

Nutrition is now recognized as having great implication on canine behavior, longevity and overall good health. Wendy Volhard started her journey into canine nutrition in 1973 when her 6 yr old Landseer Newfoundland was diagnosed with kidney degeneration and given just a few months to live. Wendy, feeling she had nothing to lose and everything to gain, began feeding a species specific, homemade food and carefully monitored her dogs' kidney functions with annual blood tests through her veterinarian. Her dog lived to the ripe old age of 12. Wendy has since devoted herself to the study of canine nutrition and is one of the leading authorities in the field.

I began to focus on nutrition and behavior soon after I lost 2 of my Danes at 4 years of age, much too young for any breed. One was definitely linked in my mind to stress and diet. As well as having physical problems, Dreamer was also dog aggressive. She died of complications from her 2nd bloat surgery. She was 4 yrs old. Chance, her sister, lived to be 8, had thyroid issues and also was dog aggressive. Astral, their mother, died at 4 yrs of age, shortly after they were weaned.

I thought I did everything right. I followed my vet and breeders recommendations, fed the food they suggested, said to be premium dog food at that time, no table scraps, no exercise 1hr before or after feeding or drinking large amounts of water and still did not have success. My girls were dying much too young. There had to be a better way.

Poor nutrition is now being linked to mental disease, poor behavior, and learning disabilities in children. Yale University's School of medicine found hormonal evidence that supports the belief sugar can provoke abnormal behavior in children. Children given refined sugar products experienced levels of adrenalin in their blood TEN TIMES HIGHER than before eating the sweet. This led to anxiety, difficulty concentrating, crankiness, and antisocial behavior.

Most mainstream dog foods contain large amounts of processed grain fragments, or another term used is carbohydrates. Processed carbs are transformed into simple sugars in the body. They may spike your dog's energy level; contribute to diabetes, hyperactivity, loss of self control, irritability and possibly fearfulness. Think about your own pets' behavior. Are you seeing some things that may be due to excessive carbohydrates in their diet?

What about the conditions these grains/carbs are grown in? What types of pesticides, chemical fertilizers, and soil conditions are they grown in? Do traces of these also make into your pets food? What do you think? Yes, absolutely and they are in our food supply too.

These toxins also affect behavior, and are thought to contribute to aggression and irritability, as well as to be known as cancer causing agents.

It has been documented that the nutrients in the soil have deteriorated in direct proportion with the amount of industrial farming performed. Large corporations are actually farming and fewer individuals. More chemical fertilizers and pesticides are being used than ever before.

This means that our food is not providing us with needed vitamins and nutrients that our bodies and our dog's bodies can absorb and utilize.

What happens to our dog's behavior when they are deficient in certain vitamins and minerals? Vitamin B1 (also known as Thiamine) deficiencies have been linked with compulsive behaviors, stool eating, muscular in-coordination and diseases of the brain and nervous system. Vitamin B3 (also know as Niacin,



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Niacin amide or Nicotinic Acid) deficiencies have been linked with irritability, aggression, and poor reflexes. Calcium deficiencies have been linked with nervousness, irritability, aggression, anxiety and confusion.

Magnesium is needed to work hand in hand with calcium. Deficiencies have been linked to aggression, muscle twitching, learning difficulties and poor memory. Wendy Volhard has reported success in some cases of “rage syndrome” supplementing magnesium in an absorbable form for those dogs testing deficient.

Manganese deficiencies have been linked with seizures, irritability, aggression, deafness and allergies. Manganese together with amino acid and zinc deficiencies have been linked with “spinning behavior” in Bull Terriers.

Did you know that there are as many as 10,000 different food additives that legally don't have to be listed on any label? Chemicals are listed as “natural flavorings” or “spices”. You are able to look at some labels and wonder where exactly the recognizable ingredients are as they are filled with chemical equivalents.

Food chemicals have been linked to easily distracting behavior, lethargy, urinary urgency, difficulty settling down, irritability and fearfulness. Artificial food colorings have been linked to hyperactivity.

What about preservatives? BHA, BHT and Ethoxyquin are known carcinogens and build up in your dog's system over time. These preservatives are linked to allergic reactions, hyperactivity, and are toxic to the nervous system (unexplained fears, aggression or timidity). The liver is a major filtering system of all living creatures. What happens to your dog's behavior if the liver is over-taxed? In traditional Chinese Medicine fear and aggressive issues are linked to the liver. Experts also link thyroid issues to aggression. These physical problems can in turn be linked to diet.

As many as 1.5 million dogs per year are put to sleep, removed from their home or sent to an animal shelter because of destructive behavior, separation anxiety, unexplainable fears/aggression/timidity, difficulty focusing on tasks, nuisance barking, house soiling, personality problems, and compulsive behaviors such as chewing, circling or obsessive grooming. As a dog trainer, many of my clients come to me with the same problems. As I assess the contributing factors to these behaviors, diet continually plays a large role.

We would not feed our children a steady diet of sugar, chemical preservatives, and substandard protein and expect them to function in a productive manner. Why do we expect our dogs to?

Nutrition is a vital part of your dog's ability to think clearly, lower stress levels and produce a calmer demeanor. Dogs are learning to survive in the environment we place them in from the moment they come into this world. Thinking, focusing and problem solving expends a vast amount of energy. Rather than placing them on a diet that gives them minimum nutritional value, observe the changes an optimal diet can give your dog.

Hyper, unfocused, out of control dogs are most likely eating a food high in cereal combined with a high energy protein such as chicken, venison or rabbit.

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Aggressive or fearful dogs may be affected negatively by consuming higher levels of incomplete protein that does not digest well.

Shy and/or stressed dogs do not digest their food well and often suffer from intestinal upsets and diarrhea. They are lacking digestive enzymes that contribute to optimal absorption of needed nutrients.

Dogs that are fed a diet specific to their needs are able to learn positive behavior easier than dogs that are distracted by the needs of their body. An example would be a dog that is constantly moving, sniffing, scratching and does not seem comfortable in their own skin. Dogs with allergies, stomach or elimination problems find it difficult to concentrate on given tasks. The simple act of sitting or lying quietly becomes a battle between dog and owner.

Something as simple as a change in diet may improve not only your dog's quality of life, but yours as well. Your dog will be able to concentrate on the positive behavior required for him to thrive in the environment he lives in. Quality nutrition can help you balance your dog's behavior and contribute to their health and longevity.

Traditional Chinese Medicine attributes different thermal qualities as well as affects on the body as a whole to each meat based protein source. Think about the demeanor and normal activity of the animal protein source your food is made from.

Chicken, venison and lamb are high energy protein sources, for an overactive dog like adding gasoline to the fire. For a sluggish dog, perhaps just what their body craves.

Beef, bison, fish and pork provide less energy and may be what an overactive temperament needs to balance their system.

People that feel healthy and alert learn quickly and easily, the same holds true for our canine companions. Diet is an element to be seriously considered as a contributing factor when faced with behavior and health problems.

Is optimal nutrition a silver bullet promising to cure all your problems?

No. However it is an important part of the whole picture of you dogs health and of your health, too. It gives our dogs and ourselves a better shot at a healthy and long life.

***A good website to compare commercial dog food www.dogfoodanalysis.com