Nutrition & Feeding for Pembroke Welsh Corgis

First, let's begin by looking at the regional origin of the Corgi diet.

Pembroke Welsh Corgis originated as herding dogs in Pembrokeshire, Wales. They ate rabbit, beef, and other meats local to the hunting and herding areas, along with some fish. They also ate vegetables such as carrots, potatoes, and cabbage. These original foods are good to keep in mind for determining a diet that will help optimize a Corgi’s health.

Looking at Particular Ingredients

Choosing a high-quality dog food is a must in optimizing the health of any dog, no matter its breeding. It is better to invest in a good, quality dog food and feed your dog well, than to spend more money with your veterinarian.

To Go Grain-Free or Not to Go Grain-Free & Taurine Deficiencies

Grain-free diets has received some criticism which even the FDA has questioned when the problem is probably due more to the first five primary ingredients in a dog food recipe causing a taurine deficiency.

A taurine deficiency can cause dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM). This canine disease causes the heart to weaken and enlarge. It is often characterized by fatigue, difficulty breathing, coughing, and fainting, with some dogs progressing to heart failure.

The FDA has stated that high amounts of legumes, lentils, and potatoes (other than sweet potatoes) in dog food may be causing a taurine deficiency which is leading to DCM in some dogs and that the problem is not so much with a grain-free diet, but with ingredients low in taurine dominating a dog food recipe.

It should be pointed out that while legumes, lentils, and potatoes have little or no taurine and grains have little or no taurine as well. Thus, a diet dominated by grains could also cause a taurine deficiency.

Taurine, an amino acid comes from meat. It is also manufactured from the amino acids cysteine and methionine.

The recommendation, that even the FDA agrees with, is that a dog food recipe should not have ingredients low in taurine listed in its first five ingredients. A recipe with the first five ingredients being from meat sources is preferable. Legumes, especially garbanzo beans (a.k.a. chickpea), and lentils should be outside the first five ingredients. Potatoes should not be listed in the first five ingredients either.
Potatoes and sweet potatoes are not in the same family, so they are not closely related. Sweet potatoes are a healthy source of nutrients for dogs whereas potatoes do not provide the same healthy source of nutrients for dogs.

Ingredients are listed in order of highest to lowest amounts, so the further down in the list the less there is in the recipe.

**A Grain-Free Food is Preferable With Few Exceptions**

Absolutely no corn should be fed for several reasons. In the process of explaining the problems with corn, the benefits of other ingredients will be revealed.

1. Corn and corn meal have a high glycemic index (GI). Even though the dog food label may say ‘corn’ or ‘whole grain,’ it’s still a problem which will be explained more in reason #2 and how processing affects the GI value. The glycemic index (GI) is a relative ranking of carbohydrate in foods according to how they affect the blood glucose levels. Carbohydrates with a low GI value (55 or less) are more slowly digested, absorbed, and metabolized, causing a lower, slower rise in blood glucose and therefore insulin levels. Corn’s GI value is 60 and corn meal’s GI value is 69, placing them in med-range GI index (56 to 69). For comparisons sake, high fructose corn syrup (made from corn) has a GI index that places it in the high range (70+) with the GI range being from 1 to 100.

2. Corn is not easily digested. It has to be refined and processed to make it more digestible. The more it’s processed, the higher the GI index. Even if the dog food label states ‘corn’ or ‘whole grain’ it is misleading. To be digestible the ‘corn’ or ‘whole grain’ has to be ground and cooked to make it digestible, thus raising the GI index of it.

3. Allergies to corn. There are a substantial number of reports by owners, breeder, veterinarians, and forums/blogs, reporting corn and other grains as a likely cause of dog allergies. There’s also the very real issue of grain quality. In many cases, allergy problems may not be so much a matter of the grain itself, but rather undetected contaminants within the grain. So, the problem may stem from pollens and storage mites, their droppings, and carcasses within the grain.

