hill. “We’re in the water with the dogs and we encourage the owners to be right beside the pool so they can participate and see the progress their dogs make.”

As with underwater treadmills, the water temperature in hydrotherapy pools is typically 80 to 88 degrees Fahrenheit. Some facilities feature salt water, for

which additional therapeutic claims are made. The term thalassotherapy refers to therapeutic baths in warm seawater, which is similar to the body's own internal fluids and which is said to allow magnesium and potassium to be drawn into the blood stream while toxins are eliminated.

TYPICAL PATIENTS

Because dogs take up hydrotherapy for many reasons, most facilities define categories of treatment depending on their condition and medical history.

For example, Apex Animal Hospital defines four levels of treatment. Level 1 patients are the most incapacitated, and require two experienced handlers. "We use two people for safety," says Hill, "and that refers to our own safety as well as that of the dog. As soon as a surgical patient gets a go-ahead from his or her vet, we move to the water.

"One of my favorite Level 1 patients was a Bernese Mountain Dog who had just arrived at the hospital to have both knees operated on when he ruptured a shoulder muscle. The knee surgery went ahead as planned but the shoulder re-

pair was done later. There were serious complications with one of the stifle surgeries, so we actually could only work on the shoulder. That was a two-person job! In other cases the patient may be so out of condition or obese that it takes two people to help the dog into and out of the pool. One Labrador Retriever weighed 187 pounds and had never been in water when he came for his first swim. He has trimmed down to 164 pounds and, while he still has a way to go, he no longer needs both of us in the pool with him."

Most patients with knee or stifle injuries or surgery, hip surgery, or fracture repairs receive four weeks of dry land rehabilitation therapy from Hill before swimming.

At Apex, dogs stay at Level 1 or Level 2 (with just the rehabilitation therapist in the pool) for five weeks and are re-evaluated. Level 3 dogs are still recuperating but require less supervision, and Level 4 dogs swim for play, recreation, or general conditioning with a veterinary technician.

The goal at all levels is to improve muscle strength and stamina, provide a cardiovascular workout, stimulate lymph

circulation, increase range of motion, and bring all sides of the body into balance by moving in all directions.

"My hydrotherapy patients fall into three categories," says Dr. Helfer. "These are geriatric patients, dogs recovering from surgery or neurological problems, and those with soft-tissue injuries. I see the most dramatic results in the geriatrics. It is quite remarkable how much these patients improve with the right kind of exercise. Elderly dogs who had trouble jumping into the car or onto the sofa start doing these things again, and their stamina increases on walks. I'm not going to turn a 13-year-old into a puppy, but owners often comment that Fluffy is doing things she hasn't done for years."

One of Dr. Helfer's favorite patients was Noah, a Newfoundland who started hydrotherapy sessions at age 12. "That's a grand old age for a Newfie," she says. "He was in pretty good shape for an old guy but was having some trouble getting around. He improved greatly with twice-a-week sessions and finally passed away at 15½. I'm convinced that the quality of the last years of his life greatly improved because of regular hydrotherapy.

"COLD TAIL" IS A HOT ISSUE WITH SWIMMING DOGS

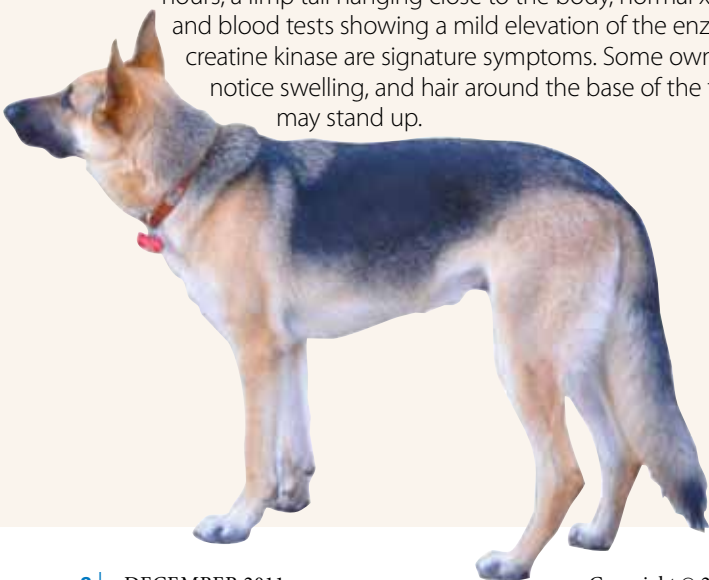
Swimming dogs, especially hunting dogs, sometimes experience acute caudal myopathy, which is more commonly known as cold tail, swimmer's tail, limber tail, cold water tail, broken tail, retriever tail, Lab tail, broken wag, or dead tail.

In a study published in the November 1999 *Journal of Veterinary Internal Medicine*, this painful condition was linked to fiber damage in muscles at the base of the tail. Severe pain lasting 24 to 48 hours, a limp tail hanging close to the body, normal x-rays, and blood tests showing a mild elevation of the enzyme creatine kinase are signature symptoms. Some owners notice swelling, and hair around the base of the tail may stand up.

Exposure to cold, wet weather; overexertion or a lack of conditioning; and long periods of crate confinement are blamed for this problem. Most cases appear in sporting dogs during hunting season or during training for hunting. The most-affected dogs are male and female Labrador, Flat-Coated, and Golden Retrievers; English Setters; English Pointers; Beagles; and Foxhounds.

With rest, the tail usually recovers completely within one to two weeks, though during recovery it may hang to one side. Some veterinarians believe recovery time is shortened if anti-inflammatory drugs are administered as soon as symptoms develop. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) are commonly used to reduce pain, though they don't usually affect swelling. Warm packs at the base of the tail may help. Affected dogs should not be confined but should be allowed to rest and not worked until their tails return to normal.

Although most dogs with cold tail experience it only once, many have recurring episodes. To help prevent this problem, gradually condition your dog for hunting or vigorous exercise in order to avoid stress or fatigue; keep your dog's bedding dry, especially in cold, wet weather; avoid keeping your dog in a cramped crate; and while traveling, give your dog frequent opportunities, at least every one or two hours, to stretch, move, and walk about.





Gracie the Dalmatian lives in Great Falls, Montana. Her owner, Jeanne Stehno, drove 90 miles once a week to take her to these therapy sessions with CCRP Jennifer Hill at Apex Animal Hospital in Helena, Montana.

treatment the patient requires. Therapeutic and recreational swim sessions may last 30 minutes or one hour. Fees vary by region and facility, with most offering discounts for packages of five or more swim sessions.

LONG-TERM BENEFITS

Although the evidence is anecdotal rather than from controlled clinical trials, veterinarians, rehabilitation practitioners, dog trainers, and owners agree that hydrotherapy can make a world of difference for dogs with physical problems.

Veterinary chiropractor Tia Nelson, DVM, of Helena, Montana, has noticed that dogs who take up hydrotherapy hold their chiropractic adjustments longer than they did prior to swimming. “This makes sense,” she says, “because swimming is a comfortable non-weight-bearing exercises that strengthens the body without stressing it. Swimming helps the body maintain its alignment.”

