



Feeding for optimal weight and condition

By Ness Bird – Nutrition Adviser and RVN CertCFVHNut ©

Being underweight may result in energy loss and poor stamina. Insufficient nutrient intake increases the risk of dietary deficiencies which can seriously compromise the dog's general health and wellbeing.

What constitutes underweight?

An emaciated dog is easy to identify; and the ribs, spine and bone protrusions are clearly visible from a distance, and easily felt. There is no observable body fat, and muscle mass will have been lost. The waist is very obvious, and the abdomen appears tucked when viewed from above. Breed standards can be helpful in establishing an optimal weight for adult dogs, but there can be considerable variation between individuals. Knowing the accurate healthy weight of your adult dog can be very useful because if weight is lost in future you will have an accurate record of by how much. It's harder to gauge healthy puppy weights, but your breeder may be able to provide growth charts which give guidelines depending upon age.

Veterinary advice

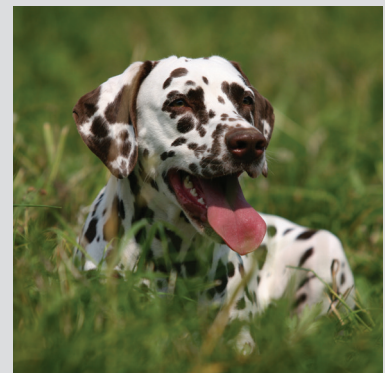
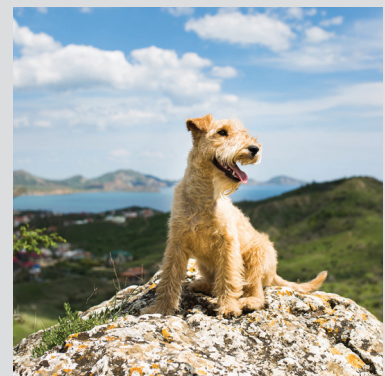
There are many possible reasons for loss of weight and condition; some are serious and will require veterinary intervention, whilst others are less severe and may often be resolved with an appropriate feeding regime. It is important to identify the cause/s and if necessary seek veterinary advice should a medical complaint be suspected. Any dramatic weight loss should always be investigated by your vet as a matter of urgency.

Metabolic energy requirement

Weight loss will occur if your dog is not eating sufficient calories to meet his energy requirements. Formulae used to calculate the calories needed can be very helpful, but unfortunately can only provide an estimate of a dog's energy requirement as they cannot take into account individual variation.

Individual requirements

There can be considerable variation in the amount of calories a dog needs; dependent not only on his actual weight and life stage, but also his desired weight, how much exercise he is taking, his temperament, neuter status, and





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his metabolism. Stressed and anxious dogs burn more calories than placid dogs. A 20kg dog of a normal, healthy weight could require as few as 850 calories if very inactive, to as many as 1655 calories if very energetic. As you can see, this is quite some range and shows just how tricky it can be to establish exactly what is going to be optimal in cases where a dog is underweight.

It is not just the number of the calories ingested that is important; it is essential to provide calories from nutritionally valuable ingredients that the individual dog can utilise very easily. The proportion of calories supplied by each nutrient also needs to suit the individual.

Inappetance

Inappetance is a common cause of underweight dogs. Medical reasons for inappetance should always be ruled out first by your vet. Behavioural issues are very common, but require patience and perseverance to resolve.

Arden Grange Prestige rich in fresh chicken

This concentrated and calorific diet can be a good choice for the discerning eater because the subsequently smaller feed portions are often more acceptable to dogs with a low appetite. The Arden Grange Partners canned food range is also a good option due to the soft texture and especially appealing aroma. Like the **Arden Grange Prestige rich in fresh chicken** dry food, it contains a high proportion of fresh meat or fish which is great for palatability.

Adverse food reactions

An increasing number of dogs are found to suffer from food allergies or intolerance to certain ingredients and this may result in loss of condition, and ultimately body weight since the dog's metabolism finds it difficult to utilise the ingredient/s to which he is sensitive. Elimination of the reaction provoking ingredients and replacing them with easily digestible substitutes that your dog is able to efficiently metabolise is the solution. The **Arden Grange Sensitive ocean white fish & potato** moves away from the more common meats and grains found in many commercial diets, and may be suitable for dogs suffering from adverse food reactions.

Metabolic stress

Metabolic stress may be caused by illness, surgery, physical injury, malnourishment, strenuous exercise, extreme environmental / climatic changes, pregnancy and lactation, anxiety, hyperactivity and other behavioural problems.

In cases of metabolic stress, be it physical or psychological, the metabolic rate increases meaning that more calories are expended than usual. **Arden Grange Performance with fresh chicken & rich** is specially formulated to support dogs suffering from metabolic stress, and it contains a higher proportion of fat, extra taurine to support the heart, and a blend of natural antioxidants to help protect against free radical damage.

