

Meeting Your Pet's Nutritional Needs

In addition to lots of love and attention, our pets depend on us to provide them with a balanced, nutritious diet to keep them healthy and strong. Since rabbits have been the focus of this month's Rescue Roundup, we'll start with them.

Dr. Don Costlow, Owner and President of the Newton Veterinary Hospital in Newton, NJ, recommends rabbits be fed commercial pet food developed specifically for rabbits. Rabbit owners must keep in mind, however, that rabbits need 20 – 25% fiber in their daily diet for optimal health. A low fiber diet can cause digestive difficulties, such as diarrhea and hairballs. The hairballs can get extremely large, become lodged in the stomach and ultimately cause anorexia. Compare rabbit food labels to determine which brands offer the ideal amount of fiber. Fiber can also be added to the diet by having grass hay always available. However, rabbits should not be given both alfalfa hay and alfalfa pellets, as it can cause urinary stones.

Dr. Costlow recommends a balanced commercially made diet for dogs to prevent nutritional deficiencies. There are also a wide variety of dog foods that address specific health conditions, including old age, obesity, diabetes, urinary tract problems, kidney or liver disease and so on. Table food and bones from human food should never be given. Table food is often high in fat and can cause pancreatitis, a serious disease that requires hospitalization and can be fatal. Bones often cause obstructions that require surgery.

Cats also do well on balanced commercial diets and, like dogs, have foods available for specific health conditions. Overweight male cats that have been neutered are at high risk for urinary tract crystals that can cause obstructions. Cats that have had such problems should be on prescription diets for life. Many cat owners like to give their cats milk, but milk can cause diarrhea and should not be given.

Dr. Don Costlow is the Owner and President of the Newton Veterinary Hospital (www.newtonvet.com) in Newton, NJ. You can e-mail Dr. Costlow with your pet health concerns at info@newtonvet.com.

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