

ALL ABOUT RAW FOOD

Our animal companions are natural hunters and carnivores; just look at their ancestry. The dog at your feet (or on your sofa) has evolved from the wolf, and its digestive system is virtually the same despite thousands of years of domestication. They have very short intestinal tracts geared to the consumption and digestion of raw foods. Dogs are considered "omnivores" as they eat a variety of grasses, berries and vegetables in addition to prey. The cat on your lap is a true or "obligate" carnivore (meat only diet) and is specially designed by nature to hunt small rodents and birds. Her digestive tract, as well, is intended to assimilate raw meat best.

The Benefits of Raw

Raw food diets have been shown to help the body deal with many common ailments such as flea infestations, hot spots, continual shedding, poor dental & gum health, allergies, gastro-intestinal problems such as Inflammatory Bowel Disease, immune disorders and degenerative diseases. Diet is the foundation of health. The fresher the diet, the more nutrients are available for the animal's system to utilize in building immunity, healing from illness and warding off disease.

Raw diets have been common practice in European countries for decades, especially Germany, where it is commonly recommended by veterinarians. The fear of feeding raw meat in this country seems to stem from a fear of salmonella, e. coli and parasites. In over 10 years of feeding raw food and seeing countless animals on raw food diets, salmonella and e. coli have not been seen to be a problem. (Remember, their digestive systems are designed to accommodate raw meat.) Parasites could be contracted through eating wild, whole prey or game meats, but is much less likely from properly handled human grade meats. Infection is more likely to occur through ingestion of feces or soil, or poorly handled meat.

The actual research cited in the US in support of a raw diet is rather convincing. A long term study conducted by Francis M. Pottenger, Jr., M.D. between 1932 to 1942 was initiated a bit by accident. Dr. Pottenger kept cats as laboratory animals for experiments in human health. As his research and cat population grew, he resorted to feeding them raw meat scraps from a local packing plant instead of cooked kitchen leftovers. Within a few months, he noticed distinct improvements in the cats eating raw meat. This prompted Dr. Pottenger to undertake a whole new experiment: he segregated cats into different groups — some of which were fed a cooked meat diet and others who received a raw meat diet. All observations were noted in great detail over many generations of cats. At the end of the study Dr. Pottenger concluded that cats fed a heat processed diet were deficient and suffered from innumerable ailments ranging from low immunity, irritability, and allergies; to skeletal deformation, organ malfunction, poor development during kittenhood, low birth rate, birth defects, infertility, and shortened lifespan. (If you wish to learn more about the Pottenger study, you can purchase a summary of the study as book or video from the Price-Pottenger Nutrition Foundation.)

Some exceptions to "raw is better" are the older, weaker animal who may not tolerate raw food, or animals with certain gastro-intestinal problems where the gut has to be restored to a healthier state using herbs and/or supplements. In these cases, a home prepared, cooked diet the best substitute for a raw food diet.

Raw Food Diets

Ideally, our companions would eat an all raw diet that includes some viscera and bones. Generally, the more raw food you can include in your companion's diet, the better — but some is better than none. Some guardians choose to feed their companions a ½ raw and ½ dry (dehydrated or kibble) diet; either mixing the two or feeding raw for one meal each day and

dry or cooked for the other. It does not have to be complicated — you can feed raw chicken and turkey necks and chicken backs as part or all of a meal several times a week. Raw poultry bones do not splinter, they crunch. This is a great way to clean teeth, exercise chewing muscles, and provide a natural source of balanced calcium and phosphorus, as well. As always, naturally raised, hormone and antibiotic free or organic meat is best.

When introducing raw bones to dogs they may experience diarrhea, constipation, or both as their systems adjust. Remember to go slowly and feed small amounts at first. When beginning the introduction of raw bones, it may be helpful to crush them with a hammer or in a meat grinder until your dog becomes fully transitioned to a raw diet. For cats bones should always be ground. If your companion has a delicate digestive system, consider grinding meat and bones through a 1/4 inch blade before feeding. Ground bones do not have the same teeth cleaning benefits as whole bones, however. You may also see similar symptoms as your companion's system goes through a detoxification process during the transition to a healthier diet. Again, the key is to go slowly and persevere. In the long run, your companion's increased health and vitality will be the ultimate reward.

Only Natural Pet Store offers a wide range of commercial frozen raw foods that are available either in a formula of raw meat, grains, and fresh vegetables designed to provide complete nutrition, or as pure raw meat designed to be added as a supplement to other types of food. We also offer vegetable and/or grain based mixes by Sojos and Honest Kitchen — Preference that are designed to be added to raw or cooked meat. You simply re-hydrate the mixture and add the meat. The Honest Kitchen Verve Formula can be used this way as well.

Obvious precautions should be taken when feeding raw meat — wash hands thoroughly after handling the raw meat. Thaw

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meat in the refrigerator, not sitting on the counter at room temperature. Warm water can be used to thaw or warm the food after it has been mostly thawed in the refrigerator. Do not microwave raw food as the live enzymes are damaged and bones will harden even in just 30 seconds of micro waving. We do recommend avoiding pork as it has been shown to be a source of Trichinella. If you are concerned about bacteria, you can rinse it with several drops of food grade hydrogen peroxide in a sink of water or ½ teaspoon liquid grapefruit seed extract in a sink of water to help kill bacteria on the surface.

Transitioning to Raw Food

It is best to introduce raw food slowly into your companion's diet over the course of two weeks. If your companion is used to

having food available throughout the day, first transition him or her to eating only once or twice per day for dogs, and two to three times per day for cats before beginning the transition to raw food. Consider transitioning fully to raw in the beginning even if you ultimately intend to feed a mix of raw and cooked or dry. This will give your companion's digestive system the optimal environment for generating healthy enzymes and flora. Start with 1 teaspoon for small dogs and cats and 1 tablespoon for larger dogs for three days or so. Then increase to 2 teaspoons or tablespoons for several days, decreasing the amount of regular food by ¼ to ½ in general proportion to the raw. Work up to replacing at least ½ the normal diet for several days. Finally replace one full meal with raw for a day or two, then fully transition to raw.

We (Animal Healing Center in Redmond, WA) recommend supplementing with digestive enzymes and probiotics for at least the first two weeks to help your companion's natural digestive processes kick back in after eating cooked foods for so long. If your animal is resistant to the raw at first, you may want to use a bit of canned food to entice them. Cats, in particular, can be resistant to a change in diet. They tend to fixate on whatever food they are weaned onto and will resist switching to a healthier diet. We have found that grinding or shredding their favorite treat on top of the food can help. Halo's Liv-A-Littles or Whole Life Dehydrated Meat Treats work well for this. Cats will most likely take some persistence on your part, but it is well worth it for the health of your companion.



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