

Creating Healthy Pets through Nutrition

With so many brands of pet food to choose from, most of us have forgotten about real food. Should we be feeding our pets “people” food? Of course! Feeding your pet **real food** is simply what Mother Nature intended our four legged friends to eat. In fact, commercial pet food has only been in existence for about 75-100 yrs. Think about it like this: how would we feel if the only thing we ate every day of our entire lives was fortified cereal or fast food? We wouldn't be very healthy, and this is why most of our pets aren't healthy either. With each passing year, we see more and more diseases in our pets such as allergies, immune-mediated diseases, cancer, and endocrine problems. Why are we doing this to our pets? Advertising has us believe that the only choice we have in feeding our pets is which brand. There is nothing live, or whole, and there is a lot missing. “Complete and balanced for all life stages” as stated on most bags/cans has very limited clinical testing trials for that claim. What were our pets fed before packaged kibble? Real food and table scraps! We have to remember however, that table scraps back then consisted of a lot of fresh raw food from the kitchen, not the processed convenience foods of today's fast paced lifestyle. Table scraps really got a bad name at veterinary clinics when people started feeding cooked bones and fat trimmings, which are not digestible and very dangerous to our pets.

What is the “raw food diet?”

The raw food diet is based on what dogs and cats eat in the wild. Although our pets have been domesticated for thousands of years, their physiological needs are still the same as that of wolves and lions. They have a short GI transit time and a high hydrochloric acid content in their stomach. They are evolutionarily designed to be digesting and assimilating raw foods. These are the building blocks for their immune system and for continual repair and rebuilding of their tissues, as well as for organ regeneration. When talking about raw foods, I am referring to raw meat and raw bones and pulped/grated raw vegetables. Commercial pet food has only been in existence for a very short period of time when you compare it to an evolutionary time line and an animal's internal body design has not changed. When did you ever see a wild animal eating oatmeal, shucking corn, or cooking rice? Their intestinal tract is designed to function as a carnivore – grains should not be a key component of their diet. All commercial pet food contains moderate to high grain content as fillers. The details of the pet food industry and questionable contents in pet food are another story. Let's just say that many of the preservatives, additives, and by-products used are know carcinogens. The ‘natural diets’ are still over-cooked and over-processed even if they are using decent raw ingredients and only natural preservatives. Cooking food completely denatures the protein structure and kills all natural enzymes found in the food. Kibble is also sprayed with a fat-digest after it comes out of the extruder to give it palatability and that addictive quality.

When examining their gastrointestinal system, both cats and dogs should be classified as carnivores. Historically dogs have been considered omnivores because of their scavenger hunting adaptations, but cats are 100% true carnivores. In nature, both dogs and cats usually first consume the internal organs and entrails (intestinal tract) as well as the pre-digested vegetation, contained therein. They then move on to the muscle meat, and finally the bones until most of the entire carcass is consumed. Usually *Salmonella* and *E. coli* are

not an issue for our companions because of their gastrointestinal system design. Exposure is dose dependent and as long as feeding fresh meat, it is not an issue. After all, dogs lick their rear-ends daily, and dig up and chew on bones buried for indefinite periods, as well as indiscriminately eat other animal feces. Cats are typically too finicky to ever eat something spoiled. A few isolated cases of bacterial enteritis have been seen, but it usually involves severely debilitated animals that ingested an unfit meat supply. Risk is minimal; I have never seen a case and reports are extremely rare. There is also minimal risk to feeding raw bones. As long as they are raw, bones are soft, pliable, and digestible. (However, avoid fish bones.) Cooking bones completely changes their molecular structure, making them hard and brittle and a true danger to our pets.

Never feed cooked bones or cooked fat! Raw bones are an excellent source of absorbable calcium and phosphorus, and the cartilage is great source of glucosamine and chondroitin for joint health. The fat left on the bone is a good source of energy and the marrow provides many necessary nutrients. Our companions love bones! Owners love them too because gnawing bones can keep them busy for hours, and meaty bones help clean their teeth. They should be given gnawing bones on occasion – soup bones and marrow bones (the butcher can slice them longitudinal or in cross-section depending on the size of the dog). Meaty bones should be a daily part of the diet – chicken necks and turkey necks, as well as chicken backs, wings, and drumsticks and even beef ribs or lamb bones. All of this can be found at your local supermarket or butcher (you may have to do some investigating) or see Wright's Poultry listing below. Of course, hormone and antibiotic-free meats are preferred.

