

Raw Feeding

Taken from von Tighe Haus German Shepherds (unlimitedGSD.com) Written by Anne Moore

Why?

There are many, many reasons to feed your dog a species-appropriate diet! Foremost among them, the pet food recalls of the past couple of years! Add the fact that most commercial dog kibbles are loaded with grains, fillers, and preservatives, and the argument is pretty convincing!

People who argue that dogs are omnivores – many veterinarians included – should read any of the works by the world's foremost expert on wolves, Dr. L. David Mech. Here is a quote from one of his books, on the subject: Dogs are carnivores.

"Those who insist dogs did not descend from wolves must disprove the litany of scientific evidence that concludes wolves are the ancestors of dogs. And, as we have already established, the wolf is a carnivore. Since a dog's internal physiology does not differ from a wolf, dogs have the same physiological and nutritional needs as those carnivorous predators, which, remember, "need to ingest all the major parts of their herbivorous prey, except the plants in the digestive system" to "grow and maintain their own bodies"

(Mech, Dr. L.D. 2003. Wolves: Behavior, Ecology, and Conservation.)."

www.thewhole.dog.org/artcarnivores.html

With those words, Dr. Mech tells us what we need to know about feeding our dogs. Dogs are wolves, domesticated; in fact, their scientific designation is *Canis Lupus Familiaris*... house wolves. Therefore, it makes total sense to feed them as such. It is my opinion that the further we stray from nature's model, the more we screw things up, and our dog's diet is high on that list!

Dogs are carnivores. Their teeth, their digestive system, their very physiology tells us so. As such, their nutritional needs are quite simple: lots of meat, small amounts of edible bone, small amounts of various organs. According to the Merck Veterinary Manual, dogs have *no* nutritional need for grains; and yet, most commercial dog foods (aka kibble) are full of exactly that – grains! Why? Because grains are cheap fillers, and they keep the stools firm. Kibble makers are happy, because they use less expensive ingredients, and pet owners are happy because Fritz's stools are consistently firm.

Meanwhile, veterinarians are also kept busy, as those commercial foods create all sorts of problems for Fritz, primary among them, periodontal disease and tartar on the teeth. Fritz would need regular dental care at home, and periodic teeth cleaning – under anesthesia – if fed commercial foods.

However, if Fritz is fed a species-appropriate raw diet – yes, you read that right – a RAW diet – the benefits are many. . . clean teeth, no doggy breath, no doggy odor, smaller stools, more energy, softer & plusher coats.

How Do I Start?

Buy a whole chicken at the store. Cut it in half, or quarters. Feed to your dog. It really is that simple. Some dogs understand immediately that this is food. Some need a little help. You can cut "ribbons" into the meat so your dog has something to grab onto, initially.

Stick with one protein, chicken in this example, for a week or two, giving your dog time to adjust to this new diet. After that time, add new protein slowly. Maybe a small amount of pork added to a chicken meal, gradually increasing the amount of the "new" protein over a few days until you are feeding an entire meal of the new meat.

Introduce other new meats the same way. Add tiny bits of organs, too. . . maybe the size of your thumbnail the first few times. Liver is essential to your dog's diet, and readily available, but other organs are important, too. You may have to ask your butcher/meat processor or friends who hunt for such things as spleen, pancreas, lungs, kidneys, etc.

Variety is important, but there's no "race" to add it; you have the rest of your dog's life to do that! Eventually, you'll want to add red meats such as pork, beef (heart is usually relatively inexpensive and available), etc. Venison, elk, bison, moose would be great additions to your dog's menu if you are able to get them. Mutton or lamb is wonderful, as is goat, turkey, and rabbit.

Eggs are also a good protein source, but feed to bowel tolerance; many dogs get loose stools quickly from too many eggs (and "too many" is a very individual thing).

Do I Start a Puppy the Same Way?

The easiest meat to start a puppy on is bone-in chicken breasts. The bone is easy, and there's a good meat-to-bone ratio. Once the puppy is consuming the entire breast, you can introduce variety. Puppies adapt to variety much more easily than adult dogs.

