

# Feeding Our Senior Cairns

by Linda Heiner

According to Purina, and conformation rules for entering a Veteran dog, a senior dog is one that is at least 7 years old. As such, their digestive systems become less efficient in digesting and absorbing nutrients from their food, such as fat and other skin nutrients. This change can lead to skin changes such as dryer coarser hair and their coat itself may start to thin out. What may also be noticed is a more brittle texture to their toenails.

So just as we feed puppies and performance dogs a different diet, we also need to consider our senior dogs changing dietary needs.

If you feed your dog a kibble diet, be sure that you are measuring out their food accurately with a measuring cup. I have always marveled at the volume of food listed on the bags of kibble for a dog under 20 pounds. It is way too much food. Remember that dog food companies are in the business of selling food, not keeping your senior dog trim. Weigh your dog regularly and record their weight so you can see over time if they are gaining weight and need to reduce their volume of food. It has been proven that a leaner dog will live longer than an overweight dog. A 14-year study showed that dogs fed 25% fewer calories than their littermates lived nearly 2 years longer, showed fewer signs of aging and enjoyed an extra three years of mobility before developing arthritis. Being on the leaner side will also put less stress on their joints and their ability to walk more comfortably even if arthritis sets in.

How much protein? Well, there are more opinions about protein levels in dogfood than there are veterinary nutritionists. Older vets have speculated that feeding older dogs a food lower in protein can decrease the amount of nitrogen waste delivered to the kidneys thus preserving kidney function by giving the kidneys less work to do. However veterinary nutritionists say protein

restriction remains controversial and has, in cases been extended to all older dogs, whether they have kidney problems or not. It is pretty well accepted that most older dogs benefit from diets containing more protein, as long it's a high-quality protein, than young adult dogs. A good amount of protein for an older dog without kidney issues is 30% of their meal. The quality of a protein depends on how digestible it is and its amino acid profile, meaning that it contains the number of amino acids required by dogs. Generally, animal sourced proteins contain more of these amino acids than do plant-sourced proteins.

Years ago, I switched to a frozen source of animal sourced protein (mostly fish or rabbit) in feeding all my dogs regardless of age. This is in addition to cooked yams, canned pumpkin, nonfat yogurt, cooked green beans and a small amount of kibble. Supplements are also added. As my dogs age and if they cannot tolerate frozen food, I have switched them, but this has rarely happened.

Rethink the treats you feed as those add up to weight gain as well. Since dogs care more about the number of treats they get rather than the size of the treat, switch to tiny treats or cut them up into smaller pieces. Try other foods as treats such as raw baby carrots, zucchini slices, small slices of apple, melon etc. Do not give grapes, raisins or anything containing xylitol (a sugar substitute) which may also be referred to as "birch sugar." Some owners feed some of their meal as treats during the day.

Now, if only my dogs would feed me high quality protein and allow me limited treats, we would ALL be better off!

*Editor's Note: The opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not express the views or opinions of the Cairn Terrier Club of America.*

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The first show included a sweepstakes for both puppies and veterans. Louise Hooper was the Sweeps judge. BC/BSS was Cairncroft Iko Iko of Firefly bred by Patti McCully, Chuck McCully, and Christopher L. Gray. The owners are Annette Williams and Patti McCully. Best Veteran went to GCH CH Cairncroft Keltic Kisses BCAT, bred and owned by Nancy McNair and Christopher Gray. The regular class judge was Scott Kellogg. Best of Breed/Best Owner Handler went to GCHB CH Cairncroft Chasing Dreams and Rambling owned by Lynda Gilley and Patti McCully, bred by Patti McCully and Chris Gray. Best of Winners and Best of Opposite Sex was Cairncroft Brown Eyed Woman,



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