

About feeding exercise, and so forth....

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What is the best diet for my Bullmastiff puppy? I am confused because some people say to feed them puppy foods and others say to feed them adult foods...

Large and giant breeds such as Bullmastiffs, Great Danes, German Shepherds, etc., are at real risk to develop skeletal problems due to their rapid growth rates and enormous size potential. The skeletal problems we worry about most in our puppies are hip dysplasia, osteochondritis dessicans of the shoulder, elbow dysplasias, and weak cruciate (knee) ligaments.

We have learned that the incidence of these disorders is partially controlled by genetics. In hip dysplasia we feel the **hereditary component** is between **25 and 40%**, the rest of the tendency to develop disease being determined by the **diet, body weight, and environment**.

What environmental factors can we control that will lessen the likelihood of these problems from being expressed?

Diet, body weight and exercise are the things we have most control over, and that, if managed properly, can greatly decrease the chance of our pup developing problems later on.

Diet and body weight.

It is best to feed a large/giant breed a diet that will promote a slow and easy growth rate, avoiding obesity at all costs. How do we do this?

Firstly, select a diet that has been formulated for the large breeds. There are many available these days. They are usually restricted in protein, fat, and calcium and phosphorous levels.

Whether it says PUPPY or ADULT is not the important item, but instead, the levels of the following are to be fed:

Protein: 19 to 25%

Calcium: Not to exceed 1.1%

Fat: 8 to 14%

Phosphorous: Not to exceed 1%

Many puppy foods far exceed these levels recommended for the large breeds. Too much fat and protein, calcium and phosphorus result in growth rates that are too rapid, resulting in excess mechanical stresses on tender growing bones and joints. Too much fat creates fat puppies, which also heavily stresses the pup's developing skeletal system.

Studies have shown that fat puppies are more than twice as likely to develop skeletal problems as pups of normal weight.

What is "normal"?

You should be able to feel the rib bones, but not be able to see them. This is a good rule to follow. I recommend you find a diet that has the above levels of nutrients, and feed from 2 to 4 months three times a day just enough to follow this rule. At 4 months go to twice a day, and stay with this. **DO NOT** use any mineral supplements at all. This is very important! Your goal should be a puppy that is never fat, and slowly matures into his full body size.

Exercise and environment.

Young developing bodies need exercises. However, do not over-exercise. I do not recommend that pups exercise on treadmills, or do prolonged running, jogging, hiking or jumping. Never exercise on wet slippery surfaces, such as wet grass or cement. Provide indoor sleep area that is warm and soft. Do these things, and watch your bully turn into the magnificent animal of your dreams!