

# Your Potbellied Pig's Diet

Potbellied pigs are omnivores, so their natural diet in the wild would include roots, veggies, nuts, seeds, berries, worms, insects, raw eggs and other little critters. Of course, you can't imitate this diet for your pig, but you can feed your pig a variety of healthy foods. It's a good idea to feed pigs larger meals twice a day (breakfast and dinner) and healthy snacks throughout the day.

**Recommended Foods.** Your pig's diet should contain a lot of veggies. Meals should consist of a head of cut-up romaine lettuce along with a cup of veggies, plus pellets made specifically for miniature or potbellied pigs. Vary the veggies so the pigs don't get bored with their meals and also get a variety of nutrients. Safe veggies include broccoli, cauliflower, lima beans, green beans, sweet potatoes, corn, peas, edamame, peppers and peeled zucchini.

Don't feed your pig too much broccoli or cauliflower, however, since they can cause bloating and gas. You might want to peel the zucchini (unless they are organic) because the skin has quite a bit of residual pesticides and synthetic fertilizers in it.

In the winter, if you really want to pamper your pig, warm the veggies (you can even allow the lettuce to warm up a bit) so the pig isn't eating cold food in cold weather. In the summer, if you live in a very hot climate, feed the pig cold lettuce and cold or slightly frozen veggies.

Limit veggies such as corn, carrots and peas; the high sugar content of these veggies can cause hyperactive and aggressive behavior. All veggies should have no added sodium, so canned vegetables are not a good choice. Fresh or frozen are best. Include commercially prepared potbellied pig pellets in the salads, but don't feed the pig pellets only, since such a restricted diet doesn't supply the nutrients the pig needs to have optimum health. Two or three times a week, you can also include eggs in the pig's food.

Fruit can be offered as treats on occasion or included in meals, but only once in a while because of the high sugar content. Unsalted almonds or popcorn make a wonderful snack. Try mixing almonds and pellets and tossing them around the pig enclosure after meals. This extends meal time and helps satisfy pigs' innate desire to root. Of course, they also get physical and mental stimulation while searching for the almonds and pellets. Alfalfa hay is another good snack and it has plenty of fiber.

**Recommended Supplements.** Supplements can be used to encourage a strong immune system and help the pig overcome a particular illness or disease. To allow the pig's body to adjust, start with small amounts of a supplement. Before giving a supplement, check with a veterinarian experienced with potbellied pigs to verify that the supplement will have no ill effects. Administer the supplement in small doses for two weeks and watch the pig closely for changes of any kind.



The supplements that Best Friends has used safely with pigs are Vitamin C (in the form of Ester C), probiotics (for good digestion), flax meal, olive oil, AR-Ease and Wobezym (for arthritis), CoQ10, enzymes and B vitamins. Try including supplements two or three times a week for general good health. Mix with canned pumpkin so that the powdery supplements do not irritate the pig's nose.

**What Not to Feed a Pig.** Potbellied pigs are not being fattened up for slaughter, so they can't be fed anything and everything, as farm hogs typically are. Certain foods and plants are toxic to pigs, including chocolate, alcohol, avocados, ivy and a large variety of other plants. Pigs can also suffer from sodium toxicity and selenium toxicity. There is a comprehensive list of toxic plants at [www.napcc.asPCA.org](http://www.napcc.asPCA.org).

Dog food, cat food and hog/sow pellets are all bad for potbellied pigs because they can cause your pig to become obese. Dog and cat foods are too high in protein for them. Hog and sow pellets are formulated to encourage maximum growth in a minimal time for slaughter pigs, so they are not suitable either. Processed human food is also a poor dietary choice for a potbellied pig, since it can cause obesity and other health problems.

**Consequences of Obesity.** As with humans, dogs and cats, obesity can cause discomfort, lack of energy, digestive problems and leg complications in pigs. A potbellied pig's legs were not designed to carry excess weight, so an obese potbellied pig can suffer damage to the tendons, ligaments and joints of the legs. Fractures to the bones can even occur. Such damage can cause permanent residual problems, such as arthritis, even after the extra weight has been shed. Given the opportunity, pigs will eat continuously because that is what nature intended. In the wild, they would be continuously foraging, roaming and rooting in order to get something to eat. All that exercise would prevent them from becoming obese and, besides, they would only be eating healthy foods.

A pig who becomes obese can also suffer from "mechanical blindness," which is caused by fat surrounding the eye area and obscuring the pig's vision. There are degrees of mechanical blindness – it depends on how obese the pig is. Vision is not a pig's strongest sense, so even a small reduction in vision is a big issue for the pig. Once the pig has lost weight, excess skin may remain around the eye area and continue to hinder vision to a certain extent.

**Controlled Weight Loss in the Obese Pig.** As with humans, pigs vary in size, so there's no correct weight for all pigs. A pig who is at a healthy weight has a bit of a swayback and a bit of a belly, and the torso curves inward just before the hindquarters.

As with humans, obese pigs didn't get that way from eating a healthy diet. The first step in helping the pig return to a normal weight is to make salads for each meal. Romaine is a good lettuce to use because it has more nutrients than iceberg lettuce. Of course, pigs who have been fed junk food probably won't gobble down salads right away. To entice the pig to eat all her veggies, try coating salads with canned pumpkin, applesauce or yogurt. Don't use an excessive amount of these foods, however – just enough to make the salad more palatable. After a week or so, reduce the amount of coating; after two weeks, try eliminating the coating and see if the pig will still eat the salad.

It is extremely important for the pig to lose weight gradually. The reason: The pig can become quite ill if her body does not ingest enough nutrients. To compensate, the pig will begin processing her excess fat in large amounts, causing a condition called hepatic lipidosis that can be devastating and even deadly for pigs (as well as other critters). Provide a balanced, low-fat diet so the pig can lose weight the healthy way.

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