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Reader Question for The Nutritionist: Issue 26 (June/July)
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QUESTION:

I just got a young mongrel puppy from a friend, who told me he is about 1 month old. Although she looks a little skinny, she seems to be quite active and healthy. I feed her puppy dog food (kibbles) daily, but she still looks skinny after two weeks. The vet said she does not suffer from worm infestation. What should I feed her?

ANSWER:

The skinny physique of your young mongrel puppy may not necessarily be solely attributed to a case of intestinal worm infestation. It is good to hear that you have sought veterinarian advice to eliminate this possibility. Remember to observe good overall hygiene for prevention and as a step towards long-term good health for you and your puppy.

As with all children, the high metabolic needs of puppies' means that they will require eating a lot more food for growth or simply to fuel their day-to-day activities. Thus, you may like to review your feeding habits and the type of foods your puppy is currently feeding on. From birth up to six months of age, puppies usually need twice the energy intake of adult dogs, depending on the breed. Generally, puppies are recommended to feed on balanced, high-quality commercial puppy formulas whereby the appropriate nutritional balance has been worked out for your puppy. Puppy formulas not only provide higher protein and fat content to match their fast-changing development but are also enriched with additional nutrients like vitamins and minerals essential for puppy growth. Not forgetting, their small bite-size kibbles make them puppy friendly while eating. Otherwise, regular food labeled "for-all-life-stages" will do well for your puppy too.

While choosing foods for your puppy, try to introduce high protein foods like lamb that is high in fat and is great for muscle building and allergy-friendly. As a thumb of rule in selecting commercial foods, ensure that the brand meets AAFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials) nutrient standards for puppy growth. Besides, supplementing your puppy with digestive enzymes can be a beneficial way to enhance absorption in its digestive system. These digestive enzymes are commonly available off the counter at pharmacies or at your regular vet.

Aside from good nutrition, some dogs and puppies may be intolerant or allergic to certain ingredients or additives. This will cause increased gastro intestinal movement that affects proper nutrient absorption. The most common food intolerance are colorings, sugars, wheat, milk and soy and if consumed can lead to a variety of problems such as weight loss and bloating, lethargy, diarrhea, consistent soft stools or skin and ear problems. Should you suspect your puppy have food intolerance, I recommend that you put your puppy on a premium quality, low-allergy and all-natural exclusion diet, after which you can gradually re-introduce foods into your puppy's diet so that the cause of any physical or behavioral changes that occur can be identified.

Last of all, you might want to check your puppy for signs of malabsorption. Puppies that have malabsorption will mean that they are unable to properly absorb the nutrients from digested foods by the small intestine into the bloodstream. Their appetite is usually ravenous, and weight loss with soft stools or diarrhoea is common. Immediate medical attention for your puppy is required for this condition.

I would strongly recommend that you seek further detailed veterinary advice on your puppy's condition to rule out these possible scenarios.