4. There is nothing in corn that makes it stand out in nutritional value as far as its “biological value” in dog food. The biological value is a scientific way to compare the nutritional worth of different protein ingredients and that protein’s ability to supply vitamins (especially B vitamins), minerals, and essential amino acids (Omega fatty acids), and to supply them in the proper proportions. In other words, the higher a protein’s biological value, the more usable it is to animal. Corn’s biological value is 54, whereas beef’s BV is 74, fish’s BV is 76. (Amounts vary some depending on source.) The BV of duck and chicken is also high, with many sources stating such, but not providing the actual number value. The easier the protein source is to digest the quicker it is able to be absorbed and used by the body.
The higher the BV of the protein the better it is for building and repairing muscle as well as maintaining healthy hair, bones, skin, and blood.

(5) Corn is NOT a superior source of energy.
Corn is mostly fat free and it is the fat in meat, along with its protein that provide energy. Lean meats can provide nearly twice as much energy than corn. While fat intake needs to be considered to keep an animal from becoming overweight, it also needs to be understood that fat is needed for energy and a balance needs to be determined.

If you study the history of dogs’ diet, corn was not introduced until the invention of today’s dry dog food in 1956. A ‘natural ancestral diet’ consisted of 56% protein, 25-30% fat, and 14% carbohydrates. With the invention of dry dog food this changed to 18-32% protein, 8-22% fat, and 46-74% carbohydrates.

What suddenly made carbohydrates, like corn, grains, and potatoes (carbohydrates), so popular with the rise of the pet food industry? The answer is cost! Carbohydrates are cheap – it is a filler, and should be considered cheap calories. Carbohydrates also contribute to the process of gelatinization – turning the dog food mixture into a jelly form that will hold together into dry dog food ‘kibble.’

While brown rice has a high BV of 83, it’s GI value is 55. Plus, the part of the rice used could be questionable in some commercial dog foods. Provided the brown rice used is the same as that for human consumption its use in dog food is fine in moderation, but if it’s a filler to lower costs it should be avoided. The other problem with rice in commercial dog foods is that there tends to also be other grains that should be avoided in dog food.

Oatmeal in the form of steel cut oats or ‘rolled’ (flattened) grain is a whole food and has health benefits for dogs. Whole foods have less potential for disrupting the stomach and bowels. Oatmeal can help with upset stomach, gas, vomiting, diarrhea, or constipation. Oatmeal has a soothing effect on the stomach lining.

The concern would be what part of the rice or oat grain is used in a particular dog food recipe. If it’s the whole grain, the dog will benefit. If it’s the mill ends (pieces left over after the milling process) basically all the benefits are lost and it’s just a cheap filler in the recipe.

**Protein Intolerance**

Another recent concern is “protein intolerance” for dogs. The term is a bit deceptive and clarification of what it means is important.

It *does not* mean that dogs should have a low protein diet.

*It is* referring to the source of the protein in the dog’s diet, specifically, what source of meat is used. Some meat sources are harder for a dog to digest than others and some dogs have more of a problem with certain meat sources. So, these two problems can work against a dog obtaining the nutrients from the meat in its dog food.
Which meat source is best is highly debated, but in general most veterinarians recommending a change in a dog’s diet because of a protein intolerance will recommend duck or fish as the meat source of protein.

Most veterinarians will recommend avoiding beef, chicken, and lamb for a dog with a protein intolerance. Interestingly, these meat sources, especially chicken and lamb, are also more likely to cause problems in dogs with skin sensitivities including hot spots.

**What to Look For**

The perfect dog food has yet to be invented, so what should we look for?

While most people consider dogs to be carnivore (meat eaters), it’s more accurate to observe dogs and see that they are omnivorous (consumer both plants and animals).

Look back at the ‘natural ancestral diet’ of Corgis; rabbit, beef, fish, and other meats and vegetables.

