

## Chapter 7

### Caring For Great Danes

#### Growing A Great Dane

Yeah, I know...stupid section heading...or is it? Don't they just grow up like any other dog? Well, no. Danes are a giant breed. The amount of growing they have to do before reaching adult size in comparison to say, a Golden Retriever, is enormous. In only a year, almost full skeletal size is reached. Compare that to the very slow growth of a human who essentially reaches the same size and weight at adulthood. With bones forming and reforming so quickly, it isn't surprising that much can go wrong in a short time.

We used to think that it was necessary for giant breeds to consume huge quantities of protein, calcium, phosphorous and vitamin D in order to reach their adult full potential. Several extensive research projects have strongly indicated that over-nutrition and, worse, over supplementation, can be the causative agents in the many growth problems in the giant breeds. Now, informed breeders strive to keep growth steady but *slow!* Great Dane menus are properly balanced and body condition is kept lean, especially during the fast growth stages of puppyhood.

My litters get their first solid food at whatever age they look like they need it. Some of my bitches have enough milk to raise 10 pups up to a year on nothing else if they'd put up with it! A couple have seemed to need help. My latest litter started looking a bit lean (hip bones and ribs easily felt and visible) at about 2 1/2 weeks. I feed them the same thing their mom is on but grind it into a powder in a blender. In this case it was Innova at 24% protein, 12% fat. The first meal consists of human baby cereal, usually rice and Espilac (powdered bitches milk replacer). To this I add a couple crushed tablets of Lactinex (acidopholus which helps digestion and helps to prevent diarrhea that can happen during the weaning process. (You can purchase it at your drug store pharmacy). After a few meals of this I begin adding baby food beef. Then I grind the Innova kibble to a powder and slowly begin to add this a little at a time to each meal. I also begin adding Eagle Brand canned meats, beef, chicken, lamb or liver to the diet. As the pups get better at eating on their own, the amount of added Espilac is gradually decreased until they no longer receive it, around 4 weeks of age. At the same time I'm increasing the Eagle canned meat. Once they're about 4 1/2 to 5 weeks old they're gradually introduced to whole, soaked kibble instead of the ground. When I first begin solid food I offer it in the morning and evening, allowing mom to fill in between feedings. Again, depending on how their weight looks, I play it by ear as to when I start a noon meal. I've never had a litter that would eat 4 meals a day. Three has always sufficed. By the time they're about 7 or 8 weeks, they usually begin leaving some of the noon meal. Once this occurs I just discontinue it. I've never had a problem doing this. They're allowed to nurse (if mom will cooperate!) up until 6 weeks.

Because most dog foods are completely balanced for all stages of growth, you'll upset the delicate balances if you start adding calcium and other unnecessary items. If the kibble you use does not add vitamin C, this is one supplement you might want to use. 500 mg AM and PM is good. Although dogs

can manufacture their own vitamin C, it can't hurt to give them a little extra. I give the full group of antioxidant vitamins (C,E & A), Co-Q-10, probiotics which helps digestion.

I am one who likes to try to keep my dogs on a diet that is as natural and as free from chemicals and pollutants as possible. Because of this I've done some research on exactly what goes into different dog foods. This is why I've ended up feeding Innova and Eagle Pack at times. If nothing else, it would be helpful for you to learn a bit about how to read and interpret the labels on dog foods. One of the most helpful books I've found in this category is the Official Publication of the Association of American Feed Control Officials. You can obtain a copy from the Treasurer at: AAFCO, Capitol Square, Atlanta, GA 30334. Contact them for a current price.

You will learn that poultry meal and poultry by-products are most definitely *not* the same ingredient. Any ingredient which is designated as "by-products" is most likely stuff like beaks, feathers and feet, basically unusable protein sources for dogs. Poultry *meal* means that the whole chicken has been utilized. Also protein levels can be misleading depending on the source of the protein. A dog food label can list 28% protein but if it's derived from leather dust, the dog will never be able to utilize it. The first ingredient listed on the label must be the highest percentage of the food. Therefore if you see poultry meal as the first ingredient, the chances are that it's a higher quality food. If grains make up the bulk of the first ingredients, beware. This is not to say that just because grain is the first listed ingredient, that the food is no good. Many manufacturer's offer different types of foods for different stages of life. If they need to lower the protein content, it's often done by increasing the grain percent.