Dr. Helfer considers hydrotherapy an injury preventer. “The improvement in muscle strength and balance can save the day in a slip-and-fall situation,” she says, “or on an awkward landing in a jump.”

Older dogs who swim are often more active and agile than their non-swimming counterparts, and hydrotherapy has helped many dogs reach a ripe old age with energy and coordination.

“It’s excellent for post-op recovery,” says Jennifer Hill, “injury prevention, and general conditioning. Arthritic dogs become more active, dogs with hip or elbow dysplasia have an easier time

“Noah was a typical geriatric. We started with multiple sets of a few minutes at a time and gradually worked up to 20 minutes of exercise without a rest break. As far as I know, the hydrotherapy was the only exercise he got other than short walks around his neighborhood.”

The most common surgical patients Dr. Helfer sees have had knee surgery, usually for cruciate ligament tears or luxating patellas. “Dogs recovering from spinal surgery also benefit greatly,” she says.

Soft-tissue injuries respond more slowly to treadmill hydrotherapy, says Dr. Helfer. These injuries to muscles, tendons, and ligaments often result from slips, falls, or sprains. “Sometimes in the later stages of recovery I will use treadmill hydrotherapy for a very controlled return to activity,” she says. “I lay out a specific schedule of activities over a period of six to eight weeks. The biggest mistake I see people make with cases of soft-tissue injury is to rush things. Since dogs are usually eager to get back to being active, you can’t depend on them ‘telling’ you that one activity or another is difficult or painful. A few minutes too much of the wrong type of activity can set progress back for weeks.”

Seven-year-old Cairn Terrier Seamus, in the water with Adele Delp, loves being on the boogie board; it’s now his favorite target. Since commencing regular swim sessions, his spine and tail are straighter, his stamina on hikes has increased, and his hind legs are stronger.

IT ISN’T FOR EVERYONE

Despite its exceptional benefits, hydrotherapy isn’t for every dog, such as dogs with cardiovascular issues, infected wounds, or a serious fear of water. A history of aggression can be a problem as well.

Just because a dog has never shown an interest in swimming doesn’t mean he or she won’t benefit. Many dogs have learned, with the help of a life vest and a good coach, that swimming can be fun. Dogs who are truly terrified of water because of a traumatic past event are better suited to land-based exercise.

Cost is another factor, for not every dog lover can afford hydrotherapy. Therapeutic swims or treadmill sessions with a veterinarian or Certified Canine Rehabilitation Practitioner (CCRP) – or a rehabilitation practitioner working with an assistant – cost more than recreational swim sessions. Most clinics charge different rates depending on the attention and



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climbing stairs, and some agility dogs and other dogs who compete in canine sports win or achieve their personal best after taking up hydrotherapy.”

DO-IT-YOURSELF HYDROTHERAPY

Dog lovers who have access to pools, lakes, the ocean, or other bodies of water can help their dogs stay active by taking them swimming.

Adele Delp, a veterinary technician and dog trainer, teaches puppy kindergarten classes in the hydrotherapy room at Apex Animal Hospital.

“I teach a six-week class that’s part of the American Kennel Club’s STAR puppy training,” she says. “STAR stands for Socialization, Training, Activity, and Responsible ownership. In addition to introducing puppies to basic behaviors like walking on a leash, greeting politely, and learning how to sit, I have them climb in and out of an empty shallow wading pool. The following week, the pool has an inch of water in it. The week after that, it’s a deeper wading pool, and a week later the deeper pool contains water. They also get used to wearing life vests. At the final session, they go one at a time into the pool with me and start swimming.”

The STAR-class puppies who love the water aren’t just Labs and Golden Retrievers. They’re as varied as Yorkies, Giant Schnauzers, Malamutes, Beagles, Chinese Cresteds, Weimaraners, and

German Shepherd Dogs.

Delp does everything she can to make the experience positive. Puppies enter the water gradually and with lots of praise and rewards. This same approach can help your pup or older dog get used to swimming. If you live near a stream, lake, or river, look for a gradually sloping beach or bank that is smooth rather than muddy or rocky. Be sure the area is safe for dogs.

Having an easy way in and out helps dogs feel secure. If using a swimming pool, stay at the shallow end at first (dogs can’t climb vertical ladders), and through repetition teach your dog where the shallow end is. Keep the pool securely fenced off or covered when not in use.

Buy or borrow a canine life vest that fits securely and allows unrestricted front leg motion. A leash or line can be attached to the vest, but be sure your dog doesn’t become entangled.

In a river or stream, keep your dog away from currents. Don’t throw rocks for your dog because they break teeth so easily.

“My motto is get in and stay in,” says Hill. “Try to avoid running in and out of the water because it is often during these transitions that injuries happen.”

All dogs have a fatigue level and symptoms of fatigue include a tongue that drags, darkens, or curls up at the ends while the dog is panting; bloodshot whites of the eyes; or an obvious slowing



Jennifer Hill encourages Molly, a young Weimaraner in a STAR puppy class, into the water with a treat.

down. Provide ample rest periods.

Guard against excessive sun exposure with sunblock on the dog's nose.

For dogs who are recovering from accidents, illness, or surgery, be sure to wait for your veterinarian's OK before swimming.

If your dog will chase a tennis ball or other toy in the water, toss it to encourage distance swimming and frequent turns. For every turn to the right, add a turn to the left, and aim for figure 8s to exercise the spine. If you're in the water with your dog, use a tennis ball or other lure to create turns with a tighter radius. Also try tipping the dog slightly to one side, which strengthens the tipped side as the dog regains balance. You can also try the toe-pinching and foot-touching exercises mentioned by Jennifer Hill.

If your dog doesn't take to the water right away, don't be discouraged. "Our hydrotherapy patients often need three sessions before they catch on," says Hill. "A typical example is Shadow, a five-year-old Border Collie who experienced a spinal stroke. Shadow did not like the water at all, and his first two sessions weren't much fun. Then during his third session a light bulb went on in his head and he realized he could fetch a tennis ball. He can't do this on land any more, but in the water he's an athlete. Now when his owners ask if he wants to go for a swim, Shadow screams and howls, he's so excited."

When Chloe started her swim sessions last April, my husband wondered whether Seamus, his seven-year-old Cairn Terrier, would enjoy swimming, too. Seamus will probably never jump into water on his own, and his first two sessions produced moments of high anxiety, but by his third lesson he caught on and he is now a strong swimmer. Today, Seamus loves being on the boogie board and that's his favorite target. His spine and tail are straighter, his stamina on hikes has increased, his hind legs are stronger, and he is able to jump from the ground onto my car's back seat and from the floor onto the bed or sofa, which he wasn't able to do without assistance before he took up swimming.

