

Text for Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> January 2005

By Nick Horniman

Pets Barn Animal Hospitals, Gloucestershire

As pet lovers we all want to improve the quality of our pets' lives and help them to live longer. By paying attention to your pet's body, for example looking out for lameness and any lumps and bumps on the skin, we can see any problems early and then get veterinary treatment if appropriate. Pets Barn recommends visits to your vet every six months for health checks and vaccinations so that any problems can be treated before they become serious.

Our other role as owners is feeding. Our pets totally rely on us to feed them and it is up to us to feed them correctly with the right product and the right amount. Generally, I have two rules about pet nutrition. I recommend that you feed a food designed for the age of your pet and I recommend that your pet has a complete commercially prepared dry food with fresh water available at all times.

So why feed different foods for different pet ages? Puppy and Kitten food contains all the vital nutrition needed in this important stage. Puppies and kittens need energy-rich food for the massive growth that occurs from leaving the mother to 9 to 12 months old. Calcium and phosphorus to help build strong bones, protein to help develop strong muscles and all the vital vitamins and amino acids needed during development.

Adult pets need the correct balance of top quality protein, carbohydrates, fats and other nutrients to maintain their body weight and to provide energy for exercise. It is important to avoid excessive levels of nutrients that would actually do your pet harm. Excessive magnesium in dogs and cats will cause kidney and bladder problems.

As pets get older, their nutritional needs do change. Dogs and cats over 7 years old are at a greater risk of kidney and liver disease so the level of protein and minerals need careful control. The diet for an older pet should contain increased levels of fibre to combat the constipation that pets of this age are prone to. Older pets often have problems with their teeth so it would be great to use a diet that helped with tartar control but was also gentle on teeth and gums. Senior pet food has high

digestibility to ensure that your older companion gets all the nutrition she needs to help keep her with you as long as possible.

There are many pet foods on the market and, as with most things in life, there's very good ones and very bad ones. Generally, the cheaper pet foods are to be avoided. Low quality foods are used that you would not want your pet to go anywhere near. What I look for in a diet is a complete dry food - these are dry biscuit based foods in a bag. The word "complete" means that they contain all the nutrients needed for your pet and as a dry food, you get benefits in dental care, owner convenience and cost.

Dry food helps reduce the tartar on the surface of your pet's teeth and helps control dental disease. Dry food is easy to feed, helping owners feed the correct amount of food, helping control obesity. With dry food you get great value - you are not buying the water which makes up most of the product in canned petfood. It is much cheaper feeding dry food than any other food available.

In January Pets Barn Animal Hospitals are promoting awareness in good pet feeding, running free of charge weighing consultations and giving free advice on feeding your pet. Whether a growing Great Dane or an elderly moggy that sleeps all day, we can recommend the type and amount of food needed to keep your pets with you as long as possible. Give us a call.

Pets Barn Longhope at Harts Barn Farm 01452 830086

Pets Barn Animal Hospital at Hartpury College 01452 700086

Pets Barn Forest of Dean in Heywood Road, Cinderford 01594 826688

For Emergency Treatment contact Pets Barn 24 hrs 01452 830421