



Chelsea Animal Hospital Inc.

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Alternatively Speaking: Raw Foods Dr. Anne Carroll, DVM, CVA

If you ask ten veterinarians their opinion on the ideal nutrition for a dog you'll probably get 12 different answers. And when you bring the topic of raw feeding into the mix the debate gets even more skewed. This isn't going to be a scientific paper; rather I want to share my experience with my pets and patients over the past 17 years practicing holistic veterinary medicine. Let's start with my own dog, who if left to her own devices would go out into the backyard and eat a carcass that she found, some chicken poop and some grass. Although I find it hard to appreciate her less than discerning palette, I understand that she is merely responding to what her body tells her that she needs.

The domesticated dog's metabolic and digestive systems are still basically the same as their wolf ancestors. Their teeth are designed for grabbing and shredding. They do not have flat molars to chew thoroughly and grind up grains. Their stomachs and digestive enzymes are designed to digest big hunks of what was swallowed quickly to prevent the rest of the pack from eating it. This includes meat and bones and other carcass parts, not the finely processed carbohydrates found in today's engineered pet foods.

Processing degrades the nutrients found in fresh food, and even fresh vegetarian ingredients can't provide all the nutrients a carnivorous dog needs, so heavy use of science is required to balance dry dog food. But processed food and synthetic vitamin additives just can't compete with the nutritional value of whole fresh foods. This is especially true when your processed food contains 2 – 4 times the amount of carbohydrates that your species would naturally eat. (And let us not forget our carnivore cat friends who in the wild would never have bread with their meal.) This understanding by pet owners, and the emerging evidence equating processed, high-carb food with illness, is making raw diets an increasingly popular choice.

In general, dogs are just as susceptible as people to the inflammation caused by a high glycemic diet, and for dogs that are sensitive to those inflammatory effects, a raw diet can be almost miraculous in curing their chronic health issues. In my patients that have converted to raw feeding I have seen skin allergies, endocrine problems, digestive issues and even

chronic obesity addressed with largely diet alone. In spite of these positive results, there remains controversy over raw feeding. There are still those that believe that engineered food is better food. But far and away the biggest issue is the fear of bacterial exposure. The answer for this is common sense. If you cook your own raw meat than you already have the knowledge to handle your pet's food safely. Given the countless dogs on raw diets globally, if they were spreading harmful bacteria through their homes we would be seeing cases of people getting sick all the time. With that said however, I would still evaluate whether it is a good idea to feed raw food in a home with very young or immunologically challenged family members.

Just as raw feeding is not for every home, a raw diet is not perfect for every pet, and just giving your pet raw meat is not raw feeding. A dog's diet still needs to be balanced with all of the necessary vitamins and minerals their body needs. It requires a healthy and strong digestive system to break those materials down and some dogs, especially the young and elderly, may need the pre-digestion offered by cooking the food first. This is where the assistance of your veterinarian is crucial in developing the balanced diet that is specific to your pet's needs.

For those who chose raw feeding, it is not hard to do it right. There are many commercial products available which range from fresh fortified food in the refrigerator case or freezer, to complete dehydrated meals that you simply add water to. If you are more of a do-it-yourselfer, there are also base mixes that can be added to raw ingredients to make a balanced meal. Also, raw food does not need to be the entire meal, it can be a part of a diet that includes more traditional dry and canned foods. Even a small addition can have health benefits. At first glance these options may seem more expensive, but in reality can be comparably priced to other premium pet foods, and without all of the empty carbs filling your pet's bowl they will typically eat a smaller portion. Most importantly, their shiny coat and new found health may save you the expense of treating their chronic problems. And one last benefit we can all get behind - without all the fiber and fillers, there is less in the pooper-scooper at the end of the day.

Dr. Anne Carroll is owner of the Chelsea Animal Hospital where she practices both conventional medicine and surgery as well as several alternative modalities including traditional Chinese acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine. Her associate Dr. Betty Jo Black brings classical homeopathy to the practice. For more information on alternative veterinary medicine visit there website at www.chelseaanimalhospital.com