It is also helpful to educate yourself about preservatives. I always avoid foods that use any kind of chemical as a preservative. Ethoxyquin is a common one in some foods and has been proven to cause cancer in mice. It was originally used as a preservative for *rubber*! I also avoid any food that uses tomato pomace. This is the left over parts of tomatoes after they've had everything good taken out of them for human use. Now, this in itself isn't particularly bad, but what is left over contains the highest concentration of insecticides of almost any by product you can name, especially the tomato skin! No thank you!

As I learned more about the ingredients that can be contained in pet food, I found that even if certain ingredients (namely preservatives) aren't listed on the dog food package, it doesn't necessarily mean that it isn't in there. The reason for this is because if the supplier of certain ingredients contained in the meals have used these chemicals in the base product, they don't, by law, have to be shown on the label! I've also learned that certain 'meat meals' could easily contain euthanized pets, road kill, cancerous and diseased carcasses as well as the chemicals used to euthanize those pets!

It's also worth mentioning that recent studies have shown that protein level may not be the culprit in growth problems. Now researchers are saying it's the body condition of the growing puppy. Until he's at least 10 months old, you should keep your Dane puppy on the lean side. You should be able to readily feel his ribs, but only see slight shadows of them.

Once the puppy is a year or so its major growth period is over, although it will continue to fill out and the skeleton might still grow a bit. Now you can be a little more liberal when adding other foods to your Dane's meals. Balance is no longer so critical as it was while the rapid growth phase was in force. I always feed twice a day as a possible bloat prevention measure. Since most of my Danes tend to live well past 8, (thank God) perhaps I'm doing something right. (But I now always do a preventative gastropexy on them. More on this later). I've always added scraps from the table or leftovers to give them some variety in the diet. Occasionally cottage cheese in small amounts and often yoghurt. (An interesting note here. The bloat study being conducted by Purdue University, has revealed that Danes fed a *variety* of different foods, are less likely to bloat).

One reason I *love* Innova is because they add probiotics to the food. It is no longer necessary to leave the room when my dogs have gas, as they *no longer have gas!* For a breed as prone to bloat as the Dane, this can only be a plus. The other real plus in my mind regarding Innova is that they use only human grade ingredients in the formula! More recently I've begun to believe that fresh, whole foods are of real benefit to the Danes. To this end they also get fresh ground beef, raw whole eggs, shell and all, yoghurt, cottage cheese, whole raw carrots and apples as chewies and raw beef bones. Not daily, and not at the same time. I might add an egg to their food once or twice a week. Same with the beef and other items. The eggs are fed both raw and cooked, thoroughly washed in soapy water and rinsed prior to feeding if fed raw. Don't feed more than 1 or 2 raw eggs per week as they can tie up the dog's access to certain nutrients if fed in quantity.

Occasionally they tend to help themselves to their meals. Daffodil, my first champion, was very talented at opening just about every cupboard, trash can and even the refrigerator whenever she wanted a snack! How she managed to live until 9 with all the junk she fed herself over the years is a mystery to me. (Perhaps she really did do herself in, as the cause of her death was cardiac involvement after bloat surgery). I had to put baby locks on the cupboards and a bungie cord on the refrigerator to keep her out of them. It should always be a routine issue, for Dane owners, to put anything edible on top of the refrigerator. I guarantee they'll find anything else that is left within their reach!

## B.A.R.F.

Since writing the above, I have switched almost completely over to the BARF (Biologically Appropriate Raw Foods) diet. The first time this was used was on a bitch I'd bred who had IBD (inflammatory bowel disease). This diet seemed to be the easiest for her to digest. (However she was also on cortisone therapy which would have caused the very intense appetite as well as the weight gain). At the same time I put my own Danes on raw. At that time I used the 'do it yourself' method and I DO NOT recommend it! What a mess! The veggies (all ground and liquified) resembled what one would pick up out of a cow pasture! It was very time consuming and messy! So I went back to kibble based food.

