

# A VETERINARIAN'S JOURNEY FROM KIBBLE TO RAW

Veterinary school doesn't teach students about nutrition, so vets are on their own when it comes to figuring out the hazards of kibble.



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It seems there's no end to the controversy over what to feed your dog. The stream of constantly changing information is endless, often leading to much confusion. I'm writing this article to help shed some light on this confusing topic, basing it on my 30-plus years as a practicing veterinarian and recommending a large variety of different diet types for my patients.

I started out like all veterinarians, trained to recommend the popular brands like Hills or Purina. We fed sick pets based on the recommendations of the companies producing the so-called prescription diets sold through veterinarians. There was no real education in nutrition; just training on which products to use, and for which conditions.

## KIBBLE CAUSES DISEASE

As I moved forward in my career, I began to see disturbing trends in the increase of

many disease conditions: itchy skin, diarrhea, pancreatitis, autoimmune disease, and cancer. I saw magnificent advances in all areas of veterinary medicine, but nothing changed in the nutritional recommendations. As I saw pets getting sicker and dying younger, I asked myself if we needed to be offering different nutritional options for our patients.

Since there's little availability for true nutritional education in the veterinary field, I struck out on my own to learn more. The studies supporting the efficacy of standard veterinary diets are typically performed or funded by the companies making the foods, so there's clearly a potential conflict of interest that makes the resulting information suspect.

I began to read pet food labels and look at the ingredients. I started to ask myself if ingredients like rice, barley, and beet pulp were really appropriate foods for a carnivore. (What exactly is beet pulp anyway?) Oils sourced from

soybeans, corn and fish are unstable at the high temperatures used to process commercial diets. This not only causes loss of nutrients, but can, in fact make them toxic. Then there is the long list of synthetic vitamins used to "balance" the diet. The problem with synthetic nutrients is that we have no idea how they're affecting the body, and if they are even bioavailable. Once we start micro-managing nutrients, we run the risk of causing imbalances. That's what happened with the recent recalls by Hills due to toxic vitamin D levels.

## LOOK AT YOUR DOG'S TEETH

I also looked at what dogs are best equipped to be eating and digesting. A dog's dentition is that of a carnivore: canine teeth to catch prey, incisors to shear the meat from a carcass, and powerful jaw muscles and back teeth to crush the food before swallowing. Dogs have a



high acid content in their stomachs. This low pH starts the digestive process and eliminates pathogenic organisms dogs may eat. Their digestive tract is relatively short, so healthy dogs digest food in a few hours. Dogs and cats are not digestively equipped to break down plant material, including grains and vegetables.

Compare this to herbivores like horses or cows. They have large grinding teeth that begin to macerate the plant material; then part of their digestive tract is used for fermentation, which completes the digestion of the plant material thanks to the bacteria present there. Carnivores don't have this mechanism.

## HOW PLANTS CAUSE INFLAMMATION

So what happens when a carnivore eats a plant-based diet? The answer, in a nutshell, is inflammation.

How does this happen?

Carbohydrates in the form of processed grains, legumes, potatoes, and other vegetables raise the blood glucose level, and subsequently the insulin level. Insulin is a hormone released to deal with nutritional excesses such as high blood glucose. It moves the excess glucose into the liver and muscle tissue, where it's stored as glycogen for later use. But this storage mechanism has a limited capacity. Once it's full, the excess gets stored as body fat. When the consumption of glucose continues, it leads to insulin resistance as the cells become desensitized to the constantly elevated level in the blood. The blood sugar then stays elevated, causing damage to the tissues, and leading to chronic inflammation.

It's not just the metabolic effects of carbohydrates on the body; there's also a profound risk of toxic exposure.

Many crops are sprayed with glyphosate (the main ingredient in Roundup), and

some grains are sprayed after harvest to help dry them more rapidly. Wheat, corn, and soy are also highly genetically modified (GMO), which can have devastating effects on the gut microbiome.

Legumes like peas, lentils and beans accumulate glyphosate if sprayed while growing, and pass the toxicity along when eaten. This means that the *grain-free* varieties of kibble are not any safer.

## FEED A FRESH DIET

To avoid these risks I recommend feeding a fresh, whole food, ideally raw diet. Why is this better?

Whole food provides nutrition the way it's meant to be eaten. Nutrients from fresh, whole foods are not altered by processing, so the body can recognize and assimilate them properly. The nutrients in whole foods work synergistically in the body. Using the chemical equivalents doesn't have the same beneficial effect.

Not all raw diets are created equal, and I've seen some that aren't nutritionally balanced. It's a good idea to seek the advice of a professional trained in feeding raw food. Many raw diets still add in additional produce or synthetic supplements to make up for deficiencies. I recommend providing complete nutrition through proper proportioning and rotation of ingredients.

