

 **USA TODAY**

SPECIAL DOG ISSUE!



PET GUIDE

SPRING/SUMMER 2016

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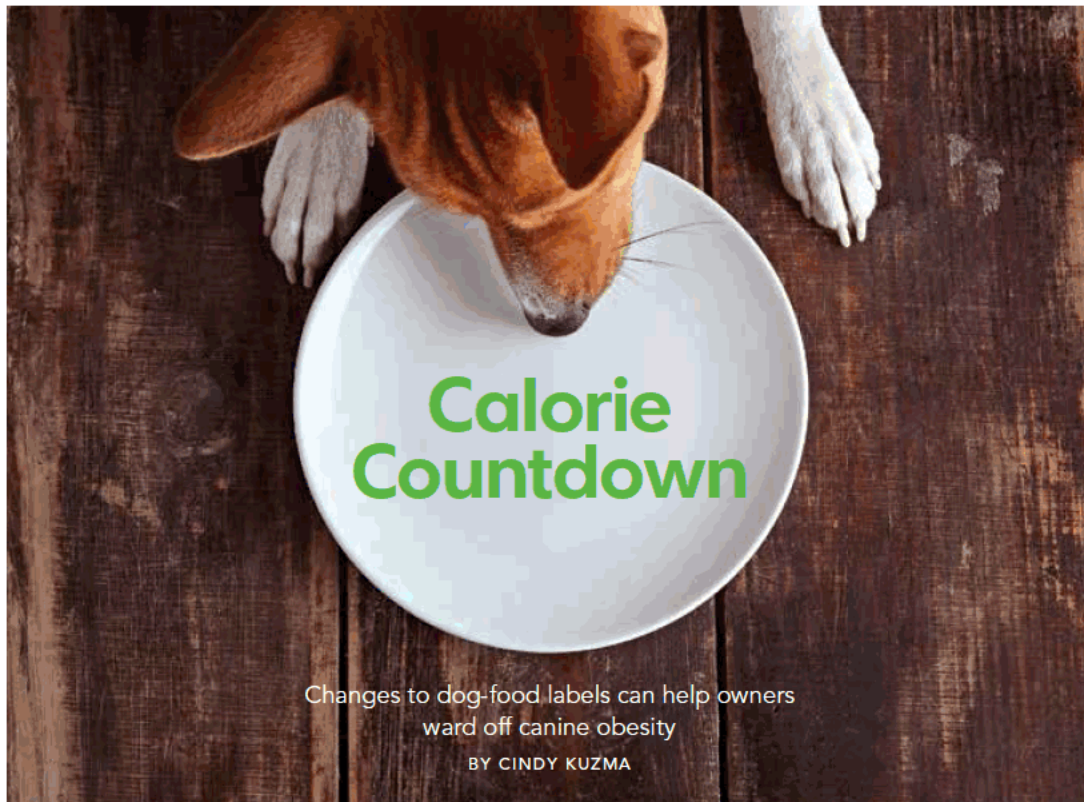
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 **THE SCOOP ON CANINE CALORIES**



Changes to dog-food labels can help owners ward off canine obesity

BY CINDY KUZMA

After his beloved shepherd mix, Bonnie, faced knee surgery in 2011, Eric Pihl knew losing weight would ease the strain on her joints. So the Arlington Heights, Ill., resident began driving her to weekly therapy, where she logs miles on an underwater treadmill. To provide her with nutritious treats, he grows green beans in his garden and makes chicken strips using a dehydrator.

Pihl doesn't mind these extra efforts to improve Bonnie's health. But when he first tried to cut her calories to the vet-recommended 751 per day, he hit a frustrating roadblock. "Most dog-food manufacturers did not have calorie information on the packaging or online," he says. "I had to call, email, harass and basically say, 'Look, I want to do the right thing, but I can't without the information.'"

Meanwhile, Marcy Cap, whose beagles Bagel

and Maxwell each need 560 calories per day to stay trim, often finds herself overwhelmed by nutritional details. "I have file folders filled with research on dog food," says Cap, who also lives in Arlington Heights. "I had to color-code a chart — which foods were high in fat, which ones were high in protein. There's so much information out there, you just start to throw up your hands."

