

**A**s raw diets become more popular

and available, at we are frequently asked about the difference between raw pet foods and dry or canned pet foods and whether or not it's safe. I will try to fit as much information as I can on one page to help answer these questions. Raw diets are frozen patties that consist of muscle meat, vital organs, ground bones, fruits and vegetables, all mixed together in their raw form for full nutrition that you simply thaw and serve. The theory behind feeding raw food is that our pets' ancestors ate raw meat and bones, and that raw food represents a more natural diet for our pets. Although domestication has changed our pets' external appearance, the digestive system and nutritional needs have not changed from those of their wild ancestors.

The question of whether a raw food diet for our pets is effective or safe can be controversial. Some are concerned about the bacteria and salmonella that may be present in raw meat, but a large and growing community of people, including many well-respected veterinarians, say that isn't a concern. In fact dogs' and cats' stomachs are extremely acidic, which creates an extremely inhospitable environment for bacteria: therefore, salmonella does not colonize in dogs or cats and is not harmful to them. Most people don't realize salmonella is often present in many kibble brands of pet food.

Of course, proper handling is an important key to raw food safety. Raw pet food is, in essence, no different than the food you prepare for your human family. Quality raw pet foods that are handled appropriately, by both the manufacturer and at home, are safe and pose no bacterial threat to your pet or your family.

Thousands of people around the world have been feeding safe, raw food diets to their pets with wonderful results for years. The benefits for many pets include a strengthened immune system, healthy digestion, low stool volume and improved skin and coat. Raw diets are generally very effective for pets with allergies, partly because the food has not been processed with artificial ingredients, but also because they are grain-free and have a low glycemic index, which also makes them an excellent treatment for certain diseases such as diabetes.

Raw diets are an important treatment for cancer. Cancer cells feed on carbohydrates, which are not present in a raw diet. Also, the liver in raw offal is an excellent source of Vitamin A, and Vitamin A is thought to prevent the growth of cancer cells.

Another benefit is that dogs and cats fed a raw diet typically have cleaner teeth and a healthy, odorless mouth. This is because dogs do not produce the enzyme amylase, which breaks down carbohydrates in their mouths. Instead, carbohydrates from cereal grains, which are present in many kibble brands, break down into sugar during the digestive process, creating an environment where plaque and bacteria thrive. A raw diet reduces the natural build-up of bacteria, mainly because it doesn't contain carbohydrates but also because the ground bone present in raw food is an excellent source of calcium and phosphorous, which strengthen teeth and bones.

Raw food from animal sources is one of the best sources of essential amino acids and enzymes like taurine. This is because enzymes are destroyed when food is cooked—temperatures over 118 degrees F. destroy all enzymes.

Enzymes are needed to run all body systems, including the brain, heart, lungs kidney and immune system. As animals age they will become enzyme-deficient. Enzymes must be provided by food, otherwise their health will deteriorate.

The decision to feed a raw diet is one of long-term health management. There is a lot of information available on raw food—both positive and negative. Truthfully, the decision is a personal one for each family, and should be the result of careful research and understanding.

There are a growing number of veterinarians around the world who, from experience and their own research, strongly recommend raw diets to their clients. Seek these veterinarians out to get balanced information before making a decision. Avoid the sensationalism and misinformation that exists so that you can make the best decision for your pet!

**Expert Advice: Pet health**

## Raw food diet