

The Energetics of Food

—Chris Bessent, D.V.M.

We are what we eat

... there is so much truth to that statement. Food provides the foundation of life and the basic building blocks to our health. However, this is a factor that is often overlooked, especially in the pet industry.

As a holistic veterinarian, I see a lot of animals that are on a variety of diets, and there is no denying that dogs who are on a great nutritional program are generally healthier than dogs who are fed a diet of low-end kibble. Food can be just as instrumental in maintaining wellness as supplements, medications, surgery, and regular veterinary care.

Every food has properties and actions in terms of how they affect the balance of the body in Chinese theory. Dogs that have a tendency to be hot in nature should be fed cooling foods, and dogs that tend to be cold in nature should be fed warming foods. This is a similar concept to how we tend to eat certain foods according to the season. For example, we don't eat beef stew in the summer and watermelon in the winter. Let me explain.

The Hot Dog

A dog that is hot will typically demonstrate it through a variety of signs. A hot dog will seek cool places, will often be hot to the touch, and may pant at inappropriate times (like at night time or while at rest). A dog that is hot may also have red eyes or red skin and may be very restless. Dogs that are affected by allergies or that are very high-arousal are characteristically very hot in nature.

Feeding a hot dog hot foods (like lamb or venison, which are considered the hottest proteins) is like throwing kerosene on the fire. Hot dogs should be fed cooling foods to dampen the negative effects of heat on their bodies. Proteins like duck, rabbit, or fish are considered cooling by Chinese theory, and are best for a dog that has allergies or is generally hot in nature. If a dog is on a raw or real food diet, you can explore other options like fruits, vegetables, and grains.

For example, some great cooling fruits and vegetables are apples, bananas, oranges, pears, tomatoes, cucumber, lettuce and mushrooms.

The Cold Dog

Alternatively, a dog that has cool tendencies should be fed warming foods. A "cold dog" may show signs like general weakness, fatigue, exercise intolerance, poor appetite, shortness of breath, slow moving, and a preference to lay. They may also seek out warm places, have fecal or urinary incontinence, stiffness that gets worse with rest, joint pain that gets worse in the cold weather, or have coldness of their ears, back, and limbs.

All of these symptoms of coldness can be aided by feeding warming foods like turkey, chicken, squash, sweet potatoes, cherries, or oats. Similarly, a dog that is affected by arthritis tends to be cold in nature. (This is why arthritis gets even worse during the winter months.) For this reason, a dog that needs added joint support would benefit most from a warm diet.

Neutral Foods

You can never go wrong with neutral foods. Foods like beef or salmon are great for any dog. You can use neutral foods for dogs that are well balanced or to dampen the effects of hot or cold foods given as part of an animal's diet. Other examples of neutral foods include tuna, milk, cheese, eggs, white or brown rice, potatoes, peas, carrots, or green beans.

The food we're feeding our dogs impacts their health, their mood, and their general wellbeing. A dramatic improvement can be made in so many animals just by changing the foods we feed them.

Please visit: www.herbsmithinc.com/foodcharts.asp for a comprehensive list of foods and their energetics.

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