## IS RAW RISKY?

Now, let's address what seems to be the biggest controversy about raw feeding: safety. Raw feeding has been vilified in veterinary medicine as a cause of all sorts of diseases, including vomiting, diarrhea, pancreatitis, allergies, and most recently, dilated cardiomyopathy. These claims almost always have no basis whatsoever.

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How is it that a profession that preaches the importance of “evidence-based” medicine makes claims against raw feeding with no evidence to back it up? This is true hypocrisy! The truth is that raw feeding can be an appropriate diet for

any dog, with some slight modifications based on individual needs.

Feeding raw is perfectly safe with a bit of proper handling and common sense. This means you wash your hands after feeding your pet; don't leave the food set out at room temperature for extended periods of time; wash dishes and utensils after your pet eats; and don't leave food thawed in the refrigerator for more than 72 hours. That's it – and raw feeding can be perfectly safe as long as the food is well-sourced. Sourcing refers to the way the food animals are raised and how the products are processed, stored, and distributed.

## RECALLS

What if a manufacturer does a recall? Raw pet food companies are highly scrutinized by the FDA; in fact, there is zero tolerance for bacteria in pet food. Compare this to grocery store meats, which are allowed higher bacteria content than raw pet food (in case you think it's safer to make your own raw food)..

When you hear about a recall from a raw dog food manufacturer because the FDA found bacteria in their products, it's typically due to a random check at a production facility, with no evidence of the food causing illness in pets. Some manufacturers will do the recall just to be sure that their products are safe. The FDA typically won't disclose the amount or strain of the bacteria found, so there's no proof that it's even pathogenic. This also prevents the manufacturer from effectively tracing the origin of the bacteria.

Our world isn't meant to be sterile, and there are actually many beneficial bacteria that are essential to good health. The key is balance, and in a healthy organism, the beneficial bugs will far outnumber those

that can cause disease. Remember the high acid content in the carnivore stomach I mentioned earlier? This will actually destroy any unwanted bacteria that the dog eats. Have you ever seen your dog eat poop? Or pick up who-knows-what on a walk and eat it before you can stop him? How much bacteria is your dog getting here? Do you see your dog get violently ill after doing this? OF COURSE NOT!!! And why? Because a healthy pet with all of the necessary beneficial microbes will be able to eliminate any pathogenic bacteria. Dogs are natural scavengers, and should literally be able to eat road kill and remain healthy.

I've summarized the risks and benefits of feeding raw vs kibble on the next page.

Raw food may be more expensive in the short term, but feeding it will drastically reduce your vet bills in the future due to the increased health benefits. It is literally *pay now or pay later* when it comes to feeding your pet the best diet possible.

If you think you can't afford to feed raw, can you afford to treat a chronic disease such as cancer, in terms of both the financial and emotional toll it will take? I believe that most of us (myself included) can rearrange our budget when we think something is important enough to devote more resources to.

Dogs may appear to do fine on kibble in the short term, but I can guarantee you that there is a disease of inflammation brewing and it's only a matter of time until it surfaces.

Nothing is more important than feeding your pet a proper diet. No supplement, regardless of the claims, will substitute for an inferior diet. Feeding your dog right will be best thing you can ever do for your best friend. 🐾



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# RISKS AND BENEFITS OF RAW VS KIBBLE

## KIBBLE

### Risks

- ❌ Creates inflammation leading to chronic diseases such as itchy skin, diarrhea, pancreatitis, and cancer
- ❌ Grains and legumes can harm the gut lining, preventing proper digestion and causing malnourishment
- ❌ GMO ingredients alter the function of a healthy microbiome, leading to immune system dysfunction
- ❌ Pesticides and herbicides cause organ toxicity and can damage the gut microbiome and intestinal lining, causing improper digestion and leaky gut
- ❌ Oils and fats become rancid due to over-processing and are toxic to the body; they may also be GMO
- ❌ Synthetic vitamins and minerals may not be bioavailable to pets, causing nutritional imbalances

### Benefits

- ✅ Less expensive in the short term
- ✅ More convenient



## RAW

### Risks

- ❌ Requires proper handling and washing dishes and utensils afterwards
- ❌ More expensive in the short term

### Benefits

- ✅ Provides balanced nutrition in the way nature intended
- ✅ Species-appropriate for a carnivore
- ✅ Can be varied to meet individual needs
- ✅ Supports optimal function of the immune system
- ✅ Ingredients naturally support joint and musculoskeletal health
- ✅ Reduces the need for supplementation
- ✅ Prevents inflammation, which prevents skin and digestive disease, as well as autoimmune conditions and cancer

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