Research provides new insights into dogs' natural feeding behavior

October 29 2012

An international team of researchers has shed new light on the natural feeding behaviour of domestic dogs and demonstrated that they will naturally seek a daily dietary intake that is high in fat. The study also showed that some dogs will overeat if given excess food, reinforcing the importance of responsible feeding to help ensure dogs maintain a healthy body weight.

The research was conducted by the WALTHAM® Centre for Pet Nutrition – the science centre underpinning Mars Petcare brands such as PEDIGREE®, NUTRO® and ROYAL CANIN. It was undertaken in collaboration with scientists from the University of Sydney (Australia) and the Institute of Natural Sciences at Massey University (New Zealand).

The research involved adult dogs representing five diverse breeds: the papillon, miniature schnauzer, cocker spaniel, Labrador retriever and St. Bernard. In a series of dietary studies, the dogs were offered combinations of wet or dry foods with varying levels of protein, fat and carbohydrate. The dietary nutrient balance selected by the different breeds was then assessed and compared.

The results showed that, when given the choice, dogs consistently regulated their macronutrient intake, i.e. their intake of protein, fat and carbohydrate. Specifically, the dogs selected a macronutrient profile equating to approximately 63% of their daily calorie intake from fat, 30% from protein and 7% from carbohydrate. The findings also showed

that some dogs consumed more than twice as many calories as required when offered excess food.

"The finding that domestic dogs will naturally seek a dietary intake that is high in fat and that they will readily overeat if given the opportunity probably reflects the feeding behaviour of their wild ancestors," said lead study author, Adrian Hewson-Hughes from the WALTHAM® Centre for Pet Nutrition. "In the wild, dogs and wolves often have irregular access to food and competition is fierce – leading them to try and maximise their calorie intake whenever possible."

"However, domestic dogs today have regular access to food and many lead relatively inactive lifestyles compared with their wild ancestors," added Dr. Hewson-Hughes. "By demonstrating that dogs will overeat when offered excess food, this research also reinforces the importance of responsible feeding measures, such as portion control, for helping ensure dogs maintain a healthy body weight."

Provided by WALTHAM Centre for Pet Nutrition

Citation: Research provides new insights into dogs' natural feeding behavior (2012, October 29) retrieved 19 September 2024 from
https://phys.org/news/2012-10-insights-dogs-natural-behavior.html

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