

How Much Water Should Your Dog Be Drinking?

By Dr. Becker

Have you ever wondered how much water your dog needs each day? Do you assume he'll drink precisely the amount he needs if you give him free access to fresh clean water at all times?

If so, you might be surprised to learn that while some dogs instinctively know to drink just the right amount of water for their needs, some dogs don't drink enough water, and others drink too much. So it's possible your own canine companion is either under- or over-hydrated.

Keeping an eye on your pet's water consumption is important because too little can result in dehydration, urinary tract issues like kidney stones, and organ failure. And drinking too much water can actually be toxic.

Also, the amount of water your dog drinks can be an indicator of an underlying illness. Dogs with pancreatitis, parvovirus, or leptospirosis tend not to drink much water, but a brewing bladder infection, other types of infection, or a metabolic problem such as Cushing's disease, and diabetes can cause excessive thirst and water consumption. So if your pet is drinking less or more water than normal, you should have her checked by your veterinarian to rule out an underlying condition.

General Guidelines for Water Consumption and How to Tell If Your Dog is Dehydrated

How much water your dog needs each day depends on his size, diet, age, activity level, and weather conditions.

- A good general guideline is that a healthy dog should drink between $\frac{1}{2}$ and 1 ounce of water per pound of body weight each day. So a healthy 65-pound Labrador Retriever should be drinking between about 33 and 65 ounces, or about $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ gallon of water daily.
- If your dog is eating a moisture-rich, species-appropriate diet, she's getting some of her water needs met with each meal, so she may not drink as much from her water bowl. But if she's eating primarily dry dog food (which I don't recommend), she may actually need more than the average daily intake to compensate for the lack of moisture in her diet.
- Puppies need to drink small amounts of water every couple of hours and should be closely monitored and encouraged to drink.
- After a period of hard play or exercise, use caution when your dog rehydrates. If he immediately laps up the contents of his water bowl, rest him for a bit before you refill his bowl. If your dog is very active, it's a good idea to have water with you when he exercises so that you can give him frequent short water breaks to keep him hydrated.

- During the warmer months of the year, especially during summer, it's important to monitor your dog's water intake to insure she's adequately hydrated.

To determine if your dog may need more water, lift some skin at the back of her neck and let it go. If your dog is well hydrated, the skin will fall quickly back into place. The skin of a dehydrated dog will fall more slowly and form sort of a tent. Another method is to check your dog's gums. Moist, slick gums indicate a good level of hydration; dry or sticky gums mean your pet's body needs more water.

The medical term for the desire to drink too much water is called psychogenic polydipsia. Symptoms of over hydration (water intoxication) include staggering/loss of coordination, lethargy, nausea, bloating, vomiting, dilated pupils, glazed eyes, light gum color, and excessive salivation. In severe cases, there can also be difficulty breathing, collapse, loss of consciousness, seizures, coma, and death.

Help for Over or Under-Drinkers

If your dog tends to overindulge in the wet stuff, make sure you're there to supervise his activity. The bodily condition that occurs when dogs over-consume water is called hyponatremia (or inadequate levels of sodium in the bloodstream). It is most commonly seen in dogs who like to stay in the lake, pond or pool all day; pets that lap or bite at the water continuously while playing in it; and dogs that swallow water unintentionally as they dive for a ball or other toy.

If he's retrieving a ball or other toy from the water, insist on frequent rest breaks and be especially vigilant on days when the water is rough. Also observe how your dog interacts with the water. If his mouth is open a lot – even if he's holding a ball or stick in it -- understand that he's probably ingesting a fair amount of water. The same can be true of dogs that dive to the bottom of a pool to retrieve items.

Familiarize yourself with the symptoms of water intoxication and monitor your dog's appearance and behavior when he's playing in water. And if your dog enjoys being sprayed with water from the hose or sprinkler, you should monitor that activity as well. Water from a hose or sprinkler is under pressure, and you'd be surprised how much your dog can ingest in a short amount of time.

If your dog doesn't drink enough water, make sure to praise her and give her a treat whenever she drinks from her water bowl, and place fresh water close to all the places she frequents, like her bed and food bowl.

Add yummy flavorings like chicken or bone broth to your dog's water to make it more tempting, and consider getting a pet drinking water fountain as a further enticement.

And finally, but most importantly, if you're feeding dry dog food, switch to canned and then to a balanced raw diet to greatly increase the amount of water your pet is getting from each meal.