

Home Cooked Diets

Is it safe to feed your pet a Home-Cooked diet? The answer is: Yes - if (and this is a BIG if) it is done properly.

Will my pet be healthier if I feed them a complete and balanced Home-Cooked diet? The answer is: Maybe. The verdict is still out on this one. There is, as of yet, no actual scientific evidence to prove this one way or another. There is only anecdotal evidence on both sides of the fence.

Personally, I feed my dog a variety of different brands and types of high-quality commercially prepared diets supplemented with home-cooked. Since every pet requires different nutrition and every diet has a different nutrient profile, I feel a variety will help avoid long-term excesses or deficiencies.

We will assume the information we are discussing today pertains to cooked diets and not raw. Raw diets cannot, in general, be recommended due to risk of bacterial contamination (dependent on meat supply and handling), parasites, bacterial shedding, and dental fractures.

Pros:

1. Fresh, unprocessed, whole ingredients
2. Phytonutrients, probiotics, etc.
3. Avoidance of chemical preservatives, additives, and artificial colorings and flavors if ingredients are chosen properly.
4. Potential unknown health benefits related to food that hasn't been super-heated and pressurized.

Cons:

1. Unbalanced diet formulations in most "natural" books and recipes found online.
2. "Diet Drift": The biggest problem with home-cooked diets. Owners start with a balanced formula, then - over time - drift away from the balanced diet by substituting or adding/subtracting ingredients for a variety of reasons. Nutrient deficiencies or excesses then become common. Careful attention to proper preparation is critical to prevent both vitamin and mineral deficiencies and excesses.
3. Without a semester of clinical nutrition, it can be very hard to learn how to assess nutrients properly, particularly with the unbelievable amount of misinformation available on the internet in regards to pet foods.
4. Time-Consuming
6. You must stay "up to date". Knowledge regarding nutrient requirements and nutritional management of diseases is constantly evolving. Your diets should be re-evaluated at least yearly to make certain they reflect the most current nutritional research and to confirm that they are complete and balanced for your pet's life stage, activity level and health status.
7. You will need the help of a veterinary nutritionist with access to computer software in order to provide a complete and balanced diet for your pet. www.balanceit.com and www.petdiets.com. There are private consultations or consults available with the aid of your veterinarian.
8. You will need special vitamin/mineral supplements designed to meet the needs of pets being fed a home-cooked diet. Human multi-vitamin supplements are not appropriate and general pet vitamin/mineral supplements designed to be given with commercial diets are not appropriate.

9. Nutrient deficiencies or excesses can take months to years become apparent.

Some things to think about:

1. Are grains “bad” for pets?

2. Do pets eat the skeletal meat only, or the whole carcass? What does this include?

3. Taking into account the wild ancestor’s diet is always a good idea. But, remember this: “All natural” doesn’t always equal better or safe. Average lifespan of an “all natural” wolf: 4-6 years. Average lifespan of your dog: 11-13 years. Many are living even longer. Natural things aren’t always good for you. Some examples include: Rattlesnake venom, arsenic and death. One of my favorite sayings is this: “I intend to keep an open mind, just not so open that my brains fall out.” When looking at information on the net ask three questions: Does this person have any actual scientific training? What are they selling? Do they have proof to back up each and every claim they are making?

4. Ingredients (chicken, corn, spinach, beef, etc.) versus nutrients (fats, proteins, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, fatty acids).