

## **NUTRITION NEEDS OF THE ENGLISH BULL TERRIER**

**PREFACE:** This article is based on a survey conducted in the Fall of 2005 by the Bull Terrier Club of Dallas. By polling membership on various feeding habits, our goal is to provide dog owners with a useful, practical guide to the day-to-day activity of keeping the dogs we love and cherish healthy and happy. The conclusions in this report are based on personal experiences of owners and breeders within the club, which has more than 50 active members, many of whom have more than 15 years experience with this special breed. This report is the first in a series that will cover a variety of important issues facing pet owners and breeders alike.

English Bull Terriers like their owners are a particular breed, well suited to each other, in their hard-headed playfulness and especially when the dinner bell rings. Many owners struggle for years to assemble the right dietary components for these sometimes picky eaters, who require a well-balanced diet to maintain their famous bulky muscle mass and fend off a variety of skin conditions specific to the white dogs of the breed. Most learn about their animals' nutritional needs from trial and error, the hard way in fact, lacking a complete source and guide on this topic and specific to the breed.

True to its mission to improve the breed through a better understanding of its habits and needs, the Dallas Bull Terrier Club recently surveyed its membership, on Bully eating habits, the good and the bad, including breeder and owner preferences around name brand foods, all-natural combinations, snacks and other health-issues directly related to diet.

Members admitted up front that they didn't expect any big surprises from polling the close-knit Bull Terrier community in North Texas, but findings released in this article demonstrate successful patterns of nutritional practices used throughout the membership.

The collective wisdom of the Dallas Bull Terrier Club on nutritional issues represents the first in a new series of reports dedicated to Bull Terrier health and happiness.

### **STORE BOUGHT DRY FOODS**

When it comes to the types of store-bought food, there survey respondents were not united on which brand name food they prefer. Owners almost equally use popular brands found in pet stores, however the Nutro Brand and Bil Jac products appear to be slight favorites over these other popular brands: Iams, Eukanuba, Nature's Choice, ProPlan, Wellness.

More common than brand name manufacturers, a majority of owners choose lamb and rice and chicken for their major ingredients.

### **BARF**

Approximately 50 percent of owners feed their dogs some form of raw or Barf diet, along with various brands of dry food to round out the major component of their dogs' diet. They survey results did not offer a corresponding pattern between the Barf diet and a specific type of dry food. Most owners said they feed their dogs bargain raw ground beef and occasionally chopped steak.

Textbook theories and long-held beliefs on Bull Terrier care suggest that a pound of raw meat a day is a good, average amount. Those same sources recommend for stud dogs a pound and a half of raw meat per day.

"But it's hard to get a pound and a half of meat in a dog day after day. You might be successful one or two days consecutively, but normally you can't get them to eat that much meat. You also have to remember that when these guidelines were introduced, some 30 years ago, the food we were feeding our dogs wasn't as good as it is today. That much meat just isn't necessary with today's improved foods," said long-time Texas English Bull Terrier breeder James Davis.

Arguments for the Barf diet range from theories that dogs are still basically carnivores and require raw meat, which provides a wide variety of enzymes needed for nutrient ingestion. Arguments against the diet support the claim that today's mass-produced foods provide a healthy diet and are based on sound research and experimentation. Either way, experienced owners and breeders will tell you to treat your dog as an individual case to some extent and adjust their diet as necessary according to their weight, coat condition and over all health and vitality.

### **GRAINS**

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On the topic of feeding specific grains, survey results showed a high majority of dogs get some type of whole grain product. Sixty three percent of respondents, 12 of 19, say they feed some type of grain in their dogs' diet, the most common being Rice and Oatmeal in fairly equal numbers of answers.

Equally, owners feed grains to their dogs regardless of whether or not they are serving a Barf diet or wholly store-bought. One owner named the breakfast cereal Cheerios as their dog's primary grain source.

This overwhelming commitment to grains must show that these animals benefit from a diet high in fiber derived from whole grains found in most family cupboards.

### FRUITS VEGETABLES

Most respondents say they feed raw fruits and vegetables, but there was little or no identifiable consistency in types. The survey shows, however, that Bull Terriers apparently love carrots, beans, broccoli and fruits like apples and bananas.

