



# Don't Overfeed Fido

## Plus Other Tips to Keep a Dog Cancer-Free

by Karen Becker

Cancer is the leading cause of canine fatalities in the U.S., Europe and Japan. Often diagnosed too late, the risks, heartache and expense of aggressive traditional treatments have many people searching for healthy alternatives. Although the causes are not well understood, we can give our companion the best possible chance of prevention.

### 1 Avoid Pet Obesity

In studies across species, caloric restriction has been shown to help prevent tumor development and progression. Obesity is strongly linked to increased cancer risk in humans and is assumed so in dogs. For people, cancer is also connected with excessive glucose, increased insulin sensitivity, inflammation and oxidative stress. Over-

feeding a dog is not a loving thing to do.

### 2 Choose an Anti-Inflammatory Diet

Creating or promoting inflammation raises cancer risk by facilitating abnormal cells to proliferate. Current research suggests cancer is actually a chronic, inflammatory disease. Because cancer cells require the glucose in carbohydrates as an energy source, limit or eliminate carbs present in processed grains, fruits with fructose and starchy vegetables. Cancer cells generally can't use dietary fats for energy, so appropriate amounts of good-quality fats are nutritionally healthy.

Another major contributor to inflammation is poor-quality, processed pet food, which is typically high in omega-6 fatty acids and low in omega-3. Omega-6s increase

inflammation; omega-3s do the reverse.

A healthy, moist dog diet contains real, whole, organic, non-GMO (genetically modified) foods, preferably raw—also plenty of high-quality protein, including muscle meat, organs and bone; moderate amounts of animal fat; high levels of EPA and DHA (omega-3 fatty acids, such as those present in krill oil); and some fresh-cut ground veggies; plus antioxidant-rich fruit.

Consider adding both vitamin/mineral and other supplements like probiotics, digestive enzymes, medicinal mushrooms and super green foods. Work with a holistic or integrative veterinarian to determine the best regime.

### 3 Reduce Exposure to Toxins

Harmful toxins include chemical pesticides like flea and tick preventives, lawn chemicals, tobacco smoke, flame retardants and all common household cleaners. A six-year study by the Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, at Tufts University, showed that exposure to lawn pesticides, specifically those applied by lawn care companies, raised the risk of canine malignant lymphoma up to 70 percent.

Conventional flea and tick preventives are pesticides, whether spot-on treatments, pills, dips, solutions, shampoos or collars. Chemical spot-on products attracted U.S. Environmental Protection Agency attention based on reports of 40,000 adverse events in 2008, including 600 animal deaths.

Because avoiding all toxins is nearly impossible, consider periodic detoxification based on a vet's recommendation. For a dog with constant exposure to toxic chemicals all summer, a daily oral detox protocol is sound. If the only source is a monthly dose of a flea and tick product, limit a detox to the week after each pill or topical treatment.

### 4 Refuse Unnecessary Vaccinations

To properly maintain a dog's first line of defense—the immune system—don't overstimulate it with vaccines. Tailor vaccine protocols to minimize risk and maximize protection, considering the dog's breed, background, nutritional status and overall vitality.

A good protocol with healthy puppies is to provide a single parvovirus and dis-

temper vaccine at or before 12 weeks of age, and a second set after 14 weeks. Cautious vets then order a titer test (at a lab that uses the immunofluorescence assay method) two weeks after the last set of vaccines. If the dog has been successfully immunized, it's protected for life.

If titer tests indicate low vaccine levels (unlikely), try a booster for only the specific viruses that titered low, and only those to which the animal has a real risk of exposure. Combination vaccines (four to eight viruses in one injection), a standard booster at many veterinary practices, is not recommended.

## 5 Maintain Physical Integrity Until at Least 18 to 24 Months of Age

Studies from Purdue University, the University of California, Davis, and others show a clear link between spaying/neutering and increased cancer rates in dogs, especially large breeds. These include increased risk of osteosarcoma in Rottweilers neutered or spayed before their first birthday; double the risk of bone cancer in neutered or spayed large, purebred dogs versus intact (not neutered) dogs; and three to four times the cancer rates for spayed female golden retrievers versus intact females. Opting for ovary-sparing spays (hysterectomy) is another option that preserves sex hormones while rendering the animal sterile.

Applying these five suggestions in caring for a dog throughout its life offers a pet a good chance for a cancer-free and overall healthy, high-quality life.

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