But then about 2 years ago I had a male who was experiencing digestive problems. Poor appetite, on and off diarrhea, occasional vomiting and *heart stopping, nose clogging* gas! I did every test we could think of to rule out IBD. I even had a biopsy done which was inconclusive. A possible allergy to grain or other food ingredients was also suggested. So for awhile I tried feeding one of those foods that

contain ingredients not associated with what had been fed before. It helped a little. Then I decided to try raw foods again and found the Dr. Billingshurst products. I've been using them now for almost 2 years with wonderful results. For whatever reason, Sky now eats anything placed in front of him with relish. I give the meat patties and raw chicken backs. All the dogs love this food! They still get occasional kibble (gotta be able to feed that when we travel) and any other food that I can think of. They even love raw fish!

And now I'm raising my first puppy on raw. She's almost 5 months old at this writing and so far so good. Still have to get her through that really rapid growth period so I'm keeping my fingers crossed. I know of other Dane breeders who have been raising their litters on raw for a long time and have been very pleased with the results.

There is so much to know about the feeding and nutrition of dogs that it can and does fill volumes written by much more knowledgeable authors than myself. If you want to know more about it, read them. There are some especially interesting books on natural feeding. If you're interested in feeding raw, please educate yourself first. If you're not a canine nutritionist, I recommend the prepackaged raw foods. Here's the link to the Billingshurst site: <http://www.barfworld.com/>. Highly recommend you also read his book, Give Your Dog A Bone, Ian Billingshurst, DVM.

### **Feeding A Dane Puppy**

So now let's get down to the practical side of feeding your puppy. If you've just returned home with him from the breeders you should either be supplied with the food he's been eating, or have a supply of same at home. If you plan on keeping him on the same food, no problem. If you intend to switch, please do this gradually over about a week. The breeder will tell you how much food your puppy eats and how often.

To give you an idea, most puppies 7-8 weeks old will eat between 2 to 3 cups of food twice a day. As your puppy grows, you will know when to increase the amounts by the body condition. Although most new Dane owners are obsessed by their dogs weight and height, it really doesn't matter at this point. What does matter is whether or not you can see (barely) and easily feel the puppys ribs. This is the ideal body condition for a growing Dane.

As your Dane matures, you'll find he'll require less food because he's no longer growing at such a prodigious rate. For example, Skylark (who is the tallest bitch I've ever owned) ate 12 cups of food a day at about 7 months of age! I've NEVER fed a Dane that much. She stayed lean on it too. She also spent a great deal of time running up and down the back hill. Skylark was a very *busy* puppy. Then, at 3 years old, 135 lbs and standing approximately 34" at the shoulder, she ate a scant 3 cups twice a day. She was still pretty active but not as much as when she was younger.

In contrast was Narcissus who, at the age of 10 years, weighing about 110 lbs and standing approximately 31 inches at the shoulder, stayed *fat* on 1½ cups of kibble twice a day. Poppy was a

good example of average food intake. At 6 years old, 32 inches tall and weighing 120 pounds . she ate 2 cups of Innova twice a day. Males will usually eat more. 6 to 8 cups a day is usual.

The amount of food you feed will depend upon the quality of the food. This is why I strongly urge you to feed a very high quality food. You do not have to overload the dogs stomach with huge quantities, nor will you have the huge poops to pick up! It is truly false economy to buy a lesser quality food. You will make up the difference in cost by the large quantity you must feed. You might find yourself feeding twice as much of a poor quality food. Also, the less expensive foods do not contain the best ingredients. Few of them contain probiotics which I consider essential for Great Danes. To be trite, you get what you pay for.