Feed a puppy as you would an adult dog – lots of meat, a little edible bone, small amounts of organs. It is simply not true that puppies need "more" of anything than adult dogs.

How Much Do I Feed?

A good starting point is 2-3% body weight fed daily. You can break this amount up into two daily feedings if you like, but many people choose to feed only once per day, in order to give their dogs larger, more complicated parts to eat. Eating is more than just nutrition when you're raw feeding – it also provides a physical work-out for jaws, neck, shoulders, and is mentally and physically challenging at its best.

If you are feeding two meals daily, you can also choose to feed a small meal or snack in the morning, for example, and a larger, more challenging meal at night.

For working or sport dogs, the percentage above may not provide enough nutrition to maintain healthy weight. The percentage is a guideline only; feed more if your dog is too thin, and feed less if he's getting pudgy.

Put your hands on your dog often. Run your hands down his ribcage; you should be able to easily feel his ribs. And, being able to see a last rib or two is actually a good thing! Lean is better than fat for lots of reasons!

What Supplements Do I Need to Add?

If you are giving your dog a variety of body parts of a variety of animals, he should need very little in the way of supplements.

Sometimes specific health conditions warrant the addition of supplements, but generally, the fewer the better, as long as your dog's diet is adequate. Many people add fish body oil or salmon oil. Recommended maintenance dosage is 1,000 mg per day per 20 lbs. of body weight, but therapeutic levels can be higher. If your dog's stools become loose, back off the amount of oil a bit.

NOTE: cod liver oil is not the same as fish body oil, and cod liver oil should be avoided.

I've Always Been Told NOT to Give My Dogs Bones! Bones Are Scary!

Does My Dog Really Need to Eat Bones?

Yes! Edible bone is an important building block in your dog's diet. They get calcium and other minerals from the bone. Edible bone varies from dog to dog, and varies throughout a dog's lifetime. All dogs can consume chicken bones, rabbit bones, many pork and lamb/mutton bones, and goat bones. Some dogs can eat some beef and harder bones, but generally, beef and large ungulate bones are not considered edible. You should avoid giving your dog the weight-bearing (leg) bones of large ungulates; these are not only very hard, but are teeth wreckers.

The advice to avoid giving bones to dogs is untrue, PROVIDED the bones are raw. COOKED bones splinter and can pierce intestines, trachea, etc. Appropriate raw bones are natural and fine to give to your dogs.

What if My Dog Gulps His Food?

That's how dogs eat – chomp, chomp, swallow; as soon as the piece is small enough (or the dog thinks it is!) to swallow, that's exactly what he'll do. The solution? Feed larger pieces. Think larger than your dog's head. The larger and more awkward the piece, the longer it will take your dog to eat it. But remember, dogs don't *chew* as humans do, so the crunch, crunch, swallow really is normal and acceptable.

Where Do I Get Raw Food for my Dog?

At first, you may find it easiest to simply go to a grocery store and buy meat. Watch sales flyers, and find out what day the store marks down its meat. But, as you become comfortable feeding this way, you will want to branch out and do some detective work to find cheaper sources. Talk to butchers and meat processors or packers; you may be able to order in bulk at good prices. You may also be able to purchase cheaply the parts they don't sell: pancreas, lungs, spleen, etc.) I recommend you go in person, rather than phoning; a personal relationship is valuable, and it's harder to say "no" in person.

Ask your friends, family, club members to give you old, freezer-burned meat (the nutrition remains, but taste – for humans—suffers in a freezer).

If there are Asian or ethnic markets nearby, many good deals on different types of meats and organs can be found there; watch for goat and lamb, particularly.

Look up breeders of rabbits, sheep, cattle; they may have culls or stillborns they can sell you cheaply, or they may just have better prices overall.

You can also try such internet sites as Craigslist or Freecycle. State that you home-prepare your dog's food, and see what happens.

