BRINGING HOME AN ADULT STARVING BORZOI
Important Information & Feeding Guidelines

Compiled with the guidance of: — Beth Coney, DVM, a long-time Borzoi owner and Borzoi Rescue veterinarian. Dr. Beth has treated rescues for the National Borzoi Rescue Foundation for many years and is our "go to" resource whenever we have a dog with significant medical problems. —Jan Bradley, DVM, whose practice has included both show and Rescue Borzoi. Dr. Jan was involved in the early years of Greyhound track rescue and has much experience with starvation in sighthounds.

THE DANGERS OF TOO MUCH FOOD
AND FAST WEIGHT GAIN

When dogs that have essentially been starved suddenly get larger amounts of food, they can become very sick and even die. As dog owners, our natural first instinct on seeing an emaciated animal is to give it food … lots of food. Unfortunately, if we give in to that urge, we risk harming or even killing the dog we are trying to help.

It can be very hard to look in the eyes of a starving dog and limit the amount of food the dog can have each day. If you have agreed to take home a Borzoi that is in starvation, you owe them a fair chance at staying alive. That means following strict feeding guidelines until the dog is out of danger.

WHAT HAPPENS IN STARVATION

In an attempt to survive starvation, the dog’s metabolic pathways undergo profound shifts. If the dog is suddenly fed larger amounts of food, these pathways cannot handle the demand. The dog’s fluid levels, electrolytes, and vitamins go out of balance. These imbalances have adverse effects on many different organs, including the heart and brain. Organ dysfunction can become so severe that the dog dies — and it can happen very quickly.
Refeeding Syndrome

Refeeding Syndrome is the medical term for what goes wrong when starving dogs are fed incorrectly. At its worst, overfeeding a starving dog causes organ failure and death. This UC-Davis information sheet gives more detailed information on starvation and the medical problems that happen when a starving animal is fed incorrectly. [http://brnc.org/media/docs/UCDRefeedingSyndrome.pdf](http://brnc.org/media/docs/UCDRefeedingSyndrome.pdf)

A less extreme form of Refeeding Syndrome results in gastrointestinal (GI) problems. The GI tract of a dog that has not been eating much for a prolonged period of time simply can’t handle a sudden change to larger amounts of food. These dogs develop diarrhea, loss of appetite, and/or vomiting, none of which are helpful when weight gain is the goal.

BODY CONDITION SCORE (BCS)

Body condition is usually scored on a 1-9 scale, where 1 is emaciated, 5 is ideal, and 9 is obese. (Some veterinarians and shelters use a 1-5 scale instead, where 3 is ideal.) This link has drawings and descriptions for the 9 point scale. [http://brnc.org/media/docs/NestleBodyConditionScale.pdf](http://brnc.org/media/docs/NestleBodyConditionScale.pdf).

Each number lower than the ideal score of 5 represents a 10%-15% lack of weight.

- A BCS of 4 means the dog weighs 10-15% less than its ideal weight.
- A BCS of 3 means the dog weighs 20-30% less than its ideal weight.
- A BCS of 2 means the dog weighs 30-45% less than its ideal weight.
- A BCS of 1 means the dog weighs 40-60% less than its ideal weight.

**EXAMPLE:**

An adult Borzoi who would ideally weigh 80 lbs. with a BCS of 5.

- At a BCS of 4, the dog would weigh 68-72 lbs., still considered “ideal.”
- At a BCS of 3, the dog would weigh 56-64 lbs., be “underweight” but not in starvation.
- At a BCS of 2, the dog would weigh 44-56 lbs., be “very thin” AND IN STARVATION.
- At a BCS of 1 the dog would weigh 32-48 lbs., be “emaciated” AND IN STARVATION.
STEP 1: Get the dog’s current weight IMMEDIATELY.
See your veterinarian and also get a Body Condition Score (BCS). Ask your vet if they see any issues or problems with using this plan for your dog and keep your vet in the loop as the dog recovers.

STEP 2: Use the guidelines below for any dog with a BCS under 3 out of 9.
Be sure to follow the plan strictly as you feed your dog. Observe the dog closely for diarrhea, vomiting, loss of appetite, or any other sign of Refeeding Syndrome.

STEP 3: Weigh the dog weekly.
You want the dog to gain 1-2 lbs. a week. If slower, consult your vet for advice. If faster, REDUCE the amount of kibble slightly to slow down the weight gain. A dog that is 30 lbs. underweight, for example, should take a MINIMUM of 15 weeks - nearly 4 months - to reach its ideal weight. FASTER IS NOT BETTER for the dog’s health.

