

# RAW DIET FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## WHAT IS A RAW DIET?

A raw diet is comprised of meat, organ, ground bone, and usually, some vegetable. It is put together in a variety of formats including tubes, containers, patties, and nuggets.

## WHY WOULD I WANT TO FEED A RAW DIET?

For the same reasons you eat fresh food every day. There are a number of reasons feeding a raw diet is beneficial. Food in its natural, uncooked, unprocessed state, is rich in all its naturally occurring vitamins, minerals, enzymes, etc. Think about how you would feel if you ate everything out of a box or a bag, never consuming a single whole food. That is how we've come to feed our animals. Even the best kibble foods cannot offer the same benefits of a whole food diet.

Moisture content is another benefit of the raw diet. The importance of moisture **in the food** cannot be understated. For cats, this is especially true. Cats are desert creatures. They originated there. It is not in most cats' natures to drink a lot of water, as most of the water they would have consumed came from their prey. When you feed a cat or dog a dry diet, most will never consume enough water to keep both themselves hydrated and to rehydrate this incredibly moisture-absent food. What this means is that many dogs and cats live their entire lives in a state of low-level dehydration. This can lead to kidney disease or renal failure later in life.

Another reason to feed a raw diet is that your dog or cat is a carnivore. Did you know the cat is the most carnivorous land mammal? It's true! Cats are obligate carnivores. This means that 95% of their nutrition should come from a meat source. Most dry foods on the market aren't coming anywhere close to that and literally only one actually hits that mark.

There are some out there who are trying to push the idea that dogs are omnivores. This is simply untrue. A quick visit to the dictionary can clear this up.

**Dog:** [dawg, dog] noun, verb, dogged, dog-ging.

noun

1. a domesticated canid, *Canis familiaris*, bred in many varieties.
2. any carnivore of the dog family *Canidae*, having prominent canine teeth and, in the wild state, a long and slender muzzle, a deep-chested muscular body, a bushy tail, and large, erect ears. Compare canid.

**Car-ni-vore:** [kahr-nuh-vawr, -vohr]

noun

1. an animal that eats flesh.
2. a flesh-eating mammal of the order *Carnivora*, comprising the dogs, cats, bears, seals, and weasels.

Just because a dog eats vegetables, doesn't classify him as an omnivore. To push this idea is to buck biology entirely. It is shameful and negligent that there professionals (and certain celebrities) out there who are perpetuating this falsehood.

## **WHAT ABOUT SALMONELLA?**

There is a prevalent misconception about the safety of raw food vs. the safety of dry food. If you visit the FDA's website, you will find a list of pet food recalls dating back to 2008. There are 7 total raw food recalls in the last 6 years as compared to more than 40 dry food and treat recalls (and that's just for salmonella). The proof is in the numbers but, yet, certain professionals continue to push the fear of pathogens as a reason not to feed raw.

The companies producing raw dog food are held to almost impossibly high standards of cleanliness in terms of both their facilities and the product being produced. The foods are batch tested for pathogens. If salmonella is detected, the meats are sent to the human side of processing where so many parts per million of certain pathogens are allowed to exist since it is assumed we are going to cook our meats. In other words, your pets are eating better than you are.

It is important to understand, though, that salmonella poses very little risk to pets. Their digestive systems are much different than ours. They are built to handle a moderate, and in some cases high, pathogenic load.

All that being said, we are exposed to salmonella every day. I bet you didn't know there have been 12 multi-state recalls for salmonella contamination of raw tomatoes since 2000. And that's just one fruit of the hundred or so fruits and vegetables available to us at the grocery store.

## **WHY CAN'T I JUST BUY MEAT AT THE GROCERY STORE?**

First, for the reasons discussed above. Meats for human consumption are permitted to have a certain pathogen load. The meats used in raw pet food are held to a zero tolerance standard.

Second, there is a lot more to feeding your pet than just throwing some chicken breast his way. Dogs and cats require a pretty significant amount of organ meat, which is essential for a host of vitamins, minerals, enzymes and amino acids; bone, which is essential for calcium; and in the case of dogs, usually a small amount of roughage in the form of various vegetables. Chicken and rice does not a complete diet make.

## **WILL RAW MAKE MY PET SICK?**

Any change in diet has the potential to cause some digestive upset. If you are concerned about this, go slowly with any transition, feeding only small portions as treats initially. Watch the poop! It will tell you whether you can proceed or whether you need to slow down. Canned pumpkin or probiotics can also be a useful tool when changing your pet's diet.