AFTER-SWIM RINSES

If your dog swims in chlorinated water, salt water, or swampy water, he'll need a bath or at least a rinse afterward. Here are some favorite after-swim treatments:

Our article on Willard Water (WDJ

RESOURCES

- ❖ **CANINE REHABILITATION INSTITUTE, INC.**
Wellington, FL. (888) 651-0760 or (561) 651-0760; caninerehabinstitute.com
- ❖ **CERTIFICATE PROGRAM IN CANINE REHABILITATION**
University of Tennessee, Knoxville; canineequinerehab.com
- ❖ **"COCCYGEAL MUSCLE INJURY IN ENGLISH POINTERS (LIMBER TAIL)"**
by Janet Steiss, et al., *Journal of Veterinary Internal Medicine*, Volume 13, Issue 6, November 1999, p. 540-548
- ❖ **APEX ANIMAL HOSPITAL, JENNIFER HILL, CCRP, AND ADELE DELP**
Helena, MT. (406) 449-4455; apex-animal-hospital.com
- ❖ **CANINE PEAK PERFORMANCE SPORTS MEDICINE & PHYSICAL REHABILITATION CENTER, CAROL HELFER, DVM**
Portland, OR. (503) 291-7400; caninepeakperformance.com
- ❖ **TOTAL DYNAMIC BALANCE VETERINARY CLINIC, TIA NELSON, DVM**
Helena, MT. (406) 442-0188; tdbhelena.com
- ❖ **AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB, STAR PUPPY TRAINING**
akc.org/starpuppy

PRODUCTS

- ❖ **AQUABANDIT HEADBANDS FOR DOGS**
(888) 392-7822; aquabandit.com
- ❖ **DOGLEGG'S SWIM SNOOD HEADBANDS FOR DOGS**
Reston, VA. (800) 313-1218 or (703) 715-0300; dogleggs.com
- ❖ **FOCUS 21 SEA PLASMA ALL-PURPOSE SKIN & HAIR MOISTURIZING SPRAY**
Sold at beauty supply retailers and online; focus21.us/products.htm
- ❖ **JAKE'S CANINE REMEDY FROM FROGWORKS**
Littleton, CO. (877) 973-8848 or (303) 973-8848; frogworks.com
- ❖ **WILLARD WATER CONCENTRATE FROM NCI**
 Fargo, NC. (800) 447-4793; willardswater.com

June 2006) reviewed the many ways this concentrate can be used internally and topically to improve a dog's health. Diluted at the rate of 1 teaspoon to 1 tablespoon concentrate per gallon of water and poured over the dog, Willard Water helps prevent dander, freshens the coat, and helps most dogs smell better. Willard Water concentrate can be added to shampoo or conditioner, but my favorite use after swimming is as a chlorine-destroying rinse. In 1991, shortly before his death at age 84, I corresponded with Dr. John Willard, who developed the formula, about its effect on chlorine. He

confirmed that extensive laboratory testing proved that small amounts of Willard Water neutralize or destroy chlorine. In fact, he warned against adding Willard Water to any load of laundry using chlorine bleach. "The bleach won't work," he said.

Years ago, Colorado aromatherapist Frances Fitzgerald Cleveland was out of town when her dog, Jake, developed a hot spot. The steroid shot he received caused kidney failure and Jake died. In his memory, Cleveland blended Jake's Canine Remedy, which contains purified water, apricot kernel oil, and a proprietary

blend of essential oils. In our September 2006 article on hot spots, Cleveland described how Oscar, her black Labrador Retriever, swam every day, got sprayed every day, and never had skin problems. Jake's Remedy has a pleasant, fresh, relaxing fragrance.

After her Willard Water rinse, Chloe gets sprayed with Jake's Remedy, which I brush through her coat. For dogs prone to swim-related skin irritation under or next to the collar, Jake's Remedy can be an effective preventive treatment.

Adele Delp's favorite after-swim treatment is Sea Plasma All-purpose Skin and Hair Moisturizing Spray by Focus 21. Its key ingredient is Na-PCA, or sodium pyrrolidone carboxylic acid, a natural moisturizing factor in skin which is synthesized from glutamic acid, a non-essential amino acid.

"I dilute it at the rate of 1 part product to 10 parts water," she says. "It isn't a silky conditioner and it doesn't make the coat shiny, but it penetrates the skin, helps keep the skin supple, reduces dander, and smells good."

Jennifer Hill's favorite after-swim rinse is chamomile-peppermint tea.

Chamomile is a well-known skin soother that has a calming effect on dogs, which helps them relax and rest after workouts. It helps reduce skin irritations and is safe for sensitive skin. Peppermint's fragrance is uplifting and refreshing. Mildly astringent, it heals abrasions, helps prevent hot spots, and is a natural skin toner.

To brew, pour 1 quart boiling water over 2 chamomile and 2 peppermint tea bags (available at supermarkets and natural food stores), cover, and let stand until cool. For a stronger solution, double the number of tea bags. One quart should be sufficient for small dogs. Brew up to 4 quarts (1 gallon) tea for large and giant breeds or for a more thorough application. Apply as a final rinse, work into the coat, and let dry. Because herbal tea can darken hair, it is not recommended for white dogs. Herbal tea rinses can be combined with Willard Water concentrate for increased effectiveness. 🐾

Freelance writer CJ Puotinen lives in Montana. She is the author of The Encyclopedia of Natural Pet Care and other books and a frequent contributor to WDJ. See "Resources," page 24 for book purchasing information.

What you can do . . .

- Consider hydrotherapy if your dog is recovering from surgery, injury, or an illness that affects mobility.
- Ask your veterinarian about hydrotherapy and look for a Certified Canine Rehabilitation Practitioner.
- Introduce your dog to water with patience and positive reinforcement.
- Use a life vest for safety.
- Encourage your dog to turn in different directions while swimming.
- Start slowly, watch for signs of fatigue, and provide frequent rest periods.



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Canine Swim Caps?

Don't laugh! Water in the ears can cause infections; caps can prevent these and more.

BY CJ PUOTINEN

Chloe, my eight-year-old Labrador Retriever, loves to swim. When we lived in New York, she spent almost every morning in streams and lakes, diving from high granite boulders in summer and breaking through ice in early winter. But when we moved to Montana, finding clear, open water for swimming was a challenge. Then we discovered the therapeutic pool at Apex Animal Hospital and signed up for recreational swims. Now every Tuesday Chloe swims laps while retrieving a tennis ball.

But her wet ears bothered Chloe and she spent part of every swim and much of the day after shaking her head. Her ears weren't infected; they just did a lot of flapping.

I went online to see whether anyone makes ear plugs for dogs and discovered something even better, swimming headbands. I bought both types: the AquaBandit from AquaBandit International and the Swim Snood from DogLeggs Therapeutic & Rehabilitative

Products – and left them at the pool for other dogs to try. Rehabilitation practitioner Jennifer Hill and veterinary technician Adele Delp tested them on several swimmers.

“I think dogs are more comfortable when wearing a headband,” says Delp. “Instead of shaking their heads, they relax and focus on swimming.”

When Casey, a six-year-old Border Collie, started swimming, he was intent on getting the ball, hypervigilant, and

wild in the pool. “We tried a swim band on him,” says Delp, “and we were amazed at how focused and calm he became. Whenever we took it off, he became a wild man again. This led us to speculate about the band's applications in thunderstorms and other stressful situations.”

