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**How to feed your dog or cat a raw food diet:**

Premixed raw pet foods, such as Primal, Raw Bistro, OC Raw, and Stella & Chewy’s, are a great way to get started with raw feeding. These foods are complete diets, that contain meat, bones, organs, and veggies. All you have to do is thaw and serve. There are some potential problems with these foods, such as high-pressure pasteurization, low fat content, and synthetic vitamins and minerals in some products, but overall these foods are an easy intro to raw feeding. They are also very convenient if someone else has to feed your pets! The freeze-dried versions are convenient as treats and for traveling, but don’t seem to provide enough nutrition when fed as the sole diet.

Ideally, you would have at least three different proteins from different manufacturers in your freezer at the same time. That would allow you to rotate your proteins. You can thaw out enough food for 1-3 days, and then switch. Just make sure not to feed too much chicken. It’s a common allergen for dogs and cats, since it’s an ingredient that is present in most processed foods. Changing proteins frequently helps prevent the development of food allergies.

Another way of feeding raw is to feed a variety of raw animal parts. I feed my dogs chicken necks, gizzards, drumsticks, backs, feet, and thighs, turkey necks, hearts, backs, and tails, duck heads, necks, and wings, beef heart, ribs, and liver, pork brisket, necks, and ribs, and raw green tripe. My dogs also get eggs, sardines, leftovers, and venison scraps during hunting season. I feed my cats chopped raw meat with added bones and liver. I feed one protein at each meal, and change proteins every 1-3 meals.

When feeding a diet of raw animal parts, the most important organ to add is liver. Feed each dog a meal of liver (2-8 ounces depending on the size of the dog), once a week or every other week. I usually use beef liver, but organic chicken liver or bison liver would work just as well. It’s good to feed kidneys and spleen occasionally as well. My dogs do not like raw organs, but will eat them lightly browned.

Tripe (cow stomach and intestines) is a valuable addition to a raw diet. It’s a great source of enzymes and is very high in fat, so good for dogs with intestinal problems, liver disease, and cancer. It must be raw green tripe; not bleached or canned tripe that is sold for humans or dogs. Greentripe.com is the best brand; check the website for a retailer near you.

The raw diet you feed must provide a decent amount of fat. Don’t remove skin, feed chunks of fat from around the organs and heart, and don’t avoid fatty cuts of meat or fatty hamburger. Dogs and cats are built to digest meat, bone, and fat.

There are important differences between feeding humans and feeding dogs and cats. One is that cats and dogs need to have bones as well as meat in their diet. At least half of the meat you feed must have the bones in it, either ground or whole. Whole bones have the advantage of building strong masseter muscles (the muscles that close the jaw), which is important for normal TMJ and hyoid function, and for the health of all the nerves and blood vessels that pass through the TMJ. Raw bones also tone the gastrointestinal tract and maintain its health. They will also keep your pet’s teeth clean! Bones are very safe as long as they are raw. If you don’t feed bones, then you need to add a pet calcium supplement (not one made for humans and not bone meal). A good one is Seaweed Calcium by Animal Essentials ([www.animalessentials.com](http://www.animalessentials.com)).

Another difference is the ratio of protein to vegetables in the diet. Cats and dogs are carnivores. Their diet should consist of 70-100% meat, organ, and bone, with the rest made up of vegetables, fruit, herbs, and leftovers. The leftovers or table scraps should be grain- and gluten-free to reduce inflammation. It is important to feed table scraps, especially for dogs, as in the wild dogs are carnivorous scavengers and should be able to eat a wide variety of things. If you have a pet that can only eat one kind of food or it gets diarrhea, that animal is not in good health. Gastrointestinal integrity needs to be rebuilt over time. This is important because the largest part of the immune system is in the intestines.

Dogs and cats do not digest grains well. Their salivary glands do not produce amylase (the enzyme that digests starch), and they are not designed to chew their food. Bones are crushed just enough so they will fit into the esophagus! Food spends a long time in the stomach, where digestion happens and bones dissolve. Therefore, you should feed only once or twice a day, to allow time for complete digestion. The rewards of a raw food diet are greater satisfaction (less begging for food), small, hard, dry stools (which are normal), and normal water intake (greatly decreased from what you see on a dry food diet), as well as increased energy and overall better health.

It is important to feed a wide variety of organic fruits and vegetables. Use the entire color spectrum of vegetables, including sweet potatoes, beets, cauliflower, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, lettuce, kale, collard, chard, carrots, mustard greens, avocados, peppers, cucumbers, radishes, tomatoes, kohlrabi, jicama, asparagus, zucchini, and anything else you can think of except for onions. If the veggies are not something you would eat raw, then steam them. I feed leftovers as well (but no grains), such as vegetable soup, grilled veggies, curry, and salsa. My husband and I eat spicy food, and so do our dogs. Cooking veggies makes them easier for dogs and cats to digest but is not crucial.

For fruit, you can give organic apples, pears, bananas, melon, pineapple, strawberries, kiwi, blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, and anything else they will eat. Some dogs even like citrus fruits!

Skipping one meal per week or even a whole day will allow the GI tract to empty out and rest, so intermittent fasting is a wonderful way to promote gut health for dogs. Cats don’t necessarily need to fast, since their normal diet would be small prey animals vs. an entire carcass.

Don’t feed your dog or cat: Onions, grapes and raisins (unless organic), macadamia nuts, stevia, xylitol, erythritol, or chocolate. In reality, though the largest number of toxic reactions seen in dogs and cats are from ingestion of human drugs.

Feed raw for a healthy dog or cat with a strong immune system!

And for an interesting overview of the processed pet food industry, watch the documentary Pet Foo(le)d on Netflix and Amazon Prime.