Compare this with what we’ve learned and a more ‘natural diet’ should contain more protein, more fats, and less carbohydrates. When shopping for dog food that is as close as possible to ‘ideal,’ look for the following 7 characteristics:

1. Higher in quality meat-based protein. A meat based protein should be the #1 ingredient listed in the ingredients.
2. Made with a specific named animal source (i.e. beef, fish, duck, chicken, lamb). Avoid ‘generic’ terms. Example: any kind of ‘by-product.’ With meat (i.e. chicken-by-product) this means it’s more than just the meat. There can be hides, bone fragments, beak fragments, internal organs, heads, etc. mixed in slurry made from ‘scraps’ from local butchers, meat packing plants, even food ‘scraps’ from dumpsters. Avoid a ‘meat by-product’ which could be from any mammal and come from most any part of the mammal. Avoid a generic ‘poultry’ as well for the same reasons. Any kind of meat meal (i.e. duck meal, fish meal) is okay. ‘Meal’ simply means the meat is cooked and ground. Pound for pound, there is more meat in ‘meal.’
3. Higher in natural fats and oils.
4. Lower in carbohydrates.
5. Free of artificial flavoring, coloring, and preservatives. Avoid preservatives (which prevent animal fats from turning rancid and increase shelf life) such as:
   - Ethoxyquin – also a pesticide and a possible source of problems with the liver and blood
   - Butylated hydroxyanisole (BHA) – possibly a cancer-causing agent
   - Butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT) – possibly a cancer-causing agent
6. Complete in all essential vitamins and minerals.

Natural preservatives such as vitamin E (mixed with tocopherols), vitamin C (ascorbic acid), and extracts from various plants, such as rosemary, keep dog food fresh, but for a short time period.
Fiber improves colon health, so it’s presence in any dog food is beneficial. Fiber also helps diarrhea ad constipation. With diarrhea, fiber absorbs extra water. With constipation, fiber helps hold onto water.

When weight loss or ‘weight control’ is necessary, a low-fat dog food is used containing less fat and more fiber, to fill the dog without adding calories.

Fiber helps treat both diarrhea and constipation. In the intestine, some fiber is broken down into fatty acids which help prevent the overgrowth of harmful bacteria. It aids in colon cells recovering during injury and may help reduce the risk of colon cancer. Fiber also helps keep the pancreas healthy and its production of insulin to control blood sugar. Thus, fiber may aid in preventing canine diabetes. It also helps keep the anal gland healthy.

Some fiber is water soluble and other fiber is non-water soluble (insoluble). There are benefits to the body of both kinds of fiber. Some good sources in dog food are: fruits and vegetables, legumes (i.e. peas, beans), root tubers/root vegetables (i.e. beet pulp, sweet potatoes), and flaxseed.

A dog food with 4-5% fiber is a good amount. For weight control or weight loss a dog food with 8-10%, leaning more towards the 10%.

**What do ‘natural’ and ‘holistic’ labels mean?**

Legally, not much. ‘Holistic’ and ‘natural’ as well as terms like ‘premium,’ are marketing terms and there are really no guidelines that control how they are used. Terms like ‘human-grade ingredients’ and ‘made in a USDA-inspected facility’ are hard to confirm as accurate and true as well and neither claim means the food is safe for human to eat.

**What is ‘organic’ pet food?**

There is no official definition for what constitutes an ‘organic’ pet food.

**Government Guidelines**

It won’t surprise too many people to learn that the government has ‘guidelines’ for what dog food should contain nutrient wise as well as for labeling dog food being for ‘all stages,’ puppies, or adults.

It’s regulated by ‘guidelines’ determined by the United States’ Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), as well as The Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO).

In the course of doing my research, I emailed the company office of the brand we use and asked a couple of questions. One about labeling and one about a couple of ingredients. I received quick, courteous replies, but both replies began with disclaimers about how their products adhere to the AAFCO nutrient guidelines and are completely balanced diets for normal, healthy pets only.

Well, yes, they have to – it’s required. But, those guidelines are pretty minimal when it comes to what is going to help dogs live long, happy, healthy lives.
Fortunately, the brand we use (and many others) exceed those guidelines! Fortunately, many quality brands of dog food adhere to higher standards of nutrition determined by veterinarians and animal nutrition specialist rather than governmental guidelines.