The AquaBandit comes in five sizes and two colors at prices under \$25. It works well for Chloe and other dogs as long as we readjust it frequently, for with activity it slips toward the back of the head and exposes the ears. Hill and Delp give the AquaBandit 3 stars.

Swim Snoods are custom made for the dog's head measurements. Longer, wider, and with a larger Velcro area than the AquaBandit, the Swim Snood stays on more securely. Its price is \$43.50. Hill and Delp give the Swim Snood 5 stars.

Like Chloe, most swimming dogs adjust quickly to head bands. And they work. Chloe seldom flaps her ears any more.

In addition to protecting the ears of swimming dogs, swim bands can be used during dental procedures to protect the ears from fluids. Dogs with long ears can wear them at meal time to keep their ears from being soiled by food. Dogs sensitive to the sound of a dryer during grooming or after swimming can relax without being stressed, and the compression these bands provide has a calming effect on most dogs. 🐾



The AquaBandit comes in five sizes and two colors and costs \$25. Order from aquabandit.com or call (888) 392-7822.



The Swim Snood is custom made for your dog's head measurements and costs \$44. Order from dogleggs.com or call (800) 313-1218.

Coming Up a Bit Short

Sometimes a diet looks complete at first glance, but nutrient calculators reveal deficiencies.

BY MARY STRAUS

This is the debut of what we intend to be a regular feature in WDJ: a detailed critique of a home-prepared diet. I will analyze diets that people feed their dogs and offer feedback and suggestions that might improve the nutritional value of the diet.

RAW, BONELESS DIET FOR AN ACTIVE 37-LB DOG

Fiona McNair lives in Glasgow, Scotland. McNair feeds a raw, boneless diet to her two dogs: Tara, a lean and very active six-year-old Staffordshire Terrier-cross who weighs 16.9 kg (37 lbs), and Pepi, a moderately active and slightly overweight four-year-old Podenco-cross who weighs 15.5 kg (34 lbs).

Both dogs are healthy, but McNair has noticed a few problems, including clicking in the joints, that started after she began feeding a homemade diet a year ago. I took a particularly close look at McNair's diet to try to determine what nutrients might be missing or excessive in hopes of resolving this issue.

Here is the diet McNair currently feeds her larger dog (the smaller dog gets

the same foods in slightly reduced quantities). These amounts are daily totals, split between two meals:

- 250 grams (8.8 ounces) raw meat, including 1 day of lamb and 2 days each of beef, chicken, and turkey per week. Both lamb and beef are 20 percent fat; chicken is skinless breast and turkey is skinless dark meat.
- 125 grams (4.4 ounces) vegetables, including raw grated carrot, courgette (zucchini), and celery, and steamed broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, and turnips.
- 85 grams (3 ounces) plain low-fat yogurt.
- 20 grams (1.4 ounces) each raw lamb liver and kidney.
- Daily supplements: 1,000 mg Animal Essentials Seaweed Calcium, 500 mg vitamin C, 100 IUs vitamin E, vitamin B-50 complex, and 1,000 mg fish oil.
- Both dogs also get a few small treats plus a small rawhide daily.

At first glance, this diet looked pretty good, with appropriate proportions of meat, organs, and vegetables, and good variety. It is a little high in fat, but that's okay for a very active dog (feeding less of the beef and lamb might help the smaller dog to lose weight).

Some other initial thoughts: Eggs and fish are missing. Adding starchy foods would help to reduce the fat content. Vegetables would be better digested if pureed in a food processor, blender, or juicer rather than just grated, and the Brussels sprouts and turnips may need more cooking to be digestible (raw vegetables aren't harmful but don't provide as much nutritional value as cooked vegetables).

SURPRISE!

When I entered the diet into a recipe at NutritionData.com and compared it to National Research Council (NRC) recommendations, I was a little surprised to find that it did not provide their recommended daily amounts (RDA) of several nutrients:



Tara (far right), a Staffordshire Terrier-mix, and Pepi, a Podenco-mix, are fed a raw, boneless diet. The diet needs just a little tweaking to provide complete and balanced nutrition.

- Zinc (diet provides 9.2 mg; the RDA is 17 mg)
- Manganese (0.3 mg; RDA 1.3 mg)
- Choline (137 mg; RDA 465 mg)
- Vitamin D (7 IU; RDA 149 IU)

If McNair failed to add the supplement, the diet would also be very low in vitamin E (1 mg; RDA 8 mg). It would also be low in magnesium if she were using plain calcium or ground eggshell instead of the seaweed calcium (the diet supplies 96 mg, RDA is 164 mg; the Animal Essentials calcium supplement adds 90 mg).

The dietary iron (7.1 mg; RDA 8 mg) and phosphorus (732 mg; RDA 830 mg) are also below recommended amounts. It's possible that this diet is low in iodine (264 mcg RDA), but I could not confirm this, as iodine is not tracked by the USDA's nutrient database (which is where NutritionData.com gets its information). There is iodine in yogurt and in the Animal Essentials calcium supplement (60 mcg), and this may be adequate.

Vitamin K is also short, but since this vitamin can be synthesized in the intestines, it may not need to be supplied through diet.

Calcium is a little high (1,230 mg; RDA 1,080 mg), due to the amount provided by yogurt.

Also, the number of calories provided by this diet is inadequate for a dog of Tara's size. When I mentioned this to McNair and inquired about Tara's weight, McNair acknowledged that Tara has been losing weight. McNair had calculated the amount to feed based on a percentage of Tara's ideal body weight, but had included the vegetables in the calculations.

Greens and other non-starchy vegetables are low in calories and should not be included when calculating how much to feed your dog. They can be added in whatever quantities are preferred.

Both omega-3 and omega-6 essential fatty acids (EFAs) were high enough to meet NRC recommendations. The diet is a little short in alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), a plant-based form of omega-3, but since dogs don't utilize this fatty acid very well, I don't consider that a problem. EPA and DHA, omega-3 EFAs that are found in fish, fish oil, and certain forms of algae, such as spirulina and chlorella, are better sources for dogs.

RECOMMENDED CHANGES

Here's my recommended modified diet for Tara (changes are in **bold**). Pepi would get 90 percent of these amounts:

- **200 grams (7 ounces)** meat, including 1 day each of lamb, turkey, and **pink salmon (or other fish)** and 2 days each of beef and chicken per week. **Switch to dark meat chicken.**
- **1 large egg.**
- **100 grams (3.5 ounces)** sweet potato (or other starchy foods).
- 20 grams (1.4 ounces) each **beef liver** (lamb liver may also be acceptable) and lamb kidney.
- 125 grams (4.4 ounces) vegetables.
- 85 grams (3 ounces) plain low-fat yogurt.
- **600 mg** Animal Essentials Seaweed Calcium (reduced 200 mg from yogurt, 200 mg from multivitamin).
- 1 Centrum or comparable multivitamin and mineral (replaces separate vitamin B, C, and E supplements).
- 1,000 mg fish oil, once daily.
- Do not give calcium or fish oil on days when canned fish with bones are fed.
- **Add a glucosamine-type supplement for joint support.** (It's unclear what might cause joint clicking in both dogs. Adding a glucosamine-type supplement may help protect the joints.)
- Eliminate the daily rawhide if needed to account for added calories in diet (rawhides may provide as many as 80 calories per ounce).

