

“Raw Meat Diet”

Hi, this is Dr. Karen Becker, and today we're going to discuss why dogs and cats can eat raw meat. This is probably the most common question I get, especially from uneducated pet owners (they gasp when they come into my house, “My gosh, you feed your pets raw meat?”) or my clients who put their pets on a raw food diet, but get arguments from their uneducated veterinarians on why they should not be giving their dogs and cats raw meat.

To argue this entire point is moot, because dogs and cats have been consuming living, raw meats for thousands of years. Barn cats, to this day, catch and kill mice and we don't call poison control. Farmers don't call poison control when their farm dogs find whole litters of baby bunnies and eat them up like little Tootsie Rolls. They don't call poison control, ask how to induce vomiting and say, “My gosh, my dog or cat has consumed raw meat.”

In those situations, most people's common sense kicks in and they think, “I understand that cats are designed to hunt mice, but I don't think I should be giving them raw chicken.” The truth is, both cats and dogs are designed specifically, and their bodies have adapted to consuming raw meat for thousands of years.

The Rise of Commercial Pet Foods

The first bags of commercial cat and dog foods entered the market about a hundred years ago. It's important to recognize that from a historical perspective, dog and cat food is brand-new to the market. In the last 100 years, your dogs' and cats' GI tracts have not evolved to handle an entirely kibble-based diet. What's interesting is because dogs and cats are amazingly resilient and are very capable of processing foods that aren't necessarily biologically appropriate, there's potential dietary abuse among the veterinary community.

In essence, dog and cat foods – kibble in a bag – have become so convenient that we've recommended them for almost the last 100 years. Dog food and cat food sales are a multimillion industry. It's convenient, cheap, and there's no mess or cleanup. You can just put it in the pantry, scoop it out, put it in your dog's or cat's dish, and you're done for the day.

Because we've marketed it so successfully and because cats and dogs can eat it and maybe not thrive but survive, we assume that's good enough. Even in veterinary schools, we're not even taught anything else – it's just dog and cat foods. There would be no other concern.

So this concept of feeding pets a living food diet is strange to some veterinarians. Their statement is, “Why don't you just feed your cat cat food, for crying out loud? Why do you have

to make food? Why to you have to feed living foods?” When you come down to it and do research, dogs and cats are designed to eat living foods. They're meant to eat unprocessed, raw, healthful foods. It's a lot like deciding to give your child a meal replacement bar. You can do

that now and then and get by, but you would never raise your child on an exclusive diet of meal replacement bars.

That's what we do for dogs and cats, unless you realize that you need to be including some living foods into your pet's diet for the success of their overall immune function and because you want their organs to thrive.

All that said, we have become a fast food nation. Most people feed their pets dog and cat foods, so feeding living foods is new and novel. Those of you that have been feeding living foods or a raw food diet for quite some time probably do as much educating as I do to help people understand why dogs and cats can do better on species-appropriate or evolutionary diet, the diet that they were actually biologically designed to consume.

Will Your Pet Get Parasites from A Raw Meat Diet?

I would say that the biggest questions that I get from uneducated veterinarians and some people who have never thought of feeding their pets anything other than kibble or canned food is number one, “What about the parasites?”

What I would tell you about parasites is this: Parasites, which are passed up the food chain – roundworms, hookworms, tapeworms – are found in the entrails or gastrointestinal tracts of animals. We don’t feed guts. Even if you buy a commercially available raw food diet, there are no guts in that meat because guts are where the parasites are.

If you make a homemade raw food diet, you don’t include guts – stomach, small intestine, colon (large intestine). We don’t include those parts of the prey species because for obvious reasons, those are where the parasites are.

People say, “You’re going to give your dog worms feeding raw meats.” Muscle meats in and of themselves, if they’re processed effectively, are in theory sterile. There’s no bacteria found in muscle meat. We know that’s not true because we know that bacterial contamination can become a problem, which I’ll discuss in a minute. There are some types of parasites that can (rarely) make their way out of the GI tract and into the sterile muscle meat of prey species. The types of parasites that you need to be concerned about can be effectively removed if you freeze meats for three days prior to feeding them to your dog.

For instance, toxoplasmosis, which can sometimes be found in meat, can be successfully killed if you freeze your meat for a minimum of three days before you feed them to your pet. By

freezing meats before you feed them (a lot like sushi) and by removing the guts of prey species, you can successfully avoid transmitting parasites to your pets when feeding them a raw meat diet.

What about Salmonella?

The second question I get as a veterinarian is, “What about salmonella?”