I found several sites stating AAFCO information on the importance of higher amounts of protein and fat vs. carbohydrates. Some of these sites as they sited AAFCO ‘guidelines’ apparently missed some of the contradictions AAFCO makes. Such as, while stating a diet higher in protein and fat vs. carbohydrates is better, AAFCO turned around and in a percentage, breakdown of protein and fats verses carbohydrates stated a dog’s diet should contain up to 70% carbohydrates! That does not leave room for the protein and fat content to outweigh the carbohydrates unless that’s a ‘new,’ new math.

I found little to trust in what I saw and read of the limited amount of AAFCO ‘guidelines’ actually available for the general public, such as myself. The AAFCO’s own website (as well as the USDA & FDA) offer little real documentation as to just how much of anything is to be in dog food. To find out ‘more’ the USDA website referred me to the AAFCO and the AAFCO requires paying for anything that might provide more detailed information.

Why pay for what reputable companies have worked with veterinarians and animal nutrition specialists to determine that exceed AAFCO standards?

Know what to look for and what to avoid, work with your dog’s breeder and your veterinarian, select from quality dog foods and your dog will live as health, happy, and long a life as possible.

Skimp corners on dog food to ‘save’ money and that money will be spent at the veterinarian’s office instead.

With the cost of buying a dog from a breeder, or even with the cost of a rescue or shelter dog these days, it’s well worth spending a bit more for quality dog food.

**Amount to Feed**

The actual amount to feed is going to depend a lot on the age and activity level of the dog. Corgis also tend to be ‘easy keepers.’ Thus, they typically don’t need as much for their weight as an adult as most dog food bags show.

We typically feed our adult Pembroke Welsh Corgis 1/3 to 2/3 cup of food twice a day depending on age and activity level. Most of our Corgis eat ½ cup twice a day. We also use a measuring scoop to eliminate any guess work.

For puppies from 8 weeks of age to 4 months of age we feed them 3 or 4 times per day, preferably 4 times per day. At each feeding we offer ½ cup per puppy and anything left after 15-20 minutes is picked up and stored in the refrigerator. During extreme heat, feeding in a cool area and picking up anything left after 10-15 minutes is preferable. During fly season, sitting with the puppy and keeping flies away is important since flies carry disease and the spread of parasites. Sitting with a puppy while it eats also teaches the puppy to not have food aggression problems.
What We Feed

We feed our 6 month and older Corgis dry kibble (1/3 cup to 1/2 cup/dog 2x daily) mixed with beef bone broth (approx. 2 Tbsp/dog 2x daily), brewer’s yeast (approx. ½ tsp/dog 2x daily), whole puree’ pumpkin with no spices, sugar, or coloring added (approx. 2 Tbsp/dog 2x daily), homecooked short grain brown rice (approx.. 2 Tbsp/dog 2x daily).

We also feed a vitamin supplement once a day to our dogs that are 6 months and older. While this might not be necessary for most dogs, the fact that we are breeding dogs requires maintaining as highly nutritious meals as possible for the demands breeding requires on a dog’s body. A daily vitamin insures that each dog is getting any possible holes in its nutrition met. Our pregnant dogs receive a pre-natal vitamin and switched to a post-natal vitamin 3-5 days prior to whelping and receive that until their puppies are at least 6 weeks of age before being switched back to the regular daily vitamin.

For our puppies, we introduce food at about 3 weeks of age 5 or 6 times a day. The kibble with brewer’s yeast sprinkled over it is soaked overnight covered in goat milk some beef bone broth. The moistened kibble is mashed until the puppies are about 5-6 weeks old, depending on all of the puppies showing that they can chew moistened kibble that is not mashed. Prior to feeding, we mix a calcium and vitamin supplement in as well as yogurt, pumpkin and more goat milk to the moistened kibble.