The issue of to elevate or not to elevate the food dish is still undecided. The last Purdue study suggested that elevating the dish actually *increased* the incidence of bloat! I've compromised by putting the dish holders as low on my fence as I can. I use them so the dogs aren't chasing their dishes all over their runs.

Clean, fresh water should be available at all times.

Do not free feed your Dane. It's important to know exactly how much he's eating no matter if he's fat, skinny or just right.

Feed your Dane in the same place at each meal.

## **Exercise**

Great Dane puppies are fragile beings. That big boned, 50 pound baby can be more easily harmed at this age than many other breeds. It's great to play ball with your puppy. Tug-o-war is also a favorite, but let the *puppy* do all the tugging. If you roughly yank and snap the tugged object around, you could harm the puppys neck or back.

Enforced exercise for puppies is a definite no no! Of course you can go for short walks on lead, and this is encouraged. Especially if you go to a shopping mall and allow strangers to pet and meet the puppy. But jogging with a Dane puppy or hauling it alongside a bike is asking for trouble. A Dane puppy gets his healthiest exercise from playing on his own (or with another dog) in the back yard. He can run and play until he's tired and then he can go sleep for however long he wants. *He* sets the limits. If you have a larger puppy or adult dog, make sure that it isn't playing too rough with the pup. I've seen puppies badly injured because larger adults were playing in the same area and knocked the puppy flying.

Many people ask me about jogging with their adult Danes. Great Danes are not endurance dogs. They were meant to quickly run down and then hold their prey until their masters arrived to make the kill. They do not do well in extreme heat or extreme cold. If you *must* jog with your adult Dane, work up to

the distance slowly. Do not jog with your dog on days much over 70 degrees or under 40 degrees. Danes, especially blacks, blues and dark brindles are especially susceptible to heat stroke.

## **TO CROP OR NOT TO CROP**

This is often an emotional issue. If you have the choice, it should be an informed one. Most dogs in the show ring are cropped, however this is *not* a requirement for showing. The Great Dane Standard of Perfection gives a description for both cropped and uncropped ears. Many first time Dane owners have no idea what they're facing in the way of after care with a cropped puppy. You need some information in order to make an intelligent decision. Hopefully one you won't regret.

## **UNCROPPED EARS**

First of all, it's interesting to realize that in the natural world, there is not *one animal* with a drop ear! The erect ear is nature's way of keeping an open ear canal so that air can reach inside. This helps prevent infection. Drop ears are more susceptible to infection than erect. They are also more likely to develop a hematoma if the head is shaken hard. The ear tips snap like a snapped towel and cause the blood vessels in the tips of the ears to break. They bleed into the ear tissue and cause a painful swelling. Sometimes this swelling breaks open when the dog shakes its head and blood flies everywhere! Hematomas are difficult to heal and often keep reopening. The ears must be taped down over the top of the head and a bandage applied to keep them there. Because this irritates the dog, he scratches at it, often reopening the wound.

Although cropping is not necessary for a show dog, uncropped Danes have a different look compared to cropped Danes. The alert attitude of an uncropped dog pales in comparison to the same attitude on a cropped dog. All else being equal, a judge might tend to lean toward the cropped animal when making his placements.

## **CROPPED EARS**

There is more to having a Dane with beautiful, cropped, properly standing ears than simply purchasing a cropped puppy or having him cropped after purchase. The actual crop is only half the battle. The rest is the aftercare which usually lasts until 5 or 6 months of age, but can continue up to a year or even longer! If you live close enough to the breeder he or she will often continue to tape and train the ears for you or will teach you how to do it properly. If you don't live close enough to the breeder and she cannot recommend anyone close to you, you're on your own. I've included a link to instructions that I hope will assist you in this task.

When people object to cropping ears it's often because they've seen a poor job done by a vet who has no idea of the proper way to crop an ear. Just because someone has DVM after their name, doesn't mean that they can properly crop ears. Cropping is more often learned through the vet themselves

being breeders of a cropped breed, or by being properly taught by a vet who has been doing show crops for years. And *he* may have been taught by a breeder!