Check the internet for co-ops or meat-buying groups near you. Check out:

<http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/CarnivoreFeed-Supplier/>

Talk to friends who hunt or fish and ask for dibs on parts they don't want, and the organs. Near the start of hunting season each fall, ask for the previous year's remains from their freezer. You can even contact taxidermists, who have no use for the meat.

What About De-Tox?

I've heard people claim that dogs switching to raw go through a period of detoxification, where they get diarrhea or vomit, but frankly, I think it's more that their systems need to adjust to raw.

My Dog Vomits Bones and Bile – Why is That?

New-to-raw dogs sometimes do this. Bile usually indicates that the dog's stomach anticipated food, and when none was forthcoming, the produced bile was expelled. Not a big deal.

Bone bits' vomit is simply a sign that the dog's system has not adjusted yet to the raw diet. Over time, this will decrease, and eventually, will not happen again.

What About Bones in my Dog's Stool?

This, too, indicates the dog's system is still adjusting to the raw diet. If you see blood in the stool, this indicates there was some abrasion as the bones went through the digestive process. As your dog's system adjusts, this will happen less and less. Veteran rawfed dogs do not have bone fragments in their stools.

What Consistency Should My Dog's Stools be on Raw Food?

We've been lead to believe that a dog's stool should be "consistently" small and hard. In reality, what the dog has eaten will determine what his stool looks like. Poultry will usually result in lighter colored stools, which often dry up and crumble within a day or two. Beef, pork, venison, etc. will result in very dark stools. Organs-only meals will produce very, very dark and often very soft stools.

If your dog is producing very hard stools that he has difficulty in passing, that indicates he needs less bones. If his stools are too often (runny), add more bone for a meal or two. Stool consistency usually is less of an issue for your dog than for you.

Loose stools, or true diarrhea – uncontrollable, liquid stools – are usually the result of "too much" – too much fat, too much food, or too much variety too quickly. In other words, operator error! The good news is that a raw diet can easily be tweaked to control such issues.

Can I Feed my Dog Eggs? What about the Shells?

Once a dog has adjusted to raw feeding, eggs are a good source of protein. Eggs can be fed to bowel tolerance; if your dog's stool gets loose, feed fewer eggs the next time. Some dogs will consume the shells, some will not. Shells are a good source of calcium, so if your dog will eat them, let him. Eggs are also potential entertainment for people – especially the first time you give them to your dog!

Can I Feed my Dog Half Kibble and Half Raw?

Some people successfully do this. There are claims that raw digests more quickly than kibble, but this has not been proven. What is wrong with this plan, frankly, is that kibble is poor nutrition.

What Treats Can I Give my Raw fed Dog?

There are wonderful recipes for homemade dog treats available on many websites. Treats form such a small percentage of a dog's diet that I don't worry about it. You can dehydrate raw meat to use as treats, use commercial products, or make your own. This is your dog, so find your own comfort level with treats.

What are the Best Books on Raw Feeding?

Few exist that will be helpful for those who believe that dogs are carnivores, and choose to feed them as such. The best are those by Dr. Tom Lonsdale: *Work Wonders: Feed Your Dog Raw Meaty Bones*, and *Raw Meaty Bones: Promote Health*. Both of these are available at Dogwise.com.

Fortunately, excellent information and advice are available on-line. My favorites are:

www.bluegrace.com

www.rawlearning.com

www.rawlearning.com/rawfaq.html

www.rawlearning.com/supplementmyths.html

www.rawlearning.com/premaderaw

Jane Anderson of Blue Grace Portuguese Water Dogs also maintains a plethora of e-mail lists that allow chat or discussion on more specific raw feeding questions: www.rawlearning.com/rawlists.html

These are often posted webpages that are species appropriate and Whole Prey model friendly:

www.rawfed.com/myths/intro.html

www.rawfed.com/myths/index.html

<http://rawfeddogs.net/>

<http://rawfeddogs.net/FAQlist>

<http://rawfeddogs.net/Recipes>

<http://rawfeddogs.net/Terms>

An excellent resource, with additional links is the Save Our Shepherds' rescue group from Tennessee. Their raw feeding info is available at: <http://www.saveourshepherds.org/raw.html>