

OLAE's Q&A with Dr. G

Dr. Goutam Mukherjee, usually referred to as Dr. G, got his Veterinary Degree in India in 1986. He received his M.S. in Cellular Immunology, and Ph.D. in Cell Biology from Montana State University. He did his post doctoral research and residency in Comparative Pathology from Johns Hopkins Medical Institute. Dr. G practices medicine at the Helping Hands Veterinary Clinic in Lynnwood. Dr. G served as the president of OLAE until 2009 and has been a frequent contributor to the OLAE Newsletters. We're pleased to bring you excerpts from his previous articles.

Question: How can dogs remember scents of places visited long ago (i.e. my old house)?

Answer: If you look at the animal and plant species, all of them have perfected certain traits over many thousands, if not many millions of years. In other words all of us are good at what we do. Dogs have their noses and humans have their intellect. The evolutionary pressure has selected the canine family (dogs are one of the members, like wolves) with great sense of smell. Dogs have almost 25 thousands more olfactory receptors than humans. Added to this, their olfactory lobe (processing center in the brain) is more than 40 times bigger than human's. They also have a special organ of smell at the roof of the mouth called vomeronasal organ.

Studies have shown that out of the sense of smell, eyesight, and hearing, their memory is mostly linked to their sense of smell. However not all dogs have the same ability of smell and to remember. They also lose some of their sense of smell if they are sick. According to Dr. Myers, a neurophysiologist and a veterinarian "several diseases can alter a dog's sense of smell: Parainfluenza (a kennel-cough virus), distemper, Cushing's syndrome, nasal tumors, head trauma, epilepsy, hypothyroidism, and diabetes mellitus have already been identified, and the list is expected to grow. Even the estrus cycle in females may possibly alter the sense of smell temporarily".

Question: I have a dog that hates the water and dislikes rain and he has only had a few baths after getting stinky. Do short-haired coat dogs really need routine baths?

Answer: Depends on who do you ask the question to. I have a 5 year old Rottweiler who has short hair. According to my wife my puppy needs bath every week, according to me may be never! Well all kidding aside, I do not see any problem with occasional bath. It could be especially beneficial to puppies if they have skin allergies (atopy). However if this becomes an emotional trauma for both the owner and the dog, it may be best not to have "regular" baths. Bath them when it is most needed like that awful just rolled in the dead fish seaweed combo at the beach.

Question: My 2.5 year old dog just loves to eat dirt and his dog toys and chew wood, including my expensive baskets. Is this because he has a vitamin deficiency? Do dogs need vitamins?

Answer: An issue like this is likely to have multiple causes. Two major concerns could be either physiological or psychological. However, both could be a contribution factor. Sometimes I have seen dogs eat dirt from possible gastrointestinal discomfort like intestinal parasites or worms. Pica, the abnormal desire to eat strange things, has sometimes been attributed to mineral deficiency. Psychological issues also need to be ruled out.

To answer the other part of the question, I do not believe in feeding dogs just dog food. In my mind there is no such thing as "100% nutritionally complete". I always recommend my clients to fortify their dog food (if they cannot cook at home) with fresh (not raw) food. I do recommend high quality vitamin mineral supplements. Interestingly my choice is not the dog brands. Discuss with your veterinarian for their advice for your dog.

Question: I just read somewhere that in addition to chocolate, dogs should not eat raisins or grapes? Is this true and what other foods are now on the "off-list"?

Answer: There have been few reports of grapes and raisins causing acute nephrotoxicity (damages the kidney). ASPCA poison control center considers grapes and raisins to be toxic. There has never been any controlled study verifying these claims. In general it is believed that the toxicity is not due to the pesticide on grapes. I have several

clients who have been giving grapes to their dogs for a long time without any known adverse effect. However to be safe I recommend staying away from grapes and raisins.

Some other common foods like Onion and Garlic has been implicated in causing red blood cell damage. The study on garlic published in the Journal of American veterinary Medical association few years ago, is rather faulty in my opinion, and I do not see any harm in giving dogs a small amount of Garlic with home cooked food. However it really does not work to keep fleas down. Some insurance companies are telling the pet owners to avoid avocado. I am unaware of any scientific studies, however if you have pet insurance by one of these companies it will be good to avoid avocado. I do not have pet insurance and both my puppies get avocado every evening with their salad. Discuss with your veterinarian about their advice on feeding your dog.

Question: Should I give table scraps to my dog?

Answer: I have been asked this question many times. My answer has always been “no table scraps, but share your food”. At this point pet owners will ask “what do you mean”? The answer could get very complex. One simple to understand example is pork chop. When you cut out the fat, it should go to the garbage! But it is Ok to share the meat provided your pet is not allergic to it. Now let’s talk about the value of sharing your food (I am assuming that you eat healthy). Most modern dog foods are well balanced to prevent long-term deficiency diseases. However, that is not enough for optimum health and long life. Drawing a parallel from human nutrition, I believe that we all, including our pets, should not be eating monochromatic diets but utilize all the colors from nature. I routinely share my salad greens (no iceberg), cucumbers, avocado, bell peppers, steamed veggies and fish or meat with my dogs. My cat eats some meat and fish but is reluctant to eat the greens. I keep trying though. Avoid giving your pets any extra fat or carbs, and supplement basic food with protein and veggies. Watch for total calorie intake.

Question: Can my dog get a cold since the Puget Sound is so cold and the air temperature is now close to freezing?

Answer: Here is the age-old argument. Can we get a cold (the virus) from being cold (temperature wise)? Probably not directly! However for many people, based on their general health and ability to withstand stress, colder temperatures could lower immune status, and make them more susceptible to the cold virus. Dogs are not affected by the same cold virus as we are; but they have their burden of different virus and bacteria that could cause upper respiratory disease. The biggest issue here is understanding individuality. For a Newfoundlander this environment is a not a challenge at all. The same goes for many dogs with a thick water resistant undercoat. However, even for breeds with thick undercoats, dogs should not be exposed to be severe cold suddenly if they are usually maintained in a warm indoor environment all the time. A younger healthy dog will have better vitality and better ability to resist disease than an older dog. Even for younger healthy dogs, restricting total time in water, and drying them off after they come out of water will be prudent. I would not expose my older dog with any form of disease like arthritis, heart problem etc to severe cold for any length of time.

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