The new diet has about 100 more calories than the original diet, which should be more appropriate for a dog of Tara's size. It meets all NRC nutritional recommendations except choline (158 mg short) and vitamin K (0.3 mg short, 0.4 mg RDA). Choline is considered a member of the vitamin B family and is found in most B-complex supplements, but even those don't provide enough to meet NRC recommendations. Eggs, liver, beef, salmon, and cauliflower are all con-

What you can do . . .

- Use nutrition calculators (such as the one on NutritionData.com) to ensure that the home-prepared diet you feed your dog is complete.
- Monitor your dog's weight. If he's gaining or losing, dietary adjustments are needed.
- If you feed the same diet to more than one dog, and they both exhibit the same unusual symptom (like clicking of the joints), chances are that the diet needs adjustment!



sidered good sources of choline (choline values in lamb liver are unknown; beef liver has almost twice the choline of chicken liver). The nutritional supplement Nupro could be used to provide choline, but it is low in zinc and contains almost no vitamin E. These should be added separately if you replace the multivitamin and mineral supplement with Nupro.

With the multivitamin and mineral supplement, the addition of eggs, sweet potato, and fish are not necessary, but I believe they provide a more well-rounded diet. Eggs add iron, phosphorus, zinc, and choline, though not enough to meet the RDAs. Feeding fish one day per week provides enough vitamin D to meet NRC recommendations, and also increases choline. Sweet potato and other starchy foods help to reduce fat levels, and increase magnesium and manganese. Fruits, such as bananas, apples, and blueberries, would provide similar benefits with fewer calories.

If the multivitamin is omitted, the revised diet would still be significantly short on magnesium (46 mg, supplied by Animal Essentials calcium), manganese (0.4 mg), zinc (8 mg), vitamin E (5.4 mg), and possibly iodine. If fish is not added to the diet, cod liver oil could be used instead to provide vitamin D. 🐾

Mary Straus is the owner of DogAware.com. Contact her via her website if you would like to submit a diet to be critiqued.

Alpha-Schmalpha

Why every mention of “alpha dogs” or “dominant” dogs is dangerous to all dogs.

BY PAT MILLER, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA, CDBC

The alpha myth is everywhere. Google “alpha dog” on the Internet and you get more than 85 million hits. Really. While not all the sites are about dominating your dog, there are literally millions of resources out there – websites, books, blogs, television shows, veterinarians, trainers and behavior professionals – instructing you to use force and intimidation to overpower your dog into submission. They say that you, the human, must be the alpha. They’re all wrong. Every single one of them.

The erroneous approach to canine social behavior known as dominance theory (two million-plus Google hits) is based on a study of captive zoo wolves conducted in the 1930s and 1940s by Swiss animal behaviorist Rudolph Schenkel, in which the scientist concluded that wolves in a pack fight to gain dominance, and the winner is the alpha wolf.

BAD EXTRAPOLATION

Schenkel’s observations of captive wolf behavior were erroneously extrapolated to wild wolf behavior, and then to domestic dogs. It was postulated that wolves were in constant competition for higher rank in the hierarchy, and only the aggressive actions of the alpha male and female held the contenders in check. Other behaviorists following Schenkel’s lead also studied captive wolves and confirmed his findings: groups of unrelated wolves brought together in artificial captive environments do, indeed, engage in often-violent and bloody social struggles.

The problem is, *that’s not normal wolf behavior*. As David Mech stated in the introduction to his study of wild wolves (Mech, 2000), “Attempting to apply information about the behavior of assemblages of unrelated captive wolves to the familial structure of natural packs has resulted in considerable confusion. Such an approach is analogous to trying to draw inferences about human family dynamics by studying humans in refugee camps. The concept of the alpha wolf as a ‘top dog’ ruling a group of similar-aged compatriots (Schenkel 1947; Rabb et al. 1967; Fox 1971a; Zimen 1975, 1982;

Is this powerful dog dominant? Acting like an “alpha dog”? No; he’s simply untrained. Pulling hard has enabled him to reach what he wanted to reach in the past, so he’s trying it again.



Lockwood 1979; van Hooff et al. 1987) is particularly misleading.”

What we know now, thanks to Mech and others, is that in the wild, a wolf pack is a family, consisting of a mated pair and their offspring of the past one to three years. Occasionally two or three families may group together. As the offspring mature they disperse from the pack; the only long-term members of the group are the breeding pair. By contrast, in captivity unrelated wolves are forced to live together for many years, creating tension between mature adults that doesn’t happen in a natural, wild pack.

ENOUGH ABOUT WOLVES

But that's all about wolves anyway, not dogs. How did it happen that dog owners and trainers started thinking all that information (and misinformation) about wolf behavior had anything to do with dogs and dog behavior? The logic went something like, "Dogs are descended from wolves. Wolves live in hierarchical packs in which the aggressive alpha male rules over everyone else. Therefore, humans need to dominate their pet dogs to get them to behave."

Perhaps the most popular advocate of this inaccurate concept, Cesar Milan, is only the latest in a long line of dominance-based trainers who advocate

forceful techniques such as the alpha roll. Much of this style of training has roots in the military – which explains the emphasis on punishment.

As far back as 1906, Colonel Konrad Most was using heavy-handed techniques to train dogs in the German army, then police and service dogs. He was joined by William Koehler after the end of World War II.

Koehler also initially trained dogs for the military prior to his civilian dog-training career, and his writings advocated techniques that included hanging and helicoptering a dog into submission (into unconsciousness, if necessary). For example, to stop a dog

from digging, Koehler suggested filling the hole with water and submerging the dog's head in the water-filled hole until he was nearly drowned.

Fast-forward several years to 1978 and the emergence of the Monks of New Skete as the new model for dog training, asserting a philosophy that "understanding is the key to communication, compassion, and communion" with your dog. Sounds great, yes? The Monks were considered cutting edge at the time – but contrary to their benevolent image, they were in fact responsible for the widespread popularization of the "Alpha-Wolf Roll-Over" (now shortened to the alpha roll). Reviewing the early ob-

DOG BEHAVIORS THAT ARE COMMONLY MISIDENTIFIED AS "DOMINANT"