Digestive disease

Your vet must always be consulted if you suspect digestive disease. Your dog will usually suffer additional symptoms alongside his loss of weight and condition, although in cases of SIBO (small intestinal bacterial overgrowth) sometimes the



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only sign is weight loss. Symptoms of digestive disorders may include a dull and depressed demeanour, a dull and scurfy coat, vomiting and / or chronic diarrhoea. Digestive diseases include malabsorption, exocrine pancreatic insufficiency (EPI) and inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). All the time a dog is losing nutrition through diarrhoea or vomiting, it will never be easy for him to gain weight. Arden Grange diets, particularly the **Adult Light with fresh chicken & rice** and **Adult Sensitive ocean white fish & potato** have been successfully fed to many dogs with digestive ailments under veterinary supervision.

Parasitic infestation

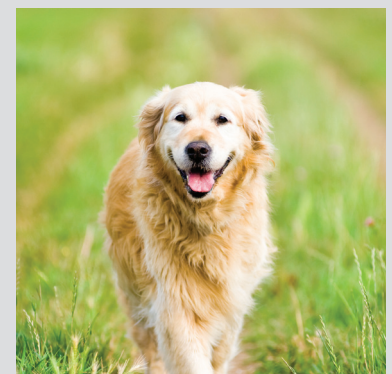
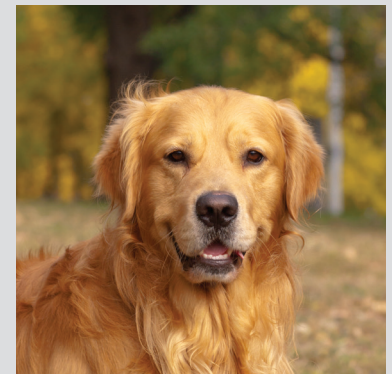
Intestinal worms are a common cause of loss of weight and condition. Protozoal parasites such as giardia and isospora should also be ruled out. External parasites e.g. fleas and mites may also contribute to an overall loss of condition since the body will be busy with its defences and the immune system will have to work harder than usual. An itchy dog will find it hard to settle, and constant scratching and fidgeting requires energy.

Infection

Bacterial and viral infections are another common cause of loss of weight and condition, since they frequently manifest in vomiting and / or diarrhoea, which has the effect of altering the body's electrolyte balance. The immune system needs to work hard to combat the infection, and very often, antibacterial therapy can leave the beneficial intestinal flora suppressed. The prebiotics FOS and MOS included in the Arden Grange recipes may help to promote the growth of the friendly bacteria and limit the growth of pathogenic bacteria. The nucleotides in the food may have a positive effect on the immune system and may help to facilitate a more rapid cell response to an outside challenge, and they also increase the surface area available for absorption within the intestine.

Energetic juveniles

Sometimes it's not possible to attribute a specific reason for loss of weight and condition, and the dog does not appear 'unwell', nor is he suffering from any medical symptoms. This is especially common in youngsters, particularly those that are very energetic and burning off calories too quickly. Periods of rest are critical for puppies. Mental stimulation is just as important as controlled physical exercise, and interactive toys are a good investment. Genetics play a crucial role, and it's important not to try and bring on a youngster too quickly as this can result in developmental joint disease. A slim, adolescent dog is generally much healthier than a plump one, and in time, providing sufficient calories from nutritionally valuable ingredients are supplied, the puppy should fill out naturally.





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Active adults

There are several diets within the Arden Grange range that cater for the active dog depending on the type and duration of exercise / activity undertaken. The **Arden Grange Prestige rich in fresh chicken** and **Arden Grange Performance with fresh chicken & rice** are frequently suited to working or sporting dogs. Both diets supply more calories from fat than the adult maintenance products, which is the most efficient energy source for dogs. It's a common misconception that protein is the most important nutrient to help promote weight gain, but 1g of pure fat contains more than twice as many calories as 1g of protein or 1g of carbohydrate. Protein is important, and in body condition terms, especially for good muscle tone, but primarily for the many structural and metabolic roles of its constituent amino acids.

