

CANINE RAW FOOD DIET BASICS

Raw foods are the most powerful healers for our companion animals. They are the most digestible and absorbable nutrients that we can provide. They are the building blocks for our animal's innate healing abilities - tissue repair and organ regeneration. In my experience, the health benefits of the raw food diet surpass any other diet - homemade or commercial. The raw food diet is just as nature intended, an evolutionary diet fit for the digestive system of a carnivore / omnivore. Of course, organic and/or hormone and antibiotic-free is the best for all animals. However, just switching to a raw food diet is a quantum leap in nutrition and further steps in refinement are relatively minor in comparison. For example, homemade cooked recipes provide approximately 60% optimum absorbable nutritional value, whereas the highest quality commercial preservative-free pet food rates provide < 50% optimum absorbable nutritional value. A balanced raw food diet provides 95% optimum absorbable nutritional value. Being a purest and offering only the best quality meats and organic vegetables as well as rotating vegetables and meats will increase the optimum absorbable nutritional value to 98%. Do the best you can for your circumstances.

Most dogs are so excited when they first get raw food – it is as if they have been waiting for **real food** all of their life. However, there are some dogs (especially small breeds) that can be a challenge and I recommend reviewing my “Converting Cats to a Raw Food Diet” handout if you have one of those finicky eaters. You may want to try cooked meat at first and then slowly start cooking it less and less. Fasting dogs for 24-36 hours prior to introducing the raw food is helpful in minimizing detoxification symptoms (for more information on this, see the handout on Detoxification). Use digestive enzymes (e.g., Prozyme) for at least the first few months. Convert slowly by mixing 25% of the raw food with 75% of their present diet. Gradually increase the proportions of the raw and decrease the proportions of their current diet over 5-7 days until you are feeding 100% raw.

Just as with humans, nutritional caloric intakes of dogs vary greatly with metabolism. This is not an exact science just as feeding ourselves is not a calculated effort for most people. The goal is to have an optimal “Body Condition Score” where they will eat far less raw food since more is absorbed and utilized for lean muscle tissue. In simplified terms, the optimal “Body Condition Score” is defined as a body condition where you can see a definitive waist in front of the hips (looking from above) and you can easily feel their individual ribs. Any intentional weight loss should be gradual. Weights should be checked at least every other week in the beginning so you can determine the maintenance amounts of food for your dog. Guidelines for amounts to feed for an adult dog of average health and activity are about **1 pound of food per 50 pounds of body weight**. Sample menus are provided below. Puppies, pregnant and lactating animals, as well as animals with cancer could require more than twice this amount of food. Very active/working animals will also have higher requirements and might need special balancing. Determine what works for your individual companion.

CANINE DIET

- **65 - 80% Raw Meat and Bones.** The meat needs to be RAW – not cooked! For the most part concern over the use of raw meat is unwarranted. I have never personally seen a problem with bacterial overload such as *E. coli* or *Salmonella* as a result of feeding raw meat. Everything has a natural balance and the digestive tracts of dogs are designed to ingest raw meat. As long as care is taken and the meat is not spoiled, there is not an issue with feeding raw meat. However, precautionary steps may be indicated in animals with severely depressed immune systems. For more information refer to articles in the *Whole Dog Journal* or contact our office.

Turkey, Chicken, Beef, Lamb, Venison, and Fish are all acceptable sources of meat, but do NOT feed pork products, fish bones, or raw salmon. Raw meaty bone sources; chicken necks and backs, (wings and drumsticks are only for the experienced eater), turkey necks, and beef ribs are good sources of bone.

I recommend starting with ground meat and bones for the novice eater since gulping/inhaling raw bones can be a problem. Then after a few weeks slowly introduce chicken/turkey necks- section in smaller pieces at first if you have a “gulper.” Judge risks for your individual dog- some “gulpers” are better fed ground meat and bones only. After your pet has been on raw food for a while, vary the meat if you can, steady feeding of the same food can lead to hypersensitivities. Offering a variety of different meats is very beneficial, but just by feeding the raw food diet you are way ahead of the game. Variety at least 1-2 days a week is usually sufficient. **Large breed puppies and geriatric animals should have a little less meat and bone in their diet.**

- **5 – 10% Raw Organ Meat.** This includes liver, kidney, heart, etc. from all of the acceptable meats listed above. Organ meat can be offered a few times a week or include a small amount daily with the raw muscle meat. Prepackaged, ground organ meat can be obtained from Halshan’s. Wright’s 80/20 mix contains organ meat.
- **20 - 30% Raw Vegetables.** It is good to include both aboveground vegetables and root vegetables. Broccoli, cauliflower, dark leafy greens (spinach, kale, mustard greens, green leaf, endive), zucchini, carrots, peas, green beans, parsnips, turnips, cabbage, etc. are all possibilities. Herbs such as dandelion, parsley, carrot tops, etc. are excellent but need to be in small amounts. Corn is not recommended since it has been extensively genetically modified and many animals are sensitive to it. **Large breed puppies and geriatric animals should have a little less meat and bone in their diet.**
- **0 -10% Cooked grain.** Grains are only occasionally recommended for extremely active dogs needing extra glycogen stores. Use grains carefully as they are the source of most food sensitivities. I prefer potatoes, yams, or sweet potatoes for complex carbohydrates. Working dogs or very active dogs are the only ones I

think do better with a small amount of grain in the diet consistently.