STEP 4: Accompany your dog outside EVERY TIME and watch them closely.
Starving Borzoi will eat almost ANYTHING they can get in their mouths – poop, sticks, grass, dead leaves, pieces of garden hose, rocks, landscape cloth, insulation, old rags, etc. You should expect this behavior throughout the dog’s recovery. Indoors, you may need to be equally vigilant or else risk a medical emergency.

STEP 5: Supervise and limit play.
Underweight dogs have weak muscles AND WEAK BONES due to the effects of starvation. As your dog gains weight, its muscles will recover quicker than its bones. Within a few weeks, he/she will feel strong enough to run and play hard. However, the bones take about 6 months to become strong again. During recovery from starvation, your dog may be very fracture-prone, especially in its front legs. You should supervise play. Limit hard running and shock-intense play
such as abrupt stops, jumping from higher places, etc. If you have an SUV, you should ramp your dog in and out of the car rather than have them jump in and out.

**HOW TO FEED**

Our rescue veterinarians recommend that you feed your Borzoi Iams or Eukanuba Adult Maintenance formulas. Both brands have meat as the first ingredient, both have passed extensive feeding trials, and Borzoi generally do very well on both. If you know what the dog has been eating prior to coming to you, DO NOT CHANGE the food until the dog is known to be stable. Then make a slow transition to the new food. If you want guidelines for making a food change, contact us at BR-NC.

This plan is based on using a food with a nutritional profile similar to Iams or Eukanuba. If you decide to use a different food, consult your veterinarian to be sure your food has the correct nutritional profile for a starving Borzoi. For larger or smaller dogs, the amounts should be adjusted accordingly.

**The following diet is for an average ADULT Borzoi, IN STARVATION, with a BCS of 2.** The dog’s ideal weight will eventually be 80 pounds. A typical "starving" weight for this dog would be under 60 lbs.

**Please read the following directions thoroughly before starting your feeding program.**

**Week 1:** Total kibble: 2 level cups per day. Measure it! Feed 1/2 cup of kibble in the morning. Add Fortiflora to improve gut bacteria. If you wish, add SMALL amounts of chicken broth, a level Tablespoon of cooked canned pumpkin (NOT the pie mix), and up to 1 level Tablespoon of cooked chicken or turkey (no skin). Repeat for dinner. During the day, measure out 1 cup of kibble and use it throughout the day for treats and snacks. Don’t eyeball this amount! If you just grab bits of kibble as you go, it is very easy to end up feeding too much. NO OTHER TREATS, COOKIES, CHEESE. OR CHEWS. Be sure fresh water is available to the dog throughout the day and night.

**Week 2:** Total kibble: 3 level cups per day. Measure it! Feed 1 level cup of kibble morning and evening, with the same additions and restrictions as above. Continue to give an additional 1 measured cup of kibble throughout the day for treats and snacks.
**Week 3:** Total kibble: 4 level cups per day. Measure it!
Feed 1.5 cups of kibble morning and evening, with the same additions and restrictions as above.
Continue to give 1 measured cup of kibble throughout the day for treats and snacks.
DO NOT GET TEMPTED AND ADD ANY OTHER FOODS, COOKIES, OR CHEWS!

**Week 4:**
If the dog is gaining weight at the right rate (1 or 2 lbs. a week), continue at the Week 3 feeding level until the dog reaches its ideal weight. If more food is needed, add another 1 cup of kibble daily (split between the morning and evening meals) and then watch the dog’s weight. If the dog starts gaining weight too fast, cut back the extra kibble by 1/2 cup and then monitor weight.

If the dog has any diarrhea ANYWHERE ALONG THE WAY, reduce the total kibble by 1/2 cup and stay at that level for another 5-7 days.

**BORZOI UNDER 2 YEARS OLD & UNDERWEIGHT ADULT DOGS WITH A BCS OF 3 OR 3.5**

Starving Borzoi puppies need very specific feeding plans based on their age and weight and may need additional medical support. Adult Borzoi that are “underweight” but not in starvation (BCS of 3 or 3.5), likewise need a specific feeding program.

For help with puppies or underweight adults, please contact BR-NC for guidelines and/or referrals to knowledgeable veterinarians in your area.

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We greatly appreciate our Adopters and Referral Owners for all the work and love they put into their Borzoi! We know how hard it is to bring home a starving dog and feed it properly. Please feel free to contact us with any questions you may have - medical or otherwise!

We are always here for you and your Borzoi!

November 2014