Most say they chop vegetables first and basically provide "whatever we're having for dinner that night." This type of family atmosphere regarding their dogs reflects the good-hearted nature of people attracted to this breed of dog, which thrives on unlimited attention and closeness to its owners.

### RAW BONES

Raw bones as a regular dietary feature are commonly used by many members of the Bull Terrier Club of Dallas. Fifty seven percent of (11 of 19) respondents feed some type of raw bones, while thirty six percent (4 of 11) use raw chicken necks.

Bones as a healthy addition to the overall diet isn't disputed across the membership, however the overall safety of offering bones presents a variety of challenges for owners and dogs alike.

**According to Marilyn Sibley, Club member, "Great care should be taken with raw bones. Chopping large bones such as turkey necks, turkey wings, pigs feet, etc, into manageable pieces with a cleaver is a good idea. The use of a grinder, such as the Maverick Meat Grinder, about \$100 from Pierce Equipment, can make the process of raw feeding much easier."**

**"You should never leave a dog unattended with raw bones," she concluded.**

Some believe their dogs received serious cases of food poisoning from unsanitary bones. Most owners forbid rawhide chews, which they say are documented choking hazards.

### PUPPY NUTRITION

Beginning life like most other energetic breeds, growing Bull Terrier puppies begin to thrive when they enter the six-month period, as they begin eating and exercising in great amounts. Giving them as much as they care to eat, introducing more mature food, and providing as much playtime as possible ensures their steady growth to full potential.

In the second half of the first year most owners slowly increase amounts of kibble and slowly begin to add more meat. After years of breeding and nurturing babies, it's obvious that some litters prefer different foods than others. All part of the learning curve with the breed.

### SUPPLEMENTS

Almost all respondents, sixty eight percent (13 of 19) use some sort of supplement in their dogs' diet and the majority provide some sort of oil: flax oil, fish oil, safflower oil, cod liver oil. Most say they are boosting their dogs' intake of Omega Fatty Acids, which indicates they are striving to help their dog maintain health skin and coat.

Owners who battle dry skin conditions and excessive itching typically benefit from increased intake of Omega 3 Fatty Acids. There are variety of supplements on the market that provide a combination of ingredients, but as you can see, many owners lean toward providing single ingredient supplements.

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## TREATS

An often overlooked aspect of your dog's health comes in the form of treats, cookies of some sort. Almost all respondents said they use store-bought treats of many different brands. And a small number said they make their own. Here is one recipe for home-made dog treats:

Kim can you provide that recipe? That might make a nice useful addition to the article.

Crunchy treats provide better dental hygiene, all agree, and a proper reward for good behavior, but the nutritional aspect of these cookies cannot be overlooked.

## ALLERGIES

Some Bull Terrier owners battle allergies of some kind on a seasonal basis and the source of various ailments owners say occasionally stem from food. In the survey, twenty six percent of respondents said "Yes," that they had good reason to believe their dogs were allergic to some food ingredients, but there was little or no consensus on the root causes. Fifteen percent of respondents said they didn't know if they were battling allergic reactions to food, but suspect they are dealing with some sort of food-ingredient allergy.

Ten respondents said they were not aware of any type of allergy in their dogs. The survey unfortunately provided very little information on this troubling issue for some owners.

## SUMMARY

The consensus of opinion across the Bull Terrier Club of Dallas membership suggests that these dogs tend to thrive on a combination of Barf and store-bought ingredients as the basis of their diet. Most owners surveyed, regardless of feeding Barf or exclusively store-bought, include some type of raw bone, raw vegetables and fruit. And most use some form of oil and vitamin supplement.

The best diet for your Bull Terrier will inevitably result from experimentation with different foods, raw and store bought, and close monitoring of your dog's weight, activity levels and especially coat and skin condition. Symptoms like incessant scratching and itching, especially the paws, can indicate some type of allergic reaction, when in actuality these conditions, dry itchy skin, hair loss and irritated paws, are sometimes caused by nutritional deficiencies. Diagnosing a problem isn't always about removing an item from the animal's diet, but including one that's missing.

Although this survey produced a great amount of variation in specific ingredients, it's clear that these dogs live up to their reputation as canine "garbage disposals" and that they eat practically anything, including broom handles and various types of plastic lawn furniture, toys and what not.

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