

Puppy

# Feeding Small and Toy Breed Puppies

Small and toy breed dogs have a higher energy requirement per unit of body weight than larger breeds, because they have higher ratios of surface area to body weight.

There is wide variation in caloric requirements or energy needs between pets. Since small and toy breeds only require relatively small amounts of food and owners tend to carry them, they are predisposed to putting on weight. Puppies should be fed as individuals to maintain normal growth and a lean, healthy body condition. [Purina Body Condition Score](#) and weight should be continually monitored at home and at regular veterinary appointments.



## Key Messages

### What to feed?

- Puppies should be fed a complete and balanced growth diet until they reach full skeletal maturity. In small and toy breed dogs, this is typically reached between 6 and 10 months of age.
- Diets formulated for small and toy breed puppies should be higher in energy and nutrient density and contain highly digestible and available ingredients. The size and shape of the kibble are typically designed for small mouths.
- Adult maintenance diets are not recommended for puppies, but a diet labeled for "all life stages" can be fed to puppies.
- Feeding wet or dry food is the owner's preference:
  - Dry foods are more calorie-dense than wet foods which contain more water.
  - Dry foods may provide dental benefits because they are abrasive and help to remove plaque. Some small breed dogs are predisposed to dental or oral problems.
- Fresh water should be freely available to the puppy.

### When to feed?

- Free-choice (ad libitum) feeding can effectively be used for small breed puppies. However, their body condition should be continually monitored to prevent excessive weight gain.

- Meal feeding provides better control over food intake and aids in house-training, as puppies tend to need to defecate shortly after eating.
- Small and toy breed puppies under 4 months of age can be fed free-choice (weigh out the daily amount) or divide into ~4+ meals per day.
- From about 4 months of age onward, the number of daily meals can be decreased and by 6 months of age, 2 meals per day is adequate.

## How to feed?

- Consult the daily feeding guidelines on the pet food package.
- For small and toy breed puppies that eat smaller amounts, the use of a ½ or ¼ cup is more appropriate than a standard 8-oz. or 250-ml cup OR the most accurate method is to weigh food on a kitchen scale.
- Remember: Daily caloric intake = total daily food plus treats, table scraps, food used for administering medications, training treats, etc.
- Growing puppies must be fed as individuals (provide each with their own dish) and in a quiet area with no distractions or competition.
- Puppies should be given about 30 minutes to consume their meal, and then any leftovers should be removed.

## Additional Resources

Case, L. P., Daristotle, L., Hayek, M. G., & Raasch, M. F. (2011). *Canine and feline nutrition* (3rd ed.). Mosby. doi: 10.1016/B978-0-323-06619-8.10025-8

Lawler, D. F. (2008). Neonatal and pediatric care of the puppy and kitten. *Theriogenology*, 70, 384-392.

The Purina Institute aims to help put nutrition at the forefront of pet health discussions by providing user-friendly, science-based information that helps pets live longer, healthier lives.

