



doggie eats

dog food comparison to find YOUR best dog food

By Chiwah Slater

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PetWrites.com, and How I Came to Write This Book

Life happens to us... and not always the way we thought it would. We make our plans, follow our chosen path, and sometimes... Life brings us better choices.

Let me begin by saying that I am not a professional dog expert. My area of expertise is books. I've been a writer, ghostwriter, book coach, editor, book designer, book shepherd, publisher, and book marketing coach... some of the above for the last two decades, some for one, some for shorter periods.

So... how did I come to write a book on dog nutrition? Here's my story: As a pet lover, I have shared much of my life with my beautiful dogs. I recently set up a site (<http://PetWrites.com>) with a dual focus: to help people learn about ways to improve the quality of their pets' lives, and to encourage pet owners to write stories and books about the ways in which their pets have enriched their lives.

One reason we love having dogs in our lives is that they remind us of the simple, positive values that make life worthwhile: love, fidelity, innocence, playfulness and courage, to name a few. Our dogs are here to teach us, and in the bargain they watch out for us, nurture us, and stretch us to take better care of ourselves by taking good care of them.

As a writer, I have learned that writing is a powerful mechanism for anchoring positive emotional experiences and healing painful ones. If you have a dog, I want to inspire you to think about the good your dog has brought you and to anchor it in by writing about it.

It will do you a world of good. And it will do your readers good as well, giving them the opportunity to feel and learn and grow with you. By touching your readers' hearts, your writing will help to heal emotional wounds besetting all humankind.

My research into pet nutrition and the state of the dog food market today has taught me a lot about making healthier choices for our dogs. As an author I have attempted to remain open minded, mindful that every dog is unique and every human companion has his or her own lifestyle and set of values and limitations.

My message to you: Learn about dog nutrition, feed your dog as well as you can, and please, please write to spread the word about the benefits of having a cherished animal as your companion in life.

You will find a plethora of opportunities at <http://PetWrites.com>, including dog story swaps, interviews with pet experts, answers to your questions, guidance for turning your pet stories and books into profit centers, and much more.

For now... enjoy the book. I hope to see you at <http