Some Great Danes can be hard work when it comes to keeping them in good condition.

Great Danes generally do not fully physically mature until they are 3–4 years of age. By this age they will have filled out and look like an adult Great Dane which can be an impressive sight.

Some Great Danes particularly under 3 years of age can be on the lean side. Some are all their lives.

If you have one of these lean Great Danes it is recommended that you have your Vet check over your Dane to ensure there is no obvious reason for the condition.

There are some things you may like to try to assist in putting weight on an ‘adult’ Great Dane (not suitable for puppies):

- Some Danes simply need more food, therefore increase the amount of food you give. In some rescue dogs this can be 500 grams of good quality kibble such as Canidae or Stay Loyal 2 or 3 times a day if they’ll eat it. If you feed budget kibble you’ll end up feeding more and having much bigger stools.

- Porridge with Rice milk.

- A supplement to assist in normal digestion such as: Inner Health, Yakult, Thrive D Powder or Dr Goodpet Digestive Powder.

- A calming supplement if your dog is nervy / highly-strung / not emotionally balanced such as PetArk Calm, Vetalogica Tranquil Formula.

- Lamb Flaps (may be too high in fat for some dogs)

- Eukanuba 30/20 or Eukanuba Active Performance has also been successful at putting on weight, however may be too fatty for some Danes and they may continue to have soft stools on it.

- Satin Balls – this is a recipe of a food you can make yourself. It may be too fatty and should only be used short term. We recommend you only make up a small batch to start with as some dogs do not like them. (Recipe on upcoming pages)

Whatever method you choose it is important to only allow gradual weight gain.
Emotional stress is one of the most common reasons why Danes drop a lot of weight.

Stress can prevent the digestive system from functioning correctly. When an animal is stressed or gets an adrenalin burst the body diverts energy away from the digestive system to the muscles for the Flight or Fight mode – you may know this as ‘Survival Mode’.

Some Great Danes also require much more food than other Great Danes, so under feeding even unintentionally can cause a dog to become underweight or emaciated.

In stressed, nervous, highly-strung & emotionally unbalanced dogs (including those who show aggressive tendencies as they are usually fear based) should be placed on a dietary supplement to help calm their mind. Where dietary supplements do not seem to have an effect after several months you may like speak with your Vet & Behaviourist about a combined prescription medication & behavioural modification program.

**Step 1:** Visit your Vet to see if there is an underlying reason why the dog could be underweight.

**Step 2:** Increase the calorie intake, if the dog will actually eat then this is a positive thing. In our rescue dogs we can feed them up to 500 grams of a quality kibble such as Canidae/Stay Loyal 3–4 times a day if they will actually eat it.

If the dog will not eat, you will then need to decipher if this is a habit problem e.g. the dog has been allowed to take a long time to eat – in this case put the food down for 15 minutes and then pick it up and put it away so the dog learns it must eat within the given time frame.

The dog may not like the food on offer, so if after 24 hours it is still refusing to eat you will need to start investigating ways to encourage the dog to eat (avoiding hand feeding where possible) such as using Liver sprinkles, Sardines in tomato sauce mixed in the kibble, BBQ Chicken mixed in, a little bit of canned food mixed in with the kibble or change to a meat based diet such as BARF. Also try to warm the meal up.

Some premium Brands pet foods do offer a canned food selection (not supermarket canned food) that you can get from your pet warehouse such as Pet Barn / Pet Stock etc.

Call your Vet for guidance if after 48 hours the dog still will not eat.
Step 3: Add a supplement such as PetArk Calm, Vetalogica Tranquil Formula or Greenpet Nerve Tonic to the dogs meal every day and use ongoing to help calm the dog’s emotional state. You can double dose this in very nervy dogs to start with.

Step 4: Add a supplement to assist in normal digestion such as: Inner Health / Yakult / Thrive D Powder / Dr Goodpet Digestive Powder.

