



FOOD FOR BERNER PUPPIES AND ADULTS

A well balanced diet provides quality nutrition and in turn keeps the cells, tissues and organs healthy. This enables a Berner's immune system to stay in top condition to fight any invaders. The food you feed can help your dog to remain fit or it can cause problems with ears, skin, overall health and behavior. Observation of your dog's physical condition, coat quality, condition of the eyes and ears, and eating habits and preferences will guide feeding decisions you make throughout your Berner's lifetime.

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT FOOD

Your dog's breeder should recommend a diet for your dog. Your dog's breeder has experience in selecting a specific diet that has proven to meet the nutritional needs of dogs from the families of dogs from which your puppy comes. Veterinary advice on diet can be helpful; especially if the dog develops short or long term health issues related to digestion. BUT do keep in mind your dog's breeder is likely to be a good source for advice on what kind of food will work best with your new pup and adult dog.

Bernese Mountain Dog owners feed a range of food from raw diet, homemade diets to commercially prepared kibble. No matter what type of feed, Berner owners seem to agree to feed a high quality food with relatively low protein level, approximately 18 -26% and a moderate fat content, less than 16%. High protein/fat feeds (> 28%, >16%) can be 'too much' for many Bernese, especially those that are not very active working/performance dogs. Feeding a diet that is too 'heavy' in protein has been known to precipitate hotspot outbreaks in some Berners. A diet too high in fat adds unwanted pounds and in some cases causes diarrhea.

CANINE DIET'S BOOK LIST

Holistic Guide for a Healthy Dog (Volhard, Brown)

Real Food for Dogs:50 Vet-Approved Recipes to Please the Canine Gastronomer

(Moore, Davis)

Better Food for Dogs: A Complete Cookbook and Nutrition Guide (Bastin, Ashton, Nixon)

Raw Dog Food: Making It Work for You and Your Dog (MacDonald)

RAW FEEDING WEBSITES/YAHOO GROUPS

Dr. Billinghurst's BARF Diet - http://www.barfworld.com/html/barf_diet/barfdiet.shtml

BARF/Raw Diet Support - <http://www.groups.yahoo.com/group/raw-lite>

Raw feeding - <http://www.pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/rawfeeding>

Carnivore Feed-Suppliers - <http://www.groups.yahoo.com/group/CarnivoreFeed-Supplier>

TIPS FOR FEEDING BERNERS

Feeding some raw foods or a raw diet can improve your Berner's immune system function and overall health. Many Bernese love to eat a variety fresh food. Small additions of yogurt, cooked or lean raw meat, fish, eggs or fresh fruits, including banana, apple or pear and vegetables, including carrots, broccoli, squash, cooked pumpkin or yams can be offered as a way of introducing enzymes to a diet. Your Berner may have certain preferences - dog loves carrots, green beans and apples, but not so fond of other fresh foods - picky, picky, picky! - Dog says, 'you really expect me to eat broccoli?' Preferences are normal. Before embarking on feeding a raw diet read books or articles on canine nutrition. Ask others who have been successfully managing their dog(s) with feeding raw foods how to proceed. Understanding how to balance a raw food diet requires research and keen observation of the dog's reaction to eating raw foods. Choosing the most beneficial food sources and striking the correct balance of ingredients in a raw diet for the individual dog's activity level, metabolism and digestive system can be challenging.



SUPPLEMENTS - NUTRACEUTICAL SUPPORT LIST

See the list below for some of the more commonly used supplements to address either overall immune system support and/or specific support for conditions such as allergies, dry skin, digestive, and arthritis. Determining the correct supplement(s) and the dosage for your particular Berner is serious business. Be aware of the possibility of interactions of supplements with other medications or supplements your dog may be taking. For best results it is wise to discuss adding supplements to your Berner's diet with the dog's breeder and vet.

Antioxidants - vitamins C & E	Joint support supplements - glucosamine sulfate, chondroitin sulfate, Methylsulfonylmethane (MSM)
B-complex supplement	Probiotics / plant enzymes
Kelp	Garlic
Omega 3 & 6 fatty acids - fish oil, flax seed oil	

ABOUT KIBBLE

For optimal development and maintenance combined with minimal food preparation time, many Bernese owners choose to feed a good quality commercially prepared food. The cheapest food available in the local supermarket or pet store is not a good choice for Bernese Mountain Dogs. Some commercially prepared kibble and canned or frozen feeds contain human grade ingredients and use vitamins C and E as preservatives instead of BHT, BHA or ethoxyquin. There is strong anecdotal evidence to suggest additions of chemical preservatives and additives may result in allergic reactions (itchy skin, seeping ears or eyes, pink staining around mouth or feet, or a host of more serious immune system challenges) in some Bernese. Protein sources in commercial kibble and canned dog foods usually come primarily from meats, eggs or fish and grains. Many Bernese owners prefer to use foods with meat sources listed first in the feed ingredients list found on the bag.