Health Benefits:

Health benefits of the raw food diet are endless, and often times can be noticed within days. I emphasize that I have never seen these benefits with any commercial pet food nor any homemade cooked diet or diets with moderate to high grain content. In the beginning you'll observe a softer, shinier coat that smells better, and bright, happy eyes. Other common ailments that often disappear include skin irritations, bad breath, digestive problems, lethargy, and suppressed appetite. Feeding real food allows their body to find balance, creating a state of homeostasis. This means all systems are functioning at an optimal level creating stronger immune systems, and therefore much less opportunity for disease. For example, animals' digestive systems produce more acid to help breakdown the protein in meat. Think about it: dogs and cats in the wild don't have to get dentals because they usually don't have tartar! I have seen tartar literally fall off the teeth after converting to the raw food diet. Whenever a question arises, simply look to mother nature to find the answer. Cats in the wild and those on a raw food diet very rarely drink water. This is because they get most of their moisture from their prey. Most cats however are plagued with kidney disease and urinary tract disease from years of trying to process dry kibble.

We see phenomenal changes in cats with a history of urinary tract problems or kidney disease when switched to the raw food diet. Hyperthyroidism was never identified in cats prior to commercial pet foods. Also more than 80% of the food allergy/intolerance cases I see resolve when converted to a raw diet. Meat proteins are less reactive in their more highly digestible raw form. Grains are typically the most highly reactive, and this is the key component of almost all commercial foods.

How to get started:

When should you start? When you are convinced of the health benefits, and that they outweigh any possible risks! I don't want you to do anything you can't do with LOVE AND CONFIDENCE. Use the resources listed to get more educated and then make an informed decision. It's never too late to start eating healthy, nor is it ever too early. However, we must remember that most of our pets were fed the same thing every day of their lives prior. This is why people so often believe that changing their food is a bad idea. Introducing any change could possibly upset their systems, so take it one day at a time. See other handouts for more converting information. If you have an animal with an active health challenge, a holistic consultation prior to converting is advisable for organ system and immune support. For apparently healthy animals, start by mixing about 25% of the raw food diet in with 75% of their present food. If on the second day there are no digestive reactions such as vomiting or loose stools, try mixing 30% raw food to 70% of their present diet. Follow this regime over a 5-7 day period until eventually they are on raw food 100%. In addition, while converting and for the first few months, add digestive enzymes to the food because they have been missing from the system for so long. Many argue it is a good lifelong supplement for overall better digestion and absorption and health. **Prozyme** is a high quality, readily available brand of digestive enzymes. If you have problems or questions regarding converting to a raw food diet than seek holistic care with a veterinarian who routinely recommends the raw food diet. There are some cases where the pet just needs additional liver or immune support before conversion can be successful. This is especially true of immune-mediated or cancer cases. Immuno-suppressive drugs and a low vital force may cause a decreased tolerance to the bacteria in raw meats. A homemade cooked diet may be in order in those cases until the immune system is supported. In all cases, expect some level of detoxification when switching to raw food. Typical detoxification signs include soft stools or mild diarrhea with mucus, eye discharge, and some increased itching. As toxins are liberated from the liver, sometimes an aggravation of old symptom patterns can occur. This is a sign of deeper healing taking place but we want to avoid any severe reactions or a "healing crisis." If symptoms are severe or persist, contact our office or a holistic veterinarian who is a raw food diet advocate.

Feed with love and confidence

The raw food is the best for health and vitality for our companion pets. However, if you don't feel comfortable with the raw food diet, I implore you to research it some more. (There are plenty of books, websites, and even email list serves). However, until you are comfortable you can home cook and follow the same general guidelines outlined in my other handouts or research recipes. If that is not an option because cooking is very time consuming, then at the very least feed a high quality commercial 'natural diet'. Learn how to read labels. Some better brands are: Wellness5, Active Life, Spot's Stew, Eagle Pack, Neura, Innova, Avo-Derm, Wysong, Precise, Pet guard, Pinnacle, Natural Balance, California Natural, Felidae/Canidae, etc.... Please contact Whole Dog/Cat Journal for previous articles regarding their top picks and why.

At the very least – Never feed semi-moist foods or generics, and try to feed preservative-free. Avoid feeding all meat diet or all meat & grain diet for an extended period - it is severely deficient in many essential nutrients.

***All homemade and raw diets need balancing!* For balancing raw food diets see my other handouts for details! The goal is balancing over time – we sure don't balance each meal in our diet. This isn't rocket science, just common sense.**

The best pro-active approach is to add quality essential fatty acids and a vitamin-mineral supplement to all diets, human and animal!