BEHAVIOR	DOMINANCE APPROACH	POSITIVE APPROACH
Dog jumps up on people to greet them.	<p>Explanation – Dog is trying to be dominant.</p> <p>Solutions – Positive punishment: Make jumping up painful or uncomfortable. Knee dog in chest, step on his hind feet, grasp his paws and squeeze to make him uncomfortable.</p> <p>Problems with dominance approach –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May cause injury to the dog. • May teach the dog to be fearful of people. • You can condition the dog to find people handling his paws aversive. 	<p>Explanation – Dog is trying to get your attention and/or greet you. He has been reinforced for jumping up because it gets human attention.</p> <p>Solutions – Negative punishment: Take away all reinforcement for jumping up. Turn away, step away, walk away. Jumping up makes good stuff go away. Management: Use a tether, leash, or barrier to prevent reinforcement. Positive reinforcement: Reinforce appropriate greeting behaviors such as "sit" (either asked for or offered). Polite greeting makes good stuff happen.</p>
Dog growls when being handled or restrained.	<p>Explanation – Dog is being dominant.</p> <p>Solutions – Positive punishment: Scruff shake, cuff, alpha roll, forced restraint. Negative reinforcement: Restrain dog until he submits, then release him (submitting makes the bad thing – restraint – go away).</p> <p>Problems with dominance approach –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May elicit escalating aggression. • May damage your dog's trust in you and other humans. • May teach the dog you and other humans are dangerous. • It doesn't teach the dog to like handling and restraint. He's still tense about it, so potential for future resistance exists. 	<p>Explanation – Dog is uncomfortable being restrained, and (perhaps) has learned that growling can make restraint stop.</p> <p>Solutions – Use counter-conditioning to give the dog a new, positive association with handling and restraint. Touch, feed a treat; touch, feed a treat; gradually increasing length and pressure of touch as he comes to accept and enjoy it.</p>
Dog pulls on leash.	<p>Explanation – Dog is being alpha (alpha always goes first).</p> <p>Solutions – Force dog to walk behind you with tight leash, leash jerks, aversive sounds. Use pain-causing equipment such as choke chains, prong collars, shock collars.</p> <p>Problems with dominance approach –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is false that high-ranking member of the social group always goes first. • Jerking on leash may cause long-term damage to dog's neck and spine. • Use of aversives (sounds, physical punishment, leash jerks, shock) may damage relationship and dog's confidence, and may give the dog a negative association with passing stimuli, causing reactive/aggressive behavior. 	<p>Explanation – Dog wants to get to where he wants to go faster than boring two-legged human can move. Pulling often succeeds in getting him there, so pulling has been reinforced.</p> <p>Solutions – Prevent reinforcement for pulling by stopping when dog pulls, or backing up ("penalty yards") without jerking on the leash. Positive reinforcement: Reinforce loose leash generously, at first with every step, with high-value treats and forward progress, gradually reducing frequency of treats as loose-leash walking behavior increases.</p>

Is this dog dominant or acting like an “alpha dog”?
No; he’s been trained to jump up and bite on cue.



if you choose the wrong dog as the subject for your piercing, sustained stare.)

Despite the strong emergence of positive reinforcement-based training in the last 20 years, the Monks don’t seem to have grasped that the “respect” part needs to go both ways for a truly compassionate communion with your dog. Perhaps one of these days . . .

servations of captive wolves, the Monks concluded that the alpha roll is a useful tool for demonstrating one’s authority over a dog. Unfortunately, this is a complete and utter misinterpretation of the submissive roll-over that is *voluntarily offered* by less assertive dogs, *not* forcibly commanded by stronger ones.

The Monks also advocated the frequent use of other physical punishments such as the scruff shake (grab both sides of the dog’s face and shake, lifting the dog off the ground) and cuffing under the dog’s chin with an open hand several times, hard enough to cause the dog to yelp.

While professing that “training dogs is about building a relationship that is based on respect and love and understanding,” even their most recent book, *Divine Canine: The Monks’ Way to a Happy, Obedient Dog* (2007), is still heavy on outdated, erroneous dominance theory. Immediately following their suggestion that “a kindly, gentle look tells the dog she is loved and accepted,” they say “But it is just as vital to communicate a stern reaction to bad behavior. A piercing, sustained stare into a dog’s eyes tells her who’s in charge; it establishes the proper hierarchy of dominance between person and pet.” (It’s also a great way to unwittingly elicit a strong aggressive response

BIRTH OF MODERN TRAINING ERA

Just when it seemed that dog training had completely stagnated in turn-of-the-century military-style dominance-theory training, marine mammal trainer Karen Pryor wrote her seminal book, *Don’t Shoot the Dog*. Published in 1985, this small, unassuming volume was intended as a self-help book for *human* behavior. The author never dreamed that her modest book, paired with a small plastic box that made a clicking sound, would launch a massive paradigm shift in the world of dog training and behavior. But it did.

Forward progress was slow until 1993, when veterinary behaviorist Dr. Ian Dunbar founded the Association of Pet Dog Trainers. Dunbar’s vision of a forum for trainer education and networking has developed into an organization that now boasts nearly 6,000 members worldwide. While membership in the APDT is not restricted to positive reinforcement-based trainers, included in its guiding principles is this statement:

“We promote the use of reward-based training methods, thereby minimizing the use of aversive techniques.”

The establishment of this forum facilitated the rapid spread of information

in the dog training world, enhanced by the creation of an online discussion list where members could compare notes and offer support for a scientific and dog-friendly approach to training.

Things were starting to look quite rosy for our dogs. The positive market literally mushroomed with books and videos from dozens of quality training and behavior professionals, including Jean Donaldson, Dr. Patricia McConnell, Dr. Karen Overall, Suzanne Hetts, and others. With advances in positive training and an increasingly educated dog training profession embracing the science of behavior and learning and passing good information on to their clients, pain-causing, abusive methods such as the alpha roll, scruff shake, hanging, drowning, and cuffing appeared to be headed the way of the passenger pigeon.

A STEP BACKWARD

Then, in the fall of 2004, the National Geographic Channel launched its soon-to-be wildly popular show, *The Dog Whisperer*. Dominance theory was back in vogue, with a vengeance. Today, everything from housetraining mistakes to jumping up to counter surfing to all forms of aggression is likely to be attributed to “dominance” by followers of the alpha-resurgence.

“But,” some will argue, “look at all the dogs who have been successfully trained throughout the past century using the dominance model. Those trainers can’t be all wrong.”

In fact, harsh force-based methods (in technical parlance, “positive punishment”) are a piece of operant conditioning, and as the decades have proven, those methods *can* work. They are especially good at shutting down behaviors – convincing a dog that it’s not safe to do anything unless instructed to do something. And yes, that works with some dogs. With others, not so much.

My own personal, unscientific theory is that dog personalities lie on a continuum from very soft to very tough. Harsh, old-fashioned dominance-theory methods can effectively suppress behaviors without obvious fallout (although there is always behavioral fallout) with dogs nearest the center of the personality continuum – those who are resilient enough to withstand the punishment, but not so tough and assertive that they fight back. Under dominance theory, when a dog fights back, you must fight back harder

COMMENTS ON “ALPHA” DOMINANCE THEORY

There is a growing body of information available to anyone who wants to learn more about why dominance theory is so outdated and incorrect. Here are 10 resources to get you started:

1 The American Society of Veterinary Animal Behaviorists Position Statement on Dominance:

“The AVSAB recommends that veterinarians not refer clients to trainers or behavior consultants who coach and advocate dominance hierarchy theory, and the subsequent confrontational training that follows from it. (tinyurl.com/avsabdminance)

2 The Association of Pet Dog Trainers Position Statement on Dominance:

“The APDT’s position is that physical or psychological intimidation hinders effective training and damages the relationship between humans and dogs. Dogs thrive in an environment that provides them with clear structure and communication regarding appropriate behaviors, and one in which their need for mental and physical stimulation is addressed. The APDT advocates training dogs with an emphasis on rewarding desired behaviors and discouraging undesirable behaviors using clear and consistent instructions and avoiding psychological and physical intimidation. Techniques that create a confrontational relationship between dogs and humans are outdated.” (apdt.com/about/ps/dominance.aspx)

3 Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist Kathy Sdao:

“... Even if dogs did form linear packs, there’s no evidence to suggest that they perceive humans as part of their species-specific ranking. In general, humans lack the capability to even recognize, let alone replicate, the elegant subtleties of canine body language. So it’s hard to imagine that dogs could perceive us as pack members at all.” (tinyurl.com/kathysdaodominance)

4 Dr. Patricia McConnell, PhD, ethologist:

“People who argue that ethology supports ‘getting dominance over your dog’ are not only focused on an issue more relevant 50 years ago than today, they are misrepresenting the findings of early researchers on social hierarchy. Social hierarchies are complicated things that allow animals to live together and resolve conflicts without having to use force every time a conflict comes up.”