We feed this ‘recipe’ to puppies until they are about 4 months of age. From 8 weeks of age puppies should be fed 3 to 4 times a day, as evenly spaced as possible during the day (with longest time between feedings being from the dinner feed until breakfast) until they are 3 ½ to 4 ½ months of age. By 3 ½ months of age, it can probably be dropped back to 3 times a day.

The idea of adding milk may be of concern to some. For this reason, a brief explanation of goat milk is important.

There is not much difference between the taste of properly handled goat milk and cow milk. As with cows what the goat is fed does affect the task of the milk. Goat milk is naturally homogenized, meaning the cream is mixed in and does not readily separate out. Goat milk is whiter than whole cow milk. The fat globules in goat milk are smaller than those in cow milk and the curd is softer and smaller, making digestion easier. It also has a better acid buffering ability than cow milk. For these reasons the nutrients in goat milk are easily obtained. Goat milk lacks the protein b-lactoglobulin, which is found in cow milk and the main stimulant of allergic reactions. Thus, some with this type of allergy may be able to tolerate goat milk. Unpasteurized goat milk is even easier to digest than pasteurized and retains more of its nutritional value. Goat milk can also be used for drinking, cooking and baking, and body products.

Because goat milk is easily digestible it makes the ideal milk replacer for babies, calves, foals, etc. Commercial milk replacer is harder to digest, which can lead to more problems with diarrhea, or scouring.

It has been proven that adding raw goat milk to any dog’s diet can have 3 benefits:
(1) It can aid and improve the digestive system, even for dogs with sensitive stomachs.
(2) It has anti-inflammatory and anti-mucous properties, which can help with allergies.
(3) It can boost the immune system because of its abundance of vitamins, trace minerals, enzymes and fatty acids. Raw goat’s milk has been shown to help fight any number of common ailments such as kidney issues, cancers, liver disease, diabetes, colitis, irritable bowel syndrome, heart disease, ulcers and various brain and nervous system disorders. Because goat milk is easily digestible it makes the ideal milk replacer for babies, calves, foals, etc. Commercial milk replacer is harder to digest, which can lead to more problems with diarrhea, or scouring.

Use of goat milk for adult dogs, could cause weight gain and this would need to monitored so the dog does not become overweight.

With this information, the advice of your veterinarian, and that of your dog’s breeder, you should be able to chose a dog food that will provide the nutrition it needs to live a long, happy, healthy life.

Currently, we feed Castor & Pollux Natural Ultramix Grain-Free Duck, Sweet Potatoes & Whole Peas Entrée. With our research, we prefer to feed duck as the primary meat source. The closest we can come to comparing ‘apples-to-apples’ with what Castor & Pollux offers that is labeled for puppies, let’s look at Castor & Pollux Pristine Grain-Free Range-Free Chicken & Sweet Potato Recipe & their Pristine Grain-Free Grass Fed Beef & Sweet Potato Recipe. Both of these recipes contain a minimum of 34% protein, 16% fat, and a maximum of 3.5% fiber. Whereas the Castor & Pollux Natural Ultramix Grain-Free Duck, Sweet Potatoes & Whole Peas Entrée contains not less than 38% protein, 17% fat, and not more than 3.5% fiber.

The higher protein and 1% higher fat content is important to us based on our research and none of the other vitamins and minerals are really any different, so we made our selection for higher protein and fat content as the best for our Corgis and all stages of life.

Merrick’s Grain-Free Real Duck & Sweet Potato Recipe is the same basic recipe. Castor & Pollux is owned by Merrick. Merrick’s recipe is slightly higher priced, current running about $10 more per 25# bag. This probably because the fruits and vegetables are in the kibble, not dried and separate from the kibble. With a shortage in 2018 of the Castor & Pollux recipe, we like knowing there is an alternative without having to truly change recipes, especially since we believe this is such a high-quality recipe.

This information is provided as resource and along with the advice of your veterinarian, to assist in making the proper determination as to what food is right for your puppy/dog.

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