## HOW MUCH DOES IT COST?

This depends entirely on which one you buy. Just like any food sold, whether it's for your pet or for yourself, the cost of the raw materials, location of production, and convenience all play a role in price. Most raw is comparably priced to high end kibble diets and tends to be less expensive than feeding canned food.

## HOW DO I PREPARE IT?

These foods are intended to be fed in their raw, uncooked state, so apply the same safe handling rules you use for your own meats. Raw should be kept in the freezer and thawed in the fridge. In a pinch, you can put it in a Zip-lock bag and put the bag in a sink of hot water to thaw it quickly. Do not microwave! Raw food can be kept for 2-3 days in your refrigerator before it starts to go bad. The simplest way that we've found is to simply take out what you need for the next meal when you feed. I.E. – when you feed breakfast, take out what you need for dinner and put it in the fridge.

## DO I NEED TO FEED ANYTHING ELSE? / IS IT COMPLETE?

That depends on the formula, but all brands are available in "complete" formulas. In that case, no, you do not need to feed anything else. Some brands also make supplemental feeding tools like plain ground chicken. These are for owners who are a little more advanced in their knowledge of the raw diet and are formulating the diet themselves. They are also frequently used simply to add variety to a pet's diet. These options can also be useful when doing elimination diets with allergy dogs and cats.

## HOW MUCH DO I FEED?

Just like kibble, all the diets are slightly different in their feeding requirements. Quantity also varies depending on your pet's individual needs, activity, age, and metabolism. A good rule of thumb for most raw diets is ½ pound for every 25 pounds of dog **PER DAY**. Cats typically eat slightly more, with an average 10-pound cat needing roughly 4 ounces a day. As with any diet, watch the weight. It will tell you whether to feed more or less.

## DOES IT SMELL?

If you're used to feeding canned, you will be pleasantly surprised by the lack of odor in feeding a raw diet. Raw has very little odor (except for fish or tripe formulas). If your raw has a strong odor, chances are, there is something wrong with it.

## IS IT MESSY?

If you let it thaw completely, cutting up a 10-pound tube of raw can be pretty messy. That's also why it's a lot cheaper per pound than patties are. Patties and nuggets offer the

benefit of virtually no mess. The best way to portion tubes is to put them in the fridge. Usually after about 12 hours, they are just thawed enough that you can barely pinch the sides of the tube (10 pound tubes may take slightly longer). As long as you have a good, sharp knife, this is the perfect time to portion and weigh it. It is still basically frozen so mess is minimal. It is also generally safe to refreeze it at this point.

## **DOESN'T MY DOG NEED SOMETHING CRUNCHY FOR HIS TEETH?**

Purina did a great job of convincing everyone of a few things in the 80s. The first was, you should never change your pet's food. The second was, dry food gives them healthy teeth. Both are completely false. Equating dental health to the consumption of dry food is the same as adopting a regiment of hard pretzels for your own dental health would be. Crunching does nothing to clean teeth or make them stronger. Chewing, however, does. Meaty bones, rawhides, bully sticks, things of that nature, that they chew for 15-20 minutes at a time, will help to remove plaque and tarter from the teeth or to keep already clean teeth clean. But, just as it is with us, regular brushing will offer the greatest benefit.

## **WILL MY PET CRAVE BLOOD?**

We used to hear this question a lot. It has become a less-common concern but every once in a while we still hear it. Do you or anyone you know, like your steak rare? After consuming said steak, do you/they go "Twilight" on anyone? No? There you go.

What can happen with any pet that really likes their food is resource guarding. If your dog has never really loved his food or treats and suddenly you give him a meaty bone to chew on, he may growl when another dog comes near him or if you try to take it away. That's not because he has developed bloodlust, it just means he really likes it. Do not allow this behavior, however. You should always be able to take food, treats, toys, etc. away from your dog without him growling at you. That is a matter of training.

## **WHY DOES MY PET DRINK LESS WATER?**

The raw diet is naturally high in moisture. This is part of what makes it an ideal diet for pets with kidney or bladder issues. If your pet needs to drink more water, simply add water to his raw to make it more like a slurry.

