PawsMenu brings a dog's daily ration from the kitchen to the clinic

How much of each ingredient should you prepare, and how much did your dog actually eat? PawsMenu uses the dog's profile to calculate portions for a home-prepared meal. Its diary lets families record how much of that meal and how much commercial food their dog ate on the same day.

Dr. Ercan Mevliyaoğulları
PhD in Animal Nutrition and Nutritional Diseases. Creator and scientific adviser to PawsMenu.

"She eats a complete commercial food, and sometimes we add a little chicken." A veterinarian hearing that answer knows what goes into the bowl, but how much chicken is "a little"? Did the dog eat it on top of her usual ration, or did she leave some of the dry food behind? I developed PawsMenu so that families could answer those questions using what they already have in the kitchen. The ingredients, the food packaging and a kitchen scale are enough to get started.

Start with the dog

The first step in Bowl, the planner for home-prepared portions, is to describe the dog. Current body weight, age, life stage and usual activity all matter. Two dogs of the same weight can have different energy requirements if one is still growing and the other is an adult who goes for a walk every day. If the dog's weight or routine changes, the family can update the profile and recalculate the portions.

Families can then choose from the menus available for that profile or select ingredients they already have. A family with chicken, rice and carrots picks the entry that matches the way each ingredient is prepared. Rice absorbs water during cooking, so 100 g of cooked rice supplies less energy than 100 g of dry rice. If the screen specifies cooked rice, weigh it after cooking. Weigh the oil as it will be added to the bowl.

From a daily amount to a single serving

Tanya, the fictional dog in PawsMenu's public example, is an active adult female Golden Retriever weighing 23 kg. The chicken option gives a daily amount of 410 g of skinless chicken thigh, weighed after roasting. Dividing the preparation into two equal meals gives 205 g of chicken per meal. The rice, carrot, zucchini and olive oil each have their own weights. The person preparing the meal can see how much of each ingredient to weigh and how much of the finished dish to serve at each meal.

How energy and protein are estimated

The planner uses energy and protein reference values from the National Research Council (NRC, 2006) for the dog's profile. To estimate what the ingredients supply, it draws on food composition data, including records from the US Department of Agriculture's FoodData Central. Oil is a simple example. It contributes energy and virtually no protein, so two combinations of ingredients can supply the same number of calories and different amounts of protein.

PawsMenu calculates both values and checks them again after rounding the ingredient weights. For energy, the software accepts a calculated value up to 10% above or below the target. It uses the NRC recommended allowance for protein as its minimum protein target. Even when a meal meets both targets, its adequacy for calcium, phosphorus, vitamins and other nutrients requires separate assessment. These meals should be part of a broader feeding plan and should never be the dog's sole daily ration. A home-prepared diet intended to be the dog's sole food requires individual formulation by a professional qualified in veterinary nutrition.

What stays in the bowl matters too

The Feeding Diary records what the dog actually eats. Suppose a dog eats 80 g of a dry food with a label energy value of 3,500 kcal/kg. That portion provides 280 kcal. In the evening, the family serves 120 g of a home-prepared meal and the dog leaves 20 g. The amount to record is 100 g. Estimating the calories in those 100 g also requires knowing the composition of the preparation.

The diary keeps both entries under the same date, with up to six feeding occasions a day and room to record treats. For foods sold in Argentina, families can save the values from the package they use. This matters because the starter catalog covers the US market. When a value is missing, the corresponding total is marked as incomplete.

The World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) also asks about the type of food, amount and frequency in its short diet history form. These are routine questions when taking a dietary history. With the week's entries in front of them, the family can explain at the next visit exactly what "a little chicken" meant for their dog.

Sources and further reading

PawsMenu Tanya's worked example · Spanish-language guide · Calculation method · Feeding Diary
National Research Council (2006) Nutrient Requirements of Dogs and Cats
USDA FoodData Central
WSAVA Short Diet History Form (Spanish edition)