- **0 - 5% Nuts and fruits.** Great snacks and typical part of the evolutionary diet. Best to feed fruits alone as they are digested quickly and tend to ferment when fed with a meal. (peanuts not recommended because of associated allergies and toxins.)
- **Vitamin/Mineral Supplements.** It is essential to supplement with additional vitamins and minerals since soils and harvests have been depleted by over-farming. High quality supplements include Animal Essentials, Vetriscience products, Pat McKay's products, TCInstincts, Celestial Pet, Kymythy's kelp/alfalfa mix, Catalyn by Standard Process, etc.
- **Essential Fatty Acids.** Fatty acids rich in Omega-3 are also essential. There are many varied opinions regarding which are the best and in what combination (i.e., cod liver oil, flaxseed oil, evening primrose oil, salmon oil, borage oil, hemp seed oil, etc...). I recommend a variety and prefer the combination formulas for that reason. Animal Essentials, RX Vitamins, Omega Nutrition, and Grizzly are some of my favorite brands.
- **Calcium.** Raw bones are the preferred main source of calcium, IF YOU CANNOT FEED BONES, YOU MUST USE A CALCIUM SUPPLEMENT! Bone meal is not recommended due to frequent heavy metal contamination- know your source. Good quality calcium supplements can be obtained from Animals Essentials, Pat McKay, Celestial Pet, etc.
- **Eggs.** Eggs are an excellent and highly absorbable source of protein. If the eggs are of high quality, (free range–hormone and antibiotic free) they can be fed raw with the shells broken in small pieces. I recommend Shelton's or San Pasqual brands for optimal quality. Depending on the size of the animal, one to several eggs twice weekly can be used as an additional protein source. In older animals, eggs can be fed daily to help with signs of senility.
- **Milk and milk products.** I usually do not recommend milk products because most dogs lack the lactase enzyme which is essential for digestion of milk products pasteurized cow's milk can cause diarrhea and gas. However, raw milk (sheep, goat, cow) is very well tolerated and can be introduced slowly into the diet if you can find a high quality source. Processed or cultured dairy products (cheese, yogurt, kefir, panir, cottage cheese, etc) are usually fine in small amounts and work well for treats or supplement administration.
- **Fasting.** Routine weekly fasting for liver detoxification is a good idea. I recommend starting with 12 hours and gradually working up to 24 hours. Smaller breeds may do better with 12 hour fasts. Always provide fresh water.

SAMPLE DIETS

Wright's 80/20 mix is one of the most complete prepackaged you can get with meat, bones, veggies and organ meat, so it is definitely the easiest for converting. You can start with the 80/20 with rice to decrease likelihood of diarrhea detox issues and then after a few weeks switch over to the 80/20 without rice since grains are not a necessary part of the diet. There are many pre-packaged raw food diet brands. Do research at your local natural pet store or consult past issues of *The Whole Dog Journal*. Dexter's Deli in Del Mar has by far the biggest selection of raw food.

Start with ground bone or chicken necks depending on your comfort level and then graduate to larger ones depending on the size of your dog. Always include some plain muscle meat to keep balanced. You can routinely look at the feces to modify proportions. There may be too much calcium if the feces are consistently white- cut back on bones and add more muscle meat. If constipated, add more vegetables and muscle meat and/or cut back on bone. If stools are loose, add more bones and/or decrease the vegetable content. Go with trends in fecal patterns because it is normal to have some minor fluctuations day to day (as observed in coyote scat) depending on what is ingested. Remember you are balancing over time; meaty bones can be given at different times than the muscle meat/veggie mix. Gnawing bones are great on fasting days. If you choose to make your own raw food diet, some daily sample diets and amounts from *Natural Nutrition for Dogs and Cats* are listed below:

Note: Feed food close to room temperature for best digestion.

10 lbs body weight

- 1) Raw meat: $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup
- 2) Raw bone: 1 – 2 chicken necks
- 3) Veggies: $\frac{1}{2}$ - 1 Tbsp. pulped (chopped and blended w/ small amt. of water)
- 4) Kelp/alfalfa: $\frac{1}{2}$ - 1 tsp.
- 5) Cod Liver Oil: $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp.
- 6) EFA's (flax seed oil): $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp.

50 lbs body weight

- 1) Raw meat: $\frac{3}{4}$ - 1 cup
- 2) Raw bone: 1 turkey neck or 6 chicken necks
- 3) Veggies: 3 Tbsp. pulped (chopped and blended w/ small amt. of water)
- 4) Kelp/alfalfa: 2 tsp.
- 5) Cod Liver Oil: 1 tsp.
- 6) EFA's (flax seed oil): 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp.

100 lbs body weight

- 1) Raw meat: 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ - 2 cups
- 2) Raw bone: 2 - 3 turkey necks
- 3) Veggies: $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ Cup, pulped (chopped and blended w/ small amt. of water)
- 4) Kelp/alfalfa: 1 Tbsp.
- 5) Cod Liver Oil: 2 tsp.
- 6) EFA's (flax seed oil): 2 tsp.