## **MY PET HAS CANCER. CAN I FEED HIM RAW?**

One of the things cancer likes more than anything is sugar. Unfortunately, even the best kibble diets have a higher than necessary carbohydrate load. Carbohydrates are converted into sugar by the body. Raw has a very small amount of carbohydrates, and in some cases, none at all.

\*Please see the attached handout from Answers for more detailed information on this topic.

## MY PET HAS ALLERGIES. CAN I FEED HIM RAW?

Absolutely! There has probably been no group of pets who has benefitted more from the raw diet than those with food allergies. With a raw diet, you eliminate all grains and white potato. This is especially good for pets with yeast issues since these starchy ingredients will only fan the flames of yeast production. You can also limit ingredients to only 1 or 2 for the purposes of elimination diets. Some pets also will have no reaction to a raw chicken product but will react to chicken once it has been extruded (the process to make kibble). The other issue that can be avoided with many raw diets is that of synthetic vitamins and minerals. All dry foods (except for Nature's Logic) use synthetic vitamins and minerals to make the foods "complete and balanced" as dictated by AAFCO's guidelines. Many raw diets are naturally complete, thereby eliminating the need for a bunch of synthetics, which some pets are sensitive to.

On top of that, you will save money over buying one of the "Hypoallergenic" veterinary diets and will be feeding a far superior quality food.

\*A note about hypoallergenic foods. The way they make them hypoallergenic is by hydrolyzing the primary protein used in them. For instance, Hill's ZD hypoallergenic diet uses both hydrolyzed chicken liver and hydrolyzed chicken. What hydrolysis means is that the ingredient is washed in an acid solution until the protein that makes it chicken is completely destroyed. Therefore, it is technically no longer chicken, so the body no longer recognizes it as chicken. Then, so your dog will still eat it, they add MSG.

## MY PET IS IMMUNOCOMPROMISED. IS IT SAFE TO FEED HIM RAW?

As discussed under the heading of salmonella, statistically speaking, your pet is safer eating a raw diet than a kibble diet. The Diamond manufacturing dry food recall of 2012 left over 40 PEOPLE sick just from handling the food.

That being said, there are some raw food companies who employ HPP (high pressure pasteurization) and UV technology to sterilize the food. While we at Pet Barn feel that this is not the ideal circumstance in which to feed a raw diet because pasteurization changes the food, for those who are worried about pathogens, companies like Stella & Chewy's, Primal, and Bravo would be a good fit.

## WHAT IS HPP (HIGH PRESSURE PASTEURIZATION)?

Here's what happens: The food is put in a plastic bag. The plastic bag is submerged in a chamber of water. The chamber is then pressurized to a pressure greater than that found at the bottom of the ocean. Some companies choose to do this because under that kind of pressure, pathogens like salmonella and E. coli can't survive. The problem we at Pet Barn have with this idea is that, when you kill the bad, inevitably, you kill the good along with it. Damage is done to proteins, enzymes, amino acids and vitamins. So, while

pasteurization does not cook the food, thereby leaving it raw, it does change it and, to us, that's not really what raw is about.

## WHY DOESN'T MY VET SUPPORT THE RAW DIET?

Veterinary school does not focus on nutrition; it focuses on medicine. It is not unlike medical school for MDs in that way. That is why nutrition is a completely separate field of study and degree. It's also why, if you ask your doctor about diet, you'll likely be handed a copy of the food pyramid. While it seems logical that these two fields be synchronized, too often, they are not. Most veterinary training offers little more than one week of nutrition. If everything that we needed to know about nutrition could be learned in a week, we'd all be healthier. The classes are also, more often than not, sponsored by one of the major veterinary food companies (Science Diet, Royal Canine, etc.). So, the information being taught is often fraught with agenda.

Colgate-Palmolive, the company that manufactures Hill's Science Diet, spends "hundreds of thousands of dollars a year funding university research and nutrition courses at every one of the 27 US veterinary colleges. Once in practice, vets who sell Science Diet and other premium foods directly pocket profits of as much as 40%" (Parker-Pope, T. 1997. For You, My Pet. The Wall Street Journal. 3 November 1997. In Lonsdale, T. 2001. Raw Meaty Bones. p266).

There are some forward thinking vets out there who do endorse the raw diet. These vets have decided to do their own research and think outside the box, instead of listen to what a toothpaste company taught them in vet school. To those vets we say, "Bravo! And thank you!"