One of the things that is important to recognize when it comes to salmonella or any potentially pathogenic bacteria is that there has to be some contamination. Contamination absolutely does occur. That’s where all the recalls come in, even for human foods. When it comes to salmonella outbreaks, there’s been contamination in the food chain. It’s important to remember that salmonella is not just one species.

There are over 1,800 serovars of salmonella, a gram-negative bacteria. It’s a facultatively anaerobic bacteria that exists in many species of mammals. The most common species of salmonella that exists in dogs and cats is salmonella typhimurium.

I want to read to you a paragraph from the Salmonella Information Network, then the Veterinary Information Network. There’s an update given every now and then on the most recent information on salmonella in dogs and cats. I want to read this to you because I think it could help with your perspective on salmonella as a terrible contaminant in your pet’s food or GI tract.

When I finish reading this, you may end up thinking that your dogs and cats are a little more like reptiles in the sense that they can harbor salmonella naturally in their GI tracts.

“The clinical significance of bacteria such as clostridium and salmonella causing diarrhea or illness in dogs and cats is clouded by the existence of many of these organisms as normal constituents of the indigenous intestinal flora. (That’s the fancy way of saying that they’re naturally there. - DKB) The primary enteropathogenic bacteria most

commonly incriminating in canine and feline diarrhea is *Clostridium perfringens*, *Clostridium difficile*, *Campylobacter*, and salmonella.

Veterinarians are faced with a quandary when attempting to diagnose small animals with suspected bacterial-associated diarrhea because the isolation rates of these pathogenic bacteria are similar in diarrheic and non-diarrheic animals, and because the incidence of bacterial-associated diarrhea is extremely variable. Salmonella species are commonly isolated from both healthy and hospitalized dogs and cats.”

What they’re saying in a nutshell is that dogs and cats naturally have some salmonella in their GI tracts – it’s not a raging foreign bacteria that they can acquire. If your veterinarian says, “Your dog has acquired salmonella,” many of my clients will gasp and say, “Oh my gosh.”

The truth is, salmonella can naturally exist in your pet’s GI tract. It’s not necessarily a foreign pathogenic invader.

This article goes on to say:

“Factors that increase the likelihood of clinical disease from salmonella include the age of the animal, poor nutrition, the presence of cancer or neoplasia, and other concurrent diseases and stress, as well as the administration of antibiotics, chemotherapy or glucocorticoids [which are steroids].”

In conclusion, these potentially harmful bacteria that naturally exist in your pet’s GI tract are there, whether you feed raw foods or not. Your pet is already contaminated with salmonella. Dogs and cats are designed to be able to handle these bacterial loads that are quite foreign to human GI tracts.

Pets have evolved to be able to handle heavy bacterial loads in food. They are well-equipped via nature to be able to handle heavy doses of abnormal bacteria because they catch and kill live food. Dogs’ and cats’ stomachs are highly acidic, with a PH of 1. We know that at that PH level, there’s nothing that can survive healthy stomach acid. That stomach acid is there in such high quantities to be able to effectively remove many of these potentially contaminated meat sources.

In addition, your dogs and cats are wired with a tremendous amount of bile. Bile is also anti-parasitic and anti-pathogenic. Bile is a secondary defense. Dogs and cats have strong pancreatic enzymes that help digest and break down food. Their bodies are given built-in, God-given resources to be able to effectively cope with heavier bacterial loads.

Strengthening Your Pet’s GI Tract

You’ll be able to recognize that this article – as well as informed veterinarians – believe that because dogs and cats are equipped to handle heavy bacterial loads, it’s important that you do what it suggests and keep your dogs’ and cats’ GI tracts resilient and strong to be able to defend against pathogenic bacteria from food and for healthy immunologic function across the board.

Number one, reducing stress means feeding a biologically appropriate diet, which is what your dogs and cats are meant to eat. It’s important to feed vegetarian animals vegetarian food, and carnivorous animals meat based diets.

Avoiding unnecessary drugs such as antibiotics, and reseeded the gut with a probiotic after antibiotic therapy, or even keeping your pet on a daily probiotic is a really good idea. It helps balance the ratio of good to bad bacteria -- the flora -- in your pet’s gut. Also, a strong digestive enzyme can help promote effective digestion in your pets.

Combining healthy diet, healthy lifestyle, digestive enzymes and probiotics is an effective way not only to nourish your pet with the most species-appropriate food for healthy immunologic function, but also to do so in a way that brings vibrancy to your pet's body.

This is unlike feeding a rendered, processed, chemically ridden, overprocessed, inorganic, grain- based food, which is what has come about in the last 100 years. Pets aren't designed to eat those foods, and we know that the sooner we can get your pet onto a species-appropriate diet, which they were designed to eat and healthfully process, the sooner you can move along to helping your pet achieve vibrant health.