(4pawsu.com/pmdominance.htm)

5 Dr. Meghan Herron, DVM:

“Our study demonstrated that many confrontational training methods, whether staring down dogs, striking them, or intimidating them with physical manipulation such as alpha rolls [holding dogs on their back], do little to correct improper behavior and can elicit aggressive responses.” (tinyurl.com/meghanherrondominance)

6 Low Stress Handling, Restraint, and Behavior Modification of Dogs and Cats, by Dr. Sophia Yin, DVM:

“... dogs jumping on people are not vying for higher rank; they are simply jumping because they want attention and they often get it by

doing so. When dogs jump on counters to steal food . . . despite having been punished previously when you are present, they are using an alternate strategy for obtaining food and getting the chance to investigate . . . These unruly behaviors occur not because the animals are vying for rank but because the behaviors have been rewarded in the past.”

7 Study – University of Bristol:

“Far from being helpful, the academics say, training approaches aimed at ‘dominance reduction’ vary from being worthless in treatment to being actually dangerous and likely to make behaviours worse.” (tinyurl.com/univbristoldominance)

8 The Culture Clash, by Jean Donaldson (1996, 2005, James and Kenneth Publishing):

“The dominance panacea is so out of proportion that entire schools of training are based on the premise that if you can just exert adequate dominance over the dog, everything else will fall into place. Not only does it mean that incredible amounts of abuse are going to be perpetrated against any given dog, probably exacerbating problems like unreliable recalls and biting, but the real issues, like well-executed conditioning and the provision of an adequate environment, are going to go unaddressed, resulting in a still-untrained dog, perpetuating the pointless dominance program.”

9 Dominance in Dogs: Fact or Fiction, by Barry Eaton (2011, Dogwise Publishing):

“...The alpha wolf is not the dictator of a pack, but a benevolent leader, and domestic dogs are not dictatorial and are unlikely to try to raise their status to rule over other dogs in a pack environment.”

“I believe it’s time to open our minds and consider the concept of pack rules as a thing of the past and recognize that dogs are not constantly trying to dominate their owners.”

10 Dominance Theory and Dogs, by James O’Heare (2008, 2nd edition, Dogwise Publishing):

“...while the notion of social dominance holds potential for value in a social psychology and ethology context, it is an insidious idea with regards to explaining and changing behavior between companion dogs or dogs and people. . . it should be abandoned completely in that context in favor of a more efficient, effective and scientifically defensible behavioral approach.”

From an interview: “The most significant problem with viewing dog-human relationships in the context of social dominance is that it implies and promotes an adversarial relationship between the two. It sets up a win-lose scenario, that actually ends up in a lose-lose scenario (as most win-lose scenarios do). It is incompatible with cooperation by its very nature, cooperation being something you need to promote an effective bond and training environment.”



THE FOUR PRINCIPLES OF OPERANT CONDITIONING

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT: The dog's behavior makes something good happen. "Positive," in behavioral terms, means something is added. "Reinforcement" means the behavior increases. When your dog sits, you feed him a treat. His behavior (sitting) made something good happen, something was added (the treat). As a result, your dog is more likely to offer to sit again, so the behavior increases. Positive trainers use positive reinforcement a lot.

POSITIVE PUNISHMENT: The dog's behavior makes something bad happen. (Positive means something is added, punishment means the behavior decreases.) Example: When your dog jumps on you you knee him hard in the chest. He gets off. His behavior (jumping up) made something bad happen; something was added (your knee in his chest). As a result, your dog is more likely to think twice before jumping on you again. "Positive trainers" do not use positive punishment very much, if at all.

NEGATIVE PUNISHMENT: The dog's behavior makes something good go away. (Negative = something is taken away; punishment = the behavior decreases.) When your dog jumps up, you turn your back and step away. His behavior (jumping) made something good (your attention) go away. Positive trainers use negative punishment as a mild negative consequence for unwanted behavior.

NEGATIVE REINFORCEMENT: The dog's behavior makes something bad go away. (Negative means something is taken away; reinforcement increases the behavior.) Example: A trainer wants a dog who is lying down to sit. He pulls the dog's leash upward, tightening the collar. When the dog sits up, the trainer slacks the leash. The dog's behavior (sitting) makes the bad thing (the tightened collar) go away. Positive trainers may use a limited amount of negative reinforcement in the form of mild physical pressure, or sub-threshold presentation of an aversive stimulus (CAT).

until he submits, in order to assert yourself as the pack leader, or alpha.

Problem is, sometimes they *don't* submit, and the level of violence escalates. Or they submit for the moment, but may erupt aggressively again the next time a human does something violent and inappropriate to them. Under dominance-theory training, those dogs are often deemed incorrigible, not suitable for the work they're being trained for nor safe as a family companion, and sentenced to death. Had they never been treated inappropriately, many might have been perfectly fine.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, a very "soft" dog can be easily psychologically damaged by one enthusiastic inappropriate assertion of rank by a heavy-handed dominance trainer. This dog quickly shuts down – fearful and mistrusting of the humans in his world who are unpredictably and unfairly violent.

Most crossover trainers (those who used to train with old-fashioned methods and now are proud to promote positive reinforcement-based training) will tell you they successfully trained lots of dogs the old way. They loved their dogs and their dogs loved them.

I'm a crossover trainer and I know that's true. I also would dearly love to be able to go back and redo all of that training, to be able to have an even better relationship with those dogs, to give them a less stressful life – one filled with even more joy than the one we shared together.

WE'RE NOT DOGS – AND THEY KNOW IT

Finally, the very presumption that our dogs would even consider we humans to be members of their canine pack is simply ludicrous. They know how impossibly inept we are, for the most part, at reading and understanding the subtleties of canine body language. We are equally inept, if not even more so, at trying to mimic those subtleties. Any attempts on our part to somehow insert ourselves into their social structure and communicate meaningfully with them in this manner are simply doomed to failure. It's about time we gave up trying to be dogs in a dog pack and accepted that we are humans co-existing with another species – and that we're most successful doing so when we co-exist peacefully.

