

“Doc, what should I feed my pet?”

Part 1: The Hype about Raw Food Diets

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One of the best things you can do for your pet is feed a good quality diet. The problem is choosing the right one! There are a lot of foods out there and sorting between canned and kibble and brand name is difficult enough but now there are options for raw food and homemade diets. Sorting through the information could be a full time job so I thought I would break it down in to a series of blogs.

There has recently been a lot of hype about raw food diets for people and animals in the media and we get a number of questions about feeding a raw food diet to pets so I thought introducing the issue in blog format would be appropriate!

Pros: The advocates claim that the enzymes, vitamins and amino acids are preserved in these diets and thus more nutritious.

The Facts: In reality, the enzymes present in raw food are degraded in the stomach of the animal anyway and a normal gastrointestinal tract and pancreas possess the necessary enzymes for digestion. No studies have demonstrated a benefit of preserved activity in raw food diets. There are no published peer-reviewed studies that support the claims by raw food advocates and there are no published studies that have examined the differences in animals fed raw animal products vs kibble or canned food.

Cons: The two major concerns about raw food feeding are food safety and nutritional adequacy.

Food Safety: Consumer reports 2007 found that over 80% of chicken intended for human consumption (including organic chicken) was contaminated with *Campylobacter* and about 15% were contaminated with *Salmonella*. Studies have found that these contamination issues are also present in commercially prepared raw food diets. In one study 14% of fecal/stool samples from dogs fed raw food diets were positive for *Salmonella* compared to positive samples in dogs not fed raw food diets. Not only are these contaminants eaten by your pet and potentially shed in their feces but their wonderfully sloppy mouths are dripping this contamination from their saliva to their face, feet and the floor. This contamination poses some very real hazards to their human housemates especially if those humans are children, elderly or otherwise immunosuppressed.

Nutritional Adequacy: Not all raw food diets are nutritionally unbalanced; however, in one study, 86% of the diets had inadequate levels of various minerals, 62% had inadequate levels of various vitamins, and 55% had an inadequate protein or essential amino acid level.

Ultimately I do not recommend feeding of raw food diets. Unfortunately the internet is full of myths and inaccurate information. The CDC and VeterinaryParnter.com have great science-based resources to answer your questions about raw food diets. If you have further questions about what to feed your pet give us a call at Lakewood so we can help you choose what is right for your furry family members!

Next Articles in the series:

Home-Made Pet Food Diets

Cats are Carnivores: Do I have to feed mice?

Buffet or Meals: The dilemma of when and how much to feed!