Pihl, Cap and other pet parents may soon find it far simpler to determine calorie counts — they'll just have to flip over the package. Under model regulations proposed by the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO), manufacturers will display this information on labels for all dog and cat food, including treats.

The AAFCO has no formal regulatory power, so it's up to each state to adopt these draft rules as laws or regulations, says Kristen »

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Green, vice chair of the AAFCO Pet Food Committee. When the states do (and most typically follow AAFCO model regulations), companies with products on the shelves before Jan. 1, 2014, will have until Jan. 1, 2017, to comply (products introduced after Jan. 1, 2014, would already be expected to meet the requirement).

A number of pet-food manufacturers are already listing calorie counts on packaging, including global manufacturers like Royal Canin.

"We think it's very important to provide that information to help pet owners and their vets make informed decisions about feeding amounts," says Dr. Brent Mayabb, a veterinarian and Royal Canin's vice president of corporate affairs.

MEET THE KILOCALORIE

The calories on a dog-food label are the same measurement as the one on your granola bar — essentially, the amount of energy each portion provides. Technically speaking, what's commonly referred to as a calorie is actually a kilocalorie. Scientists calculate this as the amount required to raise the temperature of 1 kilogram of water by 1 degree Celsius.

In order to be labeled "complete and balanced," all dog foods must meet AAFCO nutrient profiles. But depending on the



Good News!

You'll no longer have to guess how many calories are in dog food.

ingredients, the difference in calories between two formulas can be as wide as the gulf between a stick of celery and a cheeseburger.

"There are wild variations; you can literally have a pet food that has 200 or 300 more calories per cup than a comparable nutritionally complete formula," says Dr. Ernie Ward, a veterinarian and founder of the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention (APOP).

Ward calls the labeling changes "long overdue" and says transparency is crucial in helping control dog obesity and its consequences, from arthritis to diabetes to canine cardiovascular problems. An annual survey conducted by APOP found that 53 percent of dogs in the U.S. were overweight or obese in 2014.

"The most important decision a pet owner makes every day about their pet's health is what they feed it," he says. Provide calorie counts, he believes, and owners will make wiser decisions for their animal's well-being.

UP FOR THE COUNT

Understanding your dog's calorie needs starts with a visit to your veterinarian, says Dr. Lindsay Seilheimer, head of rehabilitative medicine at Veterinary Specialty Center in Buffalo Grove, Ill.

Your vet will weigh your dog and consider its age, breed, lifestyle,

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HOW TO READ THE LABEL

Nutrition Facts

Under the new guidelines, dog-food labels will list calorie counts two ways.

The calories per kilogram of food you'll see can help you compare products.

You'll also find the calories listed in a common household measure, such as a cup, which you can use to determine how much to feed. For instance, if you know your dog needs 410 calories per day and each cup contains 200, then provide two cups, plus 10 calories in nutritious treats.



activity level and whether she's spayed or lactating or he's neutered.

The doctor will also calculate a body condition score, which takes into account how easy it is to feel Fido's ribs.

All this factors into your pet's ideal weight. Once you know this magic number, you can work with your vet on a pound-shedding plan if your dog is overweight.

Reducing calories always plays a key role, Seilheimer says. Exercise matters, but most owners overestimate the impact — for instance, a 30-pound Lab will only burn about 55 calories per mile of brisk walking, she notes.

As for treats — a few bites of toast or pizza crust could easily account for 10 percent of your pooch's daily calorie needs, Ward warns. He advises sticking to low-cal options such as green beans, carrots, celery or cucumber.

Or, substitute quality time or affection.

Pihl — who's helped Bonnie drop from 63 pounds to a svelte 48 — agrees.

"Food is not love," he says. When Bonnie begs, he's just as likely to roll around on the floor with her as he is to slip her something tasty. "She appreciates that even more — because a snack lasts three seconds, but playtime can be hours." ●

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HOW MANY CALORIES DOES YOUR DOG NEED?

To get a general idea, follow this guide:



1 Ask your veterinarian for your dog's ideal or goal weight in pounds.

2 Divide by 2.2 to convert into kilograms.

3 Multiply by 30, then add 70.

This number represents your dog's resting energy requirement, the amount he or she burns before physical activity. Feeding this amount should result in safe, steady weight loss. Before making any changes, however, always talk to your vet first.

SOURCE: ASSOCIATION FOR PET OBESITY PREVENTION