



## The Soggy Dog Blog: Eat This, Not That

One of the most common health issues we see in Labs today (and dogs in general, really) is obesity. I know we've covered this topic in previous posts, but with the number of dogs we continue to see struggling with weight issues, the message bears repeating, but perhaps with a different twist.

We've already explained in previous posts how to tell if your dog is overweight and what the health consequences are. This post, we're going to focus on correcting the nutritional issues that are half the problem (with lack of adequate exercise being the other half). It goes without saying that a dog doesn't control what he eats: he cannot go through drive-thru and order combo meals number 1-5 supersized, skip the sodas. He eats what you give him. You are solely responsible for his caloric intake. Here are some tips to help monitor and control that intake:

- **Always** pre-measure your dog's food for the day. Choose a container that becomes your dog's permanent daily food container and store it out of reach. Using a measuring cup to be exact, measure out his morning meal and afternoon meal into the container. Yes, you should actually use a dry ingredient measuring cup: you would be shocked at how "off" your estimate of two cups is!
- If you are training your dog or rewarding him with a "treat" for any kind of good behavior, do **not** reach for a mini bone or other calorie bomb. Just a couple of these little biscuits are the equivalent of a **whole meal!** Instead, reach inside his daily food jar (mentioned above) and reward him from his daily allotment of kibble. This makes absolutely certain that your dog isn't consuming hundreds of extra calories.
- Use the back of the bag of dog food as a guide only. If your dog is overweight, or worse yet obese, they **should not** be consuming the bag's recommended cups of food per day. If you're on a diet, do you continue to eat the same quantity of food as usual? It's no different with a dog. Curbing caloric intake is key. You can cut the number of cups of food your dog eats per day more dramatically than you think.
- Caloric values vary *dramatically* between brands of food, and even between blends of the same brand. Look at the kCals per cup and the protein percentages noted on the back of the bag of food. Foods with very high kCals and protein levels per cup are for young adult dogs that are extremely active. If this doesn't describe your dog, he's likely eating the wrong food. You may want to trade down to a different blend with fewer calories and less protein. Your dog isn't using it for growth and energy. He's storing it as fat.
- If you do opt to treat your dog, be mindful of the caloric impact if you choose not to use his daily kibble. A 2013 study by the AAHA of the popular "bully stick" revealed that these treats averaged 8-22 calories per inch, which for a small dog, could be as much as 30% of his daily calories in just one 6" treat! Vegetable-based treats, like frozen carrots or a few tablespoons of pumpkin, may not entice your dog as much initially as a bit of bull penis (yes, that's what a bully stick is), but it won't blow his diet either. Dogs' bodies don't digest plant fibers so foods like raw pumpkin act as fiber, which isn't a bad thing for the dog on a diet. Unsweetened applesauce and pumpkin can also be

frozen inside a Kong toy or white sterilized femur bone to provide an “active snack.” Do double-check with your vet or with a reputable resource online (<http://www.akc.org/content/health/dog-nutrition/>) before feeding your dog any human food, including fruits or vegetables: some are toxic to dogs!

- **Cut the Table Scraps Out.** Include the infants in your family in this endeavor. Dogs eating “people food” really pack on the extra weight, whether they are given tidbits from the table by the adults or they are positioned on high-chair duty around the infants. “People foods,” other than non-toxic plant-based items, are major calorie bombs for dogs. Thinking in terms of percentages, just a few potato chips is like the equivalent of you adding an entire cheeseburger to your diet! A few small bites of people food each day can be the equivalent of your dog eating one or more additional meals. This is in addition to the fact that many types of foods are harmful and even dangerous to your dog's health. Potato chips, for example, are extremely high in salt and can quickly dehydrate your dog; grapes can be toxic.

If you own a Lab now or have in the past, you know that one of their key personality traits is a voracious appetite. Because you love your Lab, you're probably going to want to show him your love by obliging his lust for treats. Keep in mind those mini bones you sneak him don't even give him a second of enjoyment as he gulps them down, but they are adding pounds that can take years off of his life. The best “treat” you can give your dog is that of your time. Give him a long belly rub or get out the tennis ball for a game of fetch. Spending time with your Lab is more beneficial to him physically and mentally and will create a deeper bond between you and him than any pig ear ever could.