

NUTRITION MADE EASY – RAW MEAT  
OR  
MOMMY, FLUFFY HAS GRISTLE STUCK BETWEEN HER TEETH

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“You want me to feed raw meat to my dog,” she exclaims, with a puzzled look on her face! Yes, I want you to feed a diet more like what nature had intended for your pet to eat.

Many times a day we recommend various supplements, and make suggestions to improve health, but absolutely the most important information we can give is about making life style changes, which includes modifying the diet, and getting more fresh air and exercise. There will be many future articles about diet for various conditions, and different types of pets. Today will give basic information to help you get started feeding a more natural diet for your dog or cat. It all starts with raw meat. The response from you will vary from interest to disgust. “I feed the best pet foods already”, so why should I change to raw meat”? “Doesn’t raw meat have E. coli or Salmonella bacteria in it? “Won’t my pet get sick?”

First, we need to understand some very basic functional anatomy. Your dog and cat, no matter what the breed are exactly like their ancestors. The function of the digestive system, and the way pets assimilate foodstuffs is exactly as a wolf or a cougar does it in the wild. It is easiest to make these changes with younger animals than it is with older or more infirm pets. A basic tenet of human nutrition is to eat less processed or preserved foods, and substitute fresher, organic, whole foods. It is the same with our pets. Humans are omnivores which means we do well on a variety of foods from the plant family and from meats. Dogs are very similar in that they can and do eat a variety of foods. They are omnivores as well (meat, bones, vegetables, grains). Dogs will also scavenge a whole array of edible and indigestible things. Cats on the other hand are true carnivores which means they must have a strict meat, and bone diet with just a bit of plant food. Their ancestors all did pretty well surviving by catching their own prey. In fact, many domestic cats still supplement or fully feed themselves by killing and eating wild prey. (I hate you meeses to pieces!) If we look historically at how our pets ate from the time they were first domesticated we will see that they originally obtained their own foods as whole prey, and they were supplemented with food scraps that we would share with them. These scraps originally were muscle and organ meats and bones, whatever was left over after we were through with the carcass. Over time that didn’t change all that much. Pets were pretty much left to themselves by catching their own prey, and scavenging or getting handouts from us that we shared with them or threw out after the butchering of our food animals. Occasionally they got eggs (or stole the hen), dairy products, grains, or vegetables as well. Dogs did well on more of a variety, and kitty still wanted and needed more animal based proteins. As more pet breeds were introduced, and human society moved from farms to city, it became easier and more convenient to purchase commercial

foods in bags or cans, put it in a bowl, and walk away. The average consumer could not, and still cannot evaluate pet foods by looking at labels. We depend on advertising, price, store displays, and recommendations from knowledgeable people to help make our pet food choices. There are more and more brands to choose from, as the commercial pet food industry gets larger, more complex, and more confusing each year.

We can never go back fully to that more simple life, but we can start to slowly add fresh, uncooked meat back to our pet's diet. The proteins and other nutrients in raw meat add factors back to the diet missing or removed by the cooking and processing of canned and kibbled foods.

Organic meat products are always the best ones to use, but they are more expensive, and harder to find in many stores. It is more important that the raw meat is available in the diet, than be concerned so much about whether it is organic or not. Buy organic when you can, and when you can't just make sure it is wholesome and fresh. We recommend turkey, beef, chicken, or lamb, and usually avoid raw pork, or fish. You can use ground meats or larger cuts and reduce them to bite size yourself. Always use the leanest meats to avoid excess fats. At first, just add a pinch or two to the regular food. It can be mashed up in canned food or tuna for finicky eaters, or just stirred into the regular meal. For very finicky eaters you can just add the liquid from the meat tray at first, and slowly build up to small pinches. Some pets, especially cats and small dogs can be very reticent to change to anything new. For these pets go ahead and cook the meat rare as you would for yourself, and you can even doctor it up with spices or garlic. The pet will think it is getting some of your table food, and you can even hand feed them. The idea is to do whatever it takes for your particular pet in introducing the new ingredient to the diet. As time goes by cook it less and less, till it is back to truly raw again.

When pets transition to the additions of raw meats they will often need enzymes and beneficial bacteria (probiotics) for a short time to help make their digestive systems ready to assimilate the new foods. Years of commercial cooked foods can leave the body quite depleted, and unable to handle real food, without a slow careful introduction and transition. If at first the pet experiences difficulty with digestion of meat, just back off a few days, try again, and most pets will transition much easier. It is like doing a new exercise that you know is good for you. At first you get real sore for a couple of days, and then you move on becoming much stronger.

The amounts of meat added daily will increase with time, and will depend on whether you desire to feed a fully raw diet, or just use it as an added supplement. There are many home-made recipes available in books and handouts from your holistic veterinarian. Dr. Pitcairn's "Natural Health for Dogs and Cats", 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition is one of our favorites.

If you feed meat without added calcium for very long, there will be a calcium deficiency. Ground bone, edible bone meal, or egg shell powder will need to be added to the diet. Finally, what about this E. coli and Salmonella bacteria thing? Yes, raw meat will have bacteria in it that can make people sick. It can also make a weakened, geriatric or immuno-suppressed pet sick as well. The human caretaker should practice their normal routine for hygiene during and after pet meal preparation, just as you would for yourselves. Wash and disinfect hands, utensils, and kitchen surfaces where the raw meat has been. The pet already has that ancestral protection mechanism of a highly acidic stomach acid which will keep normal pets entirely safe from any dangerous bacterial side effects.

So there you have it. Do some research, ask questions, and make slow changes. Your pet will be healthier for it, and you will improve the quality and quantity of their lives.