

Nutrition for Pets

It is probably no surprise that proper nutrition is the most important factor in your pets' health. Feeding your pets an optimal diet will prevent many health problems in your companion, including skin and ear disease as well as more serious issues such as metabolic diseases, arthritis, and cancer. The allergies that are so common here in Florida may be significantly reduced or eliminated with a healthy diet.

What may be surprising to some folks is that most commercial dog food is junk food. It contains only the minimum daily requirements for pets, not the optimum requirements. While these foods are approved by the AAFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials), they may still contain dehydrated garbage, numerous chemical preservatives, poultry, cow and pig feces, antibiotics and chemotherapy agents, plastic, and poultry feathers. Believe it or not, these are officially allowed on the AAFCO list

on the enzymes present in a raw diet to fully utilize the food. These enzymes are destroyed by cooking at high temperatures. All dry foods are cooked at high temperatures and therefore lack the enzymes necessary for dogs and cats to extract the most nutrients out of their food.

Because dogs' and cats' digestive tracts are different than humans, they are not as susceptible to the bacterial contamination which may occur in raw food. In the wild, they eat dead carrion, which is crawling with bacteria. However, our pets are not accustomed to this bacterial load, so they may still develop digestive upset when they consume rancid food.

In order to avoid possible intestinal upset due to rancid raw food, I recommend a pre-made frozen raw diet, of which there are many available at specialty pet food stores. These diets are formulated by veterinary nutritionists, and many of them are

long-term health.

While many pets love the raw diets, some pets do not and refuse to consume them. For dogs, mixing good-quality canned food and dry food may be an option. For cats, feeding a variety of canned foods is recommended. Cats should not eat dry food because they do not consume enough water and dry food tends to dehydrate them, leading to many disorders, especially kidney failure. Dry foods do not prevent tartar buildup in cats, as they do not chew their food very well.

As a rule, anything you can buy at the grocery store is not good for your pet. Also, price does matter. If a food is cheap, this means the ingredients are cheap and probably contain some undesirable ingredients.

Many health problems in pets can be prevented with a better diet. However, it is never too late to improve your best friend's diet. Make the transition gradually, as the more nutritious food may take some time for your pet's digestive system to adjust. Your holistic veterinarian or knowledgeable holistic pet store personnel should be able to give you advice for making the transition.

Remember that the right diet for your pet is the one that they thrive on. Every animal is different, and what is ideal for one may not be right for another one. If pets do not enjoy the food or have digestive upset, try a different one. If you have geriatric pets or those with significant health issues, consult with your holistic veterinarian prior to changing their diet.

Feeding the optimal diet to your pet is the best way to ensure that they live a long, healthy life. Although the frozen raw diets or the premium foods found in specialty pet food stores are more expensive than those found at the grocery store, the health benefits far out weigh the expense. You can either pay for the good food now or pay the veterinarian later to treat your pet's health issues.



of approved substances. Animal carcasses may also be found in these foods. Although the FDA does not officially approve of sodium pentothal (a common euthanasia agent) to be in pet food, a 1998 study by the FDA showed that many of the foods tested had measureable amounts of this substance in many popular brands of pet food.

The best pet food is composed of fresh, preferably organic, vegetables, meat, and fat. A raw diet is ideal because all of the vitamins and enzymes are still intact. Dogs and cats are carnivores, and they are designed to derive their necessary nutrients from raw food. Because dogs and cats have a limited amount of their own enzymes, they depend

designed to provide a complete diet. They are also screened for bacterial contamination at the manufacturing facility, reducing the risk of bacterial exposure.

Variety is also important for your pet's diet. Feeding the same diet every day may lead to some nutritional deficiencies. There are numerous formulations available, and I recommend varying them so that your pet is more likely to obtain all of the proper nutrients.

If you plan to cook for your pet, it is extremely important to have the diet formulated by an experienced veterinary nutritionist. Although many books are available which have recipes for animals, most are not complete diets to support pets'

Anne Hyle, MS, DVM, CVA is a holistic veterinarian practicing in Sarasota. She utilizes acupuncture, Chinese herbs, homeopathy, and nutritional therapy in her practice. She has over 23 years of experience as a small animal veterinarian and owns the Integrative Animal Medical Center, located at 3646 Birky Street. Call 941-954-4771.