The fact is, successful social groups work because of voluntary deference, not because of aggressively enforced dominance. The whole point of social body language rituals is to avoid conflict and confrontation, not to cause it. Watch any group of dogs interacting. Time and time again you'll see dogs deferring to each other. It's not even always the same dog deferring:

Dog B: Hey, I'd really like to go first.
Dog A: "By all means, be my guest." Dog B passes down the narrow hallway.

Dog A: "I'd really like to have that bone."
Dog B: "Oh sure – I didn't feel like chewing right now anyway." Dog A gets the bone.

Social hierarchies *do* exist in groups of domesticated dogs and in many other

species, including humans, and hierarchy can be fluid. As described above, one dog may be more assertive in one encounter, and more deferent in the next, depending on what's at stake, and how strongly each dog feels about the outcome. There are a myriad of subtleties about how those hierarchies work, and how the members of a social group communicate – in any species.

Today, educated trainers are aware that canine-human interactions are not driven by social rank, but rather by reinforcement. Behaviors that are reinforced repeat and strengthen. If your dog repeats an inappropriate behavior such as counter surfing or getting on the sofa, it's not because he's trying to take over the world; it's just because he's been reinforced by finding food on the counter, or by being comfortable on the sofa. *He's a scavenger and an opportunist, and the goods are there for the taking.* Figure out how to prevent him from being reinforced for the behaviors you don't want, and reinforce him liberally for the ones you do, and you're well on your way to having the relationship of mutual love, respect, communication, and communion that we all want to have with our dogs. 🐾

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Addison's disease; adding "real" foods; canned plants

Thank you so much for the recent article published about Addison's disease in dogs ("The Great Pretender," October 2011). The day I read it my dog Hayleigh was showing almost every symptom, some she's had on and off for years. The final clue was the frequent urination, which had started the day before.

Because I read the article prior to taking her to the vet I knew to ask for the ACTH test in addition to the urine sample, which came back positive for primary Addison's. It would have otherwise taken weeks for us to figure out she didn't have a simple UTI and she would have been feeling so sick and possibly suffered through an Addisonian crisis while we tried to fix the wrong thing.

I am a better-informed pet owner and I can't thank you enough for teaching me about this hard-to-diagnose condition. Hayleigh has started her new medications and the results have been great.

Sarah McCorkle, via email

We love hearing this. Thanks for writing.

Thanks for the article about adding "real" foods to a dog's commercial diet ("Diet Upgrade," May 2011.) My dog had struvite bladder stones due to a bad bladder infection, and rather than feeding those prescription foods which are awful (she wouldn't even eat them), I started out with all home cooked foods.

Now I am feeding a small amount of grain-free kibble with the homemade foods: cooked meats (chicken, lean ground beef, or ground turkey), sweet potatoes, pumpkin, or regular potato, and high quality canned dog food, chicken broth and water. I added the kibble because the stools were so mushy. In the beginning I started out with rice and found that was causing problems with near diarrhea. The sweet potato or canned pumpkin took care of it. I also add digestive enzymes and fish oil from Only Natural Pet. All my other dogs get canned food and warm water mixed in with their kibble. I also add some vegetables sometimes.

Mary Fuller, via email

We're glad that you have made the connection between your dog's diet and her health! It's gratifying to feed real food ingredients and observe the improvements in the dog's condition. It's even helpful when you discover things that your dog is intolerant of; when you feed a commercial food with dozens of ingredients, it's hard to know part of the food (ingredient? manufacturing? storage?) is causing the problem.

However, when the "additives" to a commercial food exceed about 25 percent of the dog's total diet over a long period of time, it's very possible to unwittingly deprive the dog of some minor but essential nutrient that she'd otherwise get enough of from the commercial food. (Problems rarely result from feeding an incomplete or unbalanced diet for a few weeks or even months, but years of this type of feeding can result in deficiencies that lead to illness.) The most common – and most potentially harmful – diet formulation error that people make when they start tinkering with their dogs'

diets is failing to provide adequate calcium.

Now that you've gained the courage to depart a bit from the conventional commercial dog food path, we strongly recommend arming yourself with information about making your dog's diet complete. Mary Straus, the author of the "Diet Upgrade" article that you referenced, reviewed a number of great books about home-prepared diets; any of the books recommended in "Read All About it," in the March 2011 issue, would be a great place to start.

The following is a comment from a reader of the "web only" feature posted on the WDJ website, "An Inside Look at How Canned Food Is Made."

Glad to see a truly honest company (Lotus Pet Foods), but as you mentioned, (Lotus) "does not yet produce pet food for other domestic pet food companies" – similar to those companies (Wellness, California Natural, Innova, etc., etc.) that are packaged by Diamond Pets yet you continue to recommend.

Whoa up a sec. First, neither Wellness nor California Natural nor Innova are manufactured at any Diamond Pet Foods site. The actual sites where they are manufactured are listed in our wet food review ("You Can. You Should!" November 2011). In fact, none of the foods that are on our "approved" wet food list are manufactured by Diamond – because Diamond doesn't have any wet food manufacturing facilities. Diamond's wet foods, like the vast majority of the foods on our "approved" list, are manufactured by a "co-packer" (independent manufacturing facility).

In past years, Diamond Pet Foods has had some of its dry pet foods recalled – pet foods that were manufactured at its own dry pet food manufacturing facilities. Diamond also manufactures some dry pet food products for other companies at these facilities. But no educated consumer should blithely conclude that any food, wet or dry, that has any connection with Diamond is not to be trusted. That's nuts. It's also why pet food manufacturers have been reluctant (or have refused) to disclose their manufacturers – so they don't get brushed with the same tar that gets casually splashed around online.

As a long time lover of your magazine, I'm hoping you could answer a question for me about the latest canned food review. I base my dog food selections on your magazine alone and I am disheartened to find that my favorite food, Halo's Spot's Stew, did not make the list. Why?

Carlisle Stockton, via email

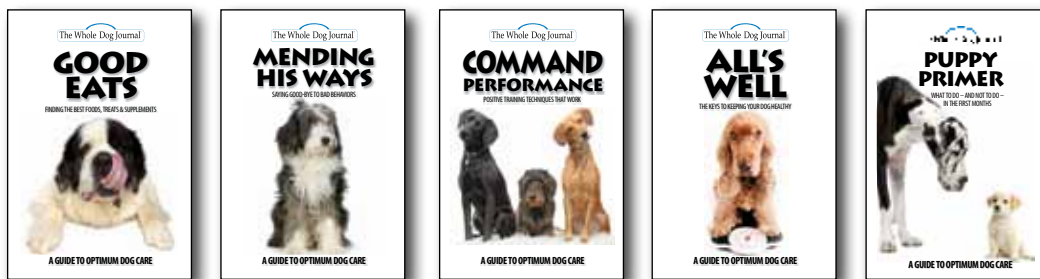
We've discussed the case of Spot's Stew in the past. The food meets all of our selection criteria save one: Halo doesn't disclose its manufacturing sites. Given the industry's experience with consumers like the previous letter writer, I understand why some companies (Newman's Own is another) make this choice – but I also know how important this information can be to consumers who want to know as much as they can about a product they feed to their beloved companions. 🐾

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