Great pain and disfigurement can be caused if the ear is not properly cut, stitched and either racked or taped to some kind of support. And, if the after-care giver has no knowledge of how to properly tape and train cropped ears, a great deal of unnecessary damage and pain can be caused. Chances are that the breeder has cropped the litter and has used a talented vet.

Ear taping consists of taping the ears in such a way that they stand erect. The tape is usually left on for a week to 10 days, removed for a couple days and then reapplied. This is done consistently until the ears are standing. It's time consuming but in my opinion, worth it.

If you decide to have your dog cropped, it is imperative that he be cropped by a veterinarian who is experienced and who comes highly recommended by breeders who show. I'd rather see an uncropped Dane any day than one who has been butchered by an incompetent vet. There is nothing uglier than a bad crop. It can also be an unnecessarily painful experience for the puppy if the vet doesn't know what he's doing. The issue of pain is the most common reason used by those opposed to cropping. If done by a competent veterinarian, there is little pain involved. Certainly no more than the pain of a hematoma.

More than likely your breeder will know where to send you. If not, question the vet as to how many crops he does, are they show dogs, what kind of aftercare does he recommend and ask to talk to a few of his clients. Also arrange to view dogs he's cropped. If he's not willing to answer these questions, look elsewhere. You want a vet who will agree to crop the ear all the way to the end in a long show crop. This will take longer to stand, but it's well worth the final result.

Most vets on the West Coast will want to crop a puppy between 8 and 12 weeks of age with a body weight of at least 20 pounds. In the East and Midwest, it isn't uncommon to hear of puppies being cropped as early as 6 weeks.

Another consideration is type of anesthetic used. My own feeling is that if they won't be using an inhalant anesthetic, forget it. I don't want my pups put under with seritol, there's just too little control in case something goes wrong. When on inhalants, they're also hooked directly to oxygen and a respirator in case they should stop breathing. The vet can put them on pure oxygen and 'breath' for them should an emergency arise.

Different vets use different methods of stabilizing the ears immediately after cropping. Few will change their methods because you ask, but here are some of the ways it's done. My personal experience has mostly been with racks. They are formed out of stiff wire (often wire coat hangers) and shaped so the ears can be taped erect to them directly on top of the head. If properly taped, they cause little discomfort to the puppy. They are left on for 2 weeks. My only real objection to racks as they can become caught on things. I've seen a pup get them stuck in the ground and severely twist it's neck when

playing. I had one of my own do this and she turned out to be a wobbler. It may have just been coincidence, but I've always felt that this had something to do with it.

Some vets will tape the ears flat over the top of the head and then apply a bandage. I don't care for this method as I think it tends to cause the ears to 'cup' over the top of the head when they're taken down. I've only seen this done, I've never had a pup treated with this method.

The other method I've seen uses Styrofoam cups stacked one atop the other and then reinforced with tape. They are set on top of the head and the ears are taped directly to their sides. I think that this looks like the best method of all. People I've discussed it with recommend it highly. The cups are loose enough to 'give' when pushed around in play, and being very light in weight, the pups seem to hardly know they're there. My last litter had this done and I will use it again in the future.

## **AFTER CARE OF THE EAR**

Once your puppy has been cropped, the racks or cups are off, and the ear is healed, it's time for the after care to begin. Without proper aftercare, the ears are unlikely to stand properly. Be sure that the ears are completely healed. If there are one or two areas still scabby, be sure not to tape over them or place a tiny bit of cotton there with some antibiotic powder so the tape won't stick to it.

There are probably as many after care methods as there are breeders. The two basic differences in most methods are that one completely encloses the ear and the ear canal and the others leave it open to the air. I don't care for the enclosed method as not only is it extremely irritating to the puppy, it often causes infection or a major case of the gooeys. The gooeys are when you get this disgusting gray goo under the more enclosed areas of tape. I much prefer and recommend any method which leaves the ear open to the air. Here is the link to the method of ear taping I prefer:

**<http://www.sunstrike-great-danes.com/ears.htm>**