REMEMBER - ALL TREATS SHOULD BE NATURAL & PRESERVATIVE-FREE!

RESOURCES:
Natural Pet Stores

Dexter's Deli (858) 792-3707
1229 Camino Del Mar
Del Mar 92014

Fortunately for those of us living in Southern California, we have the Original Health Food Store for Dogs and Cats! At Dexter's you can find the best selection of high quality, already prepared raw food, as well as an array of healthy treats. A trip to Dexter's is highly recommended- they have great resource material also. Not only is it a fun place for you and your companion to visit, but it's also conveniently located just down the street from dog beach in Del Mar. Make a day out of it and bring your pooch, too! The staff at Dexter's will help re-educate you on proper nutrition for your pets, and offer helpful suggestions on ways to get started.

Four Feet and Feathers (760) 480-0858 ***1835 S. Centre City Parkway #G*** 92025

Another great pet store and groom shop that offers a holistic assortment of goodies in **Escondido**. Has some prepackaged raw food available, as well as natural diets.

Chauncey's Pet Pantry (619) 222-1986 ***4051 Voltaire St.*** ***San Diego 92107***

Newer healthy pet store in Ocean Beach that is also trying to educate owners about the benefits of raw food. Great selection of prepackaged raw food and some other natural diets.

Molly's Gourmutt Bakery (858) 679-1967 ***14845 Pomerado Rd.*** ***Poway 92064***

Another great little pet store that specializes in wonderful homemade natural baked treats and has an assortment of natural foods and some prepackaged raw food. Remember that most baked treats are made with grains, which I do not recommend in great quantity. Please use baked treats with moderation.

Wright's Poultry (619) 422-6145 ***1043 Broadway*** ***Chula Vista 91911***

Have the best quality and prices on hormone and antibiotic-free poultry. This facility makes feeding raw food convenient and affordable for all sizes - this is where I do all my meat shopping. The best source for chicken necks and turkey necks by far. They are now making 3 kinds of fresh ground raw pet foods: 1) ground chicken necks and backs – have high skin (fat) and bone content therefore limit the amount given if your pet is overweight. This should always be combined with regular muscle meat for balancing. 2) **Ground 80/20 mix** – 80% ground chicken (necks, backs, and leg quarters with high muscle meat content),

some organ meat, and 20% mixed veggies. GREAT FOR CONVERTING to a raw food diet and for picky eaters. Their quality of meat is very high and I have had reports of many pets refusing other raw food and readily “scarfing” Wright’s meats. This is what my furry family eats with some variety and rotation.

Large breed puppies and geriatric animals should have additional pulped veggies added to the diet. 3) Ground 80/20 mix in easy to feed sausage links. Dogs love to chew on these frozen treats.

Books (top two to get started):

Natural Nutrition for Dogs and Cats by Kymythy Schultze.

This helpful little paperback book is a must. It’s beautifully written, and very easy to understand: an A-Z on feeding the raw diet, philosophy and ‘how to’ instruction. Available at most bookstores, as well as at Dexter’s Deli and Four Feet and Feathers.

The Nature of Animal Healing by Martin Goldstein

This is a fantastic first book for your holistic veterinary inquiries. The chapter on “The Dubious Legacy of Vaccines” and related issues is a must read.

Journals:

The Whole Dog/Cat Journal (800) 829-9165

An invaluable resource, contains a wealth of information- now also available online. I recommend all my clients subscribe. No paid advertising. Every issue has an article by a holistic veterinarian. Consumer reports for toys, treats, food (raw food diet reviews), training tools, equipment, etc.

Price-Pottenger Nutrition Foundation (619) 462-7600

The Health and Healing Journal. A great human and animal nutrition resource.

Websites:

Search [www.GOOGLE.com](http://www.google.com) for “pets and raw food” or “BARF” (biologically appropriate raw food)

<http://www.shirleys-wellness-cafe.com/>

<http://www.thehealthyhound.com/>

<http://www.patmckay.com/>

<http://www.puppyworks.com/> (Kymythy Schultze’s Web site)

<http://www.felinefuture.com/>

<http://www.sis.pitt.edu/~jenna/barfdanes/>

<http://www.dextersdeli.com/>

ATTENTION:

Do not leave raw meat products sitting at room temperature for long periods.

Do not keep raw meat products in the refrigerator for more than a few days.

Wash all surfaces & hands thoroughly that come in contact with raw meat.

Buy meat products from reputable sources and make sure it is fresh.