



Malnutrition in Dogs

We often associate disease primarily with a bacteria, virus, or fungus, and in a sense we are correct to do so. After all, it is the microorganism that invades the cells and hijacks their reproductive machinery for its own use. The problem with this lies in the assumption that the root cause has been found. Most often, the only way a microorganism or parasite can invade the body is after the body has been weakened (think of a cut on the skin that becomes infected).

And this is what malnutrition is most basically, a weakening of the body due to lack of proper nutrition. Malnutrition is common in dogs, because owners have little experience evaluating commercial dog food for proper ingredients and proportions. Another common cause is that dogs often eat a lot of foods that they really should not. Scraps from the table, rummaging in the garbage, and dog snacks replace the space that would have otherwise been filled with lamb, marrow, and grain proteins.

Puppies are regularly dewormed after birth due to the lifelong damage parasites can cause. Puppies, with their immature immune systems, are ill-equipped to fend off parasites which unchecked will lead to malnutrition. For puppies, this means delayed growth, chronic underdevelopment, and high susceptibility to other illnesses.

The body of a mature dog is designed to maintain its health through a series of gland-mediated checks and balances which we refer to as the immune system. The immune system, a commonly misunderstood term, refers to white blood cells, lymph, skin, lungs, liver, and pretty much any part of the body used to prevent infection and eliminate toxins.

While malnutrition can be a stealth disorder, waiting until late middle age to start showing symptoms like cataracts, osteoporosis, and arthritis, it will typically be visible in reoccurring illness. If your dog is treated for parasites and a year later needs to be treated again, it is likely malnutrition to blame. If your dog frequently has colds, diarrhea, and other symptoms of disease, malnutrition is again a likely culprit. Even problems like cancer, where the body is unable to check rapid and abnormal cell growth, are often caused secondarily by malnutrition, as the dog's body is unable to eliminate free radicals efficiently.

Lab tests can confirm low blood percentages of vital nutrients like vitamin D and fatty acids, but there is no test(s) to ensure all nutrients are present. This is the compounds necessary to good health are many, and science is still in the process of uncovering more. This leads us to three common sense recommendations to prevent malnutrition.

First, feed your dog a quality food, either commercial or cooked yourself. There are many

websites available that will help you understand the ingredients in dog food and which ones are a waste of space. Veterinarians are chock full of good advice on this one, because they know the effects of feeding cheap food.

Second, make sure your dog gets at least some fresh food. An example can be yogurt, a lacto-fermented milk product that is packed with B vitamins, many other nutrients, and bacteria to maintain a healthy digestive tract. Another example might be raw, organic beef organs which are excellent sources dog friendly nutrition.

Third, watch your dog for signs of malnutrition. Become familiar with the illnesses and symptoms your dog is most prone to, and find out what nutrients are implicated. Sight problems can be caused by lack of vitamin A, for example, and digestive upset may be due to lack of B vitamins. Science has come a long way, and information on particular deficiencies and their symptoms is readily available.

Finally, a severely malnourished dog needs a trip to the veterinarian. In these cases, IV therapy may be needed, because the digestive system is simply too weak to get back up. Additionally, veterinarians can perform blood tests and determine specific deficiencies. Once able to eat, easily digested foods like yogurt and whey, and herbs like the powder of slippery elm bark, can help restore vitality and immune functions, as well as prepare your dog's digestive system to better absorb regular food.