If you'd like to do a little research on dog foods, the following informative website <http://www.doberdogs.com> lists a number of commercially prepared dog foods, ingredients, website addresses, and contact information.

The "Whole Dog Journal" at <http://www.whole-dog-journal.com> prepares an annual list of quality feeds. Whether the feed is grain based or meat based, owners should use common sense and powers of observation to determine which foods work best for their dog. Rely on your breeder for tips on managing puppy diet to optimize development.

FEEDING - EXERCISE

Manage your Bernese puppy's play schedule or adult's activities so exertion and exercise will occur at a minimum of 1 - 2 hours after mealtime - A puppy or dog that is very active or exercised with a belly full of food could experience bloat or gastric torsion. Also, if the dog has been exercising allow for a cool down of a half an hour or so before feeding.

FOOD AND MANNERS

Offering a short 1-3 minute training session, even something as simple as requiring a sit from your dog prior to delivering a meal, will foster polite behavior related to feeding time.

Children should be taught to leave a dog alone when it is eating. Teaching your puppy to remain calm during an intrusion while the pup is eating is especially important if you have children. If your puppy has resource guarding tendencies, consult a professional trainer.

MANAGING FOOD INTAKE

The best favor any owner can do for their puppy is to manage activity and feeding to allow for as steady as possible growth. The ideal weight of any dog should depend on how large a frame and how much bone and muscle he or she has. Feeding more food to a pup to accelerate growth is NOT advised. Over feeding a Berner puppy will cause the dog to become fat which can place increased strain on joints, ligaments, tendons and bones. Overfeeding can also cause digestive difficulties such as diarrhea. A bit of firm flesh covering the ribs and when the dog feels tight fleshed but not bony is reasonable.

HOW MUCH FOOD?

Food intake will increase steadily as your pup grows. Usually healthy pups from 8 - 10 weeks of age eat roughly 3/4 - 1 and 1/2 cups of food per meal. Usually young pups are offered 3 meals between 2 - 6 months. After 6 months, offer the dog two meals per day. The amount of food a puppy needs to maintain good body condition will vary depending on the individual metabolism and activity level. As a general rule healthy Bernese will eat from 3 - 6 cups of good quality food daily. A four-month-old will eat more than an eight-week-old pup. At 6 - 8 months the food intake will usually be at an adult proportion or slightly greater depending on the dog's environment and system.



SUGGESTIONS AND IDEAS

Most breeders feed puppies in a litter from one or two large communal food dishes. Getting a puppy to eat from his own bowl, with no competition from litter mates, can present minor challenges. Some puppies are easily distracted, may wander away before finishing. An easily distracted pup that wants to move into other pets' food dishes can be confined to a crate or different area during feeding times, unless the owner is willing to act as a constant monitor. It is not unusual for puppies to be less interested in meals at particular times of the day while gobbling up food at other times. Finicky eating behaviors are often learned and may be the result of poor management or an owner making an incorrect choice of feed for a particular dog.



Generally speaking most puppies do best with planned regular feeding times; that is when food is set down and left for short periods, 5 -15 minutes. Any uneaten food is then picked up and stored safely, refrigerated until the next meal time. Scheduled feeding also can allow an owner to establish a housebreaking routine since what goes in does come out. Free feeding, that is having food available at all times, is something to be discussed with the puppy's breeder.

Coddling by holding the food bowl while the puppy eats or by adding delectable treats after the bowl has been put down can

tend to establish poor eating habits. If the puppy is hungry, the puppy will eat. Dogs have a great sense of what they need to survive. No healthy puppy will starve itself. Bernese that do not get daily physical exercise may become less than enthusiastic eaters.

Some puppies are real "chow hounds." Using a flat shallow pie plate or tin will slow down food gobblers since the food is spread out rather than all mounded in as in a steeper feeding dish.

Resource guarding, meaning dogs that growl, become territorial or overtly aggressive when food is removed or when a person comes around while the dog is eating must not be permitted to develop. Start early to train your puppy to be comfortable by placing your hand in or around puppy's food bowl – you should be able to move or pick up a bowl, at any time.