Satin Balls Recipe for Lean Great Danes

4.53kg raw hamburger mince (regular, with fat)

567grams Wheat Germ

1 large box of Oatmeal (uncooked)

340 grams of Sanitarium Weetbix (small box) or any basic Multigrain cereal

1 cups Vegetable Oil

10 eggs (boiled in shell for 30 seconds)

10 envelopes of unflavoured Gelatine

1¼ cups unflavoured Molasses (also known as Treacle)

2 teaspoons Kelp

1 cup of ground Flaxseed

A pinch of salt

Garlic to taste

Method

Mix all ingredients together well, (much like a meat-loaf) and then put into separate freezer bags and freeze. Thawing out as needed.

It puts weight on in a very short time, but may not be suitable to all Danes. The fat content may be too high and should not be given to emaciated dogs.

It can be fed alone or with kibble.

This diet is not suitable for growing Great Dane puppies.
Skinnie Black Dog Syndrome

Not an actual clinical syndrome

Although referred to as Black Dog Syndrome, Great Danes who struggle with their weight long term can happen to any colour although it is seen quite a lot in Black Great Danes especially young Males.

Vets are typically unable to find any medical reason (although don’t always do any testing or investigating) for the condition and most dogs go on to put on weight between 3–4+ years of age especially after de-sexing, some however struggle with their weight all their lives.

There are a number of sources that believe that this problem is caused by a digestive/absorption issue.

The dogs’ physical structure

It is important to consider that the dogs conformation and breeding/lines could also be responsible for it not being able to put on weight simply because it cannot.

Fine racy slab–sided (no spring of the ribcage – appear flat on the sides of their body) Great Danes can be traced back for many generations. These dogs may never put on weight, basically because their overall conformation will never allow it (you see the same in tall thin humans).

There are many different types of digestive disorders. Causes range from eating something other than pet food, to food allergies, infections or lack of digestive enzymes. Some breeds, such as Great Danes, German Shepherds, Golden Retrievers and Collies, are more prone to particular digestive problems.

Source: http://familypethealthctr.com
Malabsorption

Malabsorption is one condition that it is recommended you speak to your Vet about.

Malabsorption is poor absorption of a nutrient resulting from interference with its digestion, absorption, or both. Interference with food digestion in dogs is typically due to lack of certain enzymes from the pancreas, called exocrine pancreatic insufficiency, whereas most cases of absorption failure are caused by small intestinal disease.

The signs of malabsorption are mainly due to lack of nutrient uptake and loss of nutrients in the feces. Signs typically include long term diarrhoea, weight loss, and altered appetite (loss of appetite or excessive eating). However, diarrhoea may be absent even when disease is severe.

Weight loss may be substantial despite a good appetite, sometimes characterized by eating of faeces. Dogs with malabsorption usually appear healthy in other respects unless there is severe inflammation or cancer. Nonspecific signs may include dehydration, anaemia, dark blood in the stools, or fluid retention. A veterinarian may be able to detect thickened bowel loops or enlarged abdominal lymph nodes.

Diagnosing malabsorption can be complex, because long term diarrhoea and weight loss are signs that are common in several diseases, including malabsorption. An exact diagnosis may take more than a single visit. A thorough examination is needed for dogs with signs of malabsorption to determine whether the signs are caused by an underlying generalized or metabolic disease.

Certain tests can help determine whether the signs are due to a condition such as inflammatory bowel disease liver disease, or parasites. The dog's history is particularly important because it may suggest a specific food allergy, consumption of non-food items, or other sensitivity. Weight loss may indicate malabsorption or protein-losing disease but may also be due to loss of appetite, vomiting, or a non-digestive disease. There are certain features that help distinguish small--intestinal diarrhoea from large--intestinal diarrhoea. Suspected large intestine disease in dogs may be further evaluated by a biopsy of the intestinal lining. However, if signs are accompanied by weight loss or large volumes of faeces, then the small intestine is probably also affected.

Treatment of malabsorption involves dietary change, management of complications, and treatment of the cause, if it can be identified. If malabsorption is caused by exocrine pancreatic insufficiency, treatment involves feeding a special low--fibre diet that contains moderate levels of fat or highly digestible fat, very digestible carbohydrate, and high--quality protein.

Supplementation with pancreatic extract to provide missing enzymes is also necessary. If the dog's response to pancreatic replacement treatment is poor, small--intestinal bacterial overgrowth may be suspected. In this case, the dog may be treated with oral antibiotics for about 1 month to reduce the
bacterial overgrowth. Effective treatment of small-intestinal disease depends on the nature of the disorder, but when a specific diagnosis cannot be made, treatments may be given on a trial basis.

Dietary modification is an important aspect of the management of small intestinal disease. Your veterinarian may recommend feeding your pet an exclusion diet consisting of a single protein source (one to which your dog has not previously been exposed) as a test when dietary sensitivity is suspected.

It is very important that you provide the special diet and prescribed medication(s) for your pet exactly as instructed. Often, owners are tempted to provide a “special treat” not on the diet even though they have been instructed not to do so.

Failure to follow the prescribed diet can delay diagnosis and delay the treatment their pet needs. Owners can reward their pets during this time with petting, a new blanket or suitable toy, or some other reward that is not food. Often the best reward for the pet is extended periods of attention.

**Checklist**

**Step 1:** Book in to see your Vet if the condition has been going on for some time. If your Vet does not wish to do any testing or investigation let them know you would like the condition to be investigated further i.e. possible Malabsorption, inflammatory bowel disease liver disease, or parasites etc.

**Step 2:** Worm your dog monthly. If you use the same worming treatment all the time you will need to consider changing to a different brand as worms build resistance to brands.

**Step 3:** Look at your dog’s diet, investigate the ingredients of what your dog is fed, are they high quality ingredients with minimal fillers etc. Investigate the ingredient panel about what chemicals, flavouring and additives are on your dog’s food that could be causing digestion problems.

**Consider:**

**Consider:** What commercial treats you are feeding your dog and what ingredients they contain. Could you cook your own treats i.e. cut up piece of chicken or steak etc.

**Step 4:** Consider placing your dog on a digestive aid.

**Recommendation:** Inner Health / Yakult / Thrive / Protexin / Dr Goodpet Digestive Powder
Step 5. Minimise your dog’s stress. Stressy dogs tend to have problems with their digestion.


It is important to note temperament has a genetic component and Great Danes who are born highly strung may not be able to be assisted by supplementation.

Step 6. If your dog does not like to eat much ensure you only leave the food down for 15 minutes and then remove. It may take a week or 2 for the dog to start eating properly however free-feeding (leaving food down all the time) doesn’t help the situation as they can become fussier.

Consider fasting (not feeding your dog) for 24 hours to try and kick start their appetite. Fasting is safe for most dogs, check with your Vet if you're concerned.

Warm the meal up, dogs prefer warm meals vs something out of the fridge.

Trick the dog by only putting in their bowl what you know they will eat and then slowly add to it over time.

Consider that they do not like the food you are feeding them.

Will they eat something like dog roll or canned food? Although junk food in many cases this can be a good indicator to see if they are just being fussy.

Speak to your vet about medications that increase appetite.

Move the dogs bowl to another location to see if that may work i.e move it inside from outdoors. The dog may need you to be near it whilst it eats as well.

Make dinner time as stress free as possible, some dogs may benefit from being fed away from other dogs where some may benefit from the competition of having another dog in the same room whilst eating (if there is no history of food aggression).
Still having problems after trying all of the above? Time for some alternative testing perhaps?

Consider:

**Nutriscan** – Gold Standard food sensitivity test. Purchase online from America and you will be sent a mouth swab kit which you send back and results will be e-mailed to you.


**Bio-compatibility test** – This test is completely non-invasive and painless. It involves only the collection of a small sample of your pet’s fur. No needles or blood samples.

Many animals suffer from allergies and this can be the result of eating bio-incompatible foods over a period of time. Allergic reactions are accumulative and a visible reaction may not take place for up to four days. Often animals will crave the very foods they are allergic to.


**Hair Mineral Analysis test** – Hair testing is the most effective, non-invasive method for testing mineral levels in the body. Minerals are important for correct function of many organs and glands.


Work with an Animal Naturopath for diet and supplementation to try and get your dog on the right path for future health.