

Raw Food Diets

In a time of increasing pet food recalls, many people have an interest in preparing food for their dogs and cats. Many claims about the benefits of raw diets have been made over the past few years. Proponents of raw feeding note health benefits and feel that is a more natural way of providing nutrition. These claims are anecdotal, there is no firm evidence either way. There is currently no right or wrong answer, but home diet preparations need to be done intelligently, ideally with the help of a veterinary nutritionist. For growing animals, exercise extreme caution in dietary planning.

Raw food proponent:

- Cooking destroys important enzymes and nutrients.
- Improvement in skin condition and hair coat
- Improvement in allergic conditions.
- Improvement in lower urinary tract conditions, especially in cats.
- Dogs ate prey animals in the wild, so raw muscle and organ meat should be well balanced.
- Although raw food can contain bacteria, a healthy pet should not be affected. Dogs are more resistant to bacteria than people.
- The inclusion of bones in the diet helps keep teeth healthy and provides natural chewing.

Veterinary Nutritionist:

- Enzymes are digested in the stomach and normally become non-functional. Natural enzymes that the body excretes aid in food digestion and nutrient absorption.
- Many raw diets are high in protein and fat, which could contribute to an improvement, as could a commercial food
- Many raw diets are a single protein source, which could contribute to an improvement, as many commercial diets could, too.
- The higher water content of raw food can contribute to this, as could the feeding of more canned food.
- Research has found raw diets (either home cooked or commercially prepared) to be deficient or excessive in vitamins and minerals such as calcium and vitamin D.
- Bacterial contamination is a concern, especially for the people that handle the food, dishes and prep material. Caution should be exercised especially with immunocompromised people and pets.
- There is real cause for concern for dental damage and intestinal obstruction with bones.



So what should you do? A good alternative would be a high quality, minimally processed commercial food with the addition of cooked fruits and vegetables (some foods are toxic to dogs and cats, such as onion and grapes). Some commercial brands are Wellness, Orijen, Merrick BG or Nature's Variety. Many people rotate foods and add some home cooked meals. Feeding the occasional meat is fine, but our suggestion would be to stay away from bones and lightly cook the outside of the cut of meat to reduce bacterial load. This can be done with pan-searing or 30 seconds in boiling water. Raw food (even if it was frozen) for your dog and cat should be handled with the same care and sanitation that you use in your kitchen for any raw meat. If you wish to completely prepare your companion's food at home, a veterinary nutritionist should be involved. Go to www.acvn.org or www.balanceit.com for more information.