General hints and tips

- Make sure the feeding volume is correct. If you have estimated your dog's weight, and also the amount to feed, the scope for error is quite large, and can result in over or under-feeding by a significant quantity. The best method is to weigh your dog's meals using kitchen scales. Do not make sudden changes to the feeding quantity – increases should always be implemented gradually. Whilst wild dogs are natural scavengers and equipped for eating large amounts at times, our domestic dogs, especially large, deep-chested breeds are more at risk from bloat if overly large meals are fed. Loose stools may also be a problem if the meal volume is increased too quickly or by too much.
- Feed a diet that is suitable for the age and activity level of your dog. Puppies should be gradually changed onto an adult diet once their upward skeletal development is complete. Even though the puppy may continue to 'grow into' his adult shape over a longer period, the requirement for a growth diet generally ends once adult height is achieved. Growth diets have higher feeding volumes than adult diets to allow for the increased metabolic energy requirement of puppies, and thus provide surplus nutrients if the dog is fed a growth diet beyond his natural growth span. In lively youngsters, surplus calories are not always laid down as fat and may be burnt off as extra energy which can sometimes be mistaken for 'hyperactivity'. Other dogs may simply pass more waste. This may result in increased frequency of passing motions, increased stool volume and / or diarrhoea. This illustrates how too much food can prove detrimental even in an underweight dog. When a dog passes normal faeces the first time he empties his bowels, but they become progressively looser throughout the day, he may well be over-fed.
- Ensure that your chosen diet contains high quality ingredients, and that these are easily digestible and efficiently metabolised. Proteins, for example, should be of a high biological value, which means that they are easily broken down into the essential amino acids necessary for all the structural and metabolic functions within the body.
- Remember that different dogs thrive on different ingredients, and what might be ideal for one is not always optimal for another. The nutrient balance of a feed is important too i.e. the way in which the protein, fat and carbohydrate is proportioned. Some dogs do very well on a concentrated diet with a moderate fat percentage whilst others may thrive better on a feed with a higher carbohydrate level. It may take time to establish which food is best suited to your dog.
- Avoid the ingredients most commonly associated with adverse dietary reactions wheat gluten and the other high gluten grains – oats, rye and barley – soya, milk products and beef. Arden Grange pet foods are all hypoallergenic and the recipes are free from the items listed above. When the body is busy excreting ingredients it finds difficult to digest, it stands to reason that the overall efficiency of the metabolism will be compromised. Indigestible chews such as rawhide

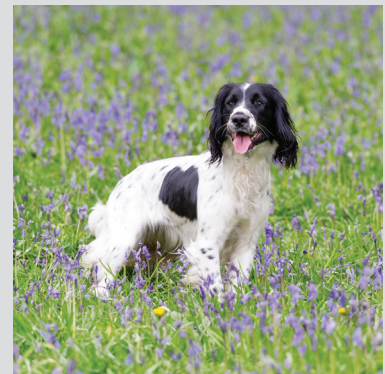


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can be especially provocative and give the digestion a lot of work to do for very limited nutritional value.

- Avoid artificial colourings, flavourings and preservatives. Some dogs are very sensitive to such additives. Arden Grange pet foods and treats are preserved naturally with mixed tocopherols (vitamin E) and rosemary extract.
- Encourage your dog to lead an active lifestyle with the minimum of stress. This is important for all dogs, but particularly so for growing youngsters. Puppies and young dogs need periods during the day when they are able to rest and sleep, in order to keep in good condition and ensure steady growth. Some dogs are naturally highly-strung or exuberant and it is especially difficult in such animals to keep weight on them, as they are burning off calories as fast as the food can supply them. These dogs will obtain particular benefits from the frequent feeding of small regular meals in order to promote more stable blood sugar and good serotonin levels with the aim of avoiding energy peaks and troughs.
- Remember that building up a dog to peak health and condition can be time consuming. It is important to build up stamina and muscle tone as well as to increase the overall body weight. Controlled exercise is crucial, and lead exercise and swimming are preferable to free-running during the build-up period. Closely monitor your dog's weight, appetite, general demeanour and stools. Weighing should be undertaken weekly in order to make any necessary gradual adjustments to the feeding volume, whilst stool production should be assessed daily.
- Soak dry food for about half an hour prior to serving. There is virtually no enzyme action before the food reaches the stomach, so softening it first can help ease the initial workload of the digestive enzymes.
- An underweight dog should be fed small, frequent meals. Not only will this be helpful in stabilising energy levels, a small meal is more easily digested, absorbed and metabolised as the gut has less work to do at any one time. Small regular feeds also keep the digestive enzymes ticking over efficiently. Together these small but helpful actions should ensure that your dog will glean the maximum benefit from the nutrients in his food. Three to four small meals per day are usually best for an underweight dog, and mean more nutrition can be provided without overloading the gut. Take care not to exercise too close to a mealtime because of the bloat risk. The metabolic rate is faster following exercise, so allowing a decent amount of time for the dog to completely settle can mean the digestive processes will work more steadily and efficiently.





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- The addition of a non-dairy probiotic such as Lintbell's YuDIGEST may help to aid absorption and assimilation of the nutrients at the lower end of the digestive tract. Boosting the friendly bowel flora may help unabsorbed nutrients be utilised better.
- Water is a very important nutrient and dehydration can cause weight loss, so always make sure your dog has plenty to drink. A canine water fountain is a good way to encourage a greater fluid intake. Filtered water can also be beneficial because dogs have special taste buds that can detect the "flavour" of water. Tap water is not always very appealing to them, which is why many dogs like to drink from puddles.
- Seek advice from your vet if medical problems are suspected. If you are experiencing behavioural difficulties with your dog, then clinical causes need to first be ruled out. A qualified behaviourist will then be able to give you constructive help in resolving any problems.

As a responsible and ethical company, Arden Grange fully appreciates the caution that must be taken when discussing the potential benefits of nutritional supplements. It is against the law to make medical claims. Whilst these ingredients are safe and natural, and may be beneficial to some of the cats and dogs fed on Arden Grange, we must highlight that their inclusion is not a substitute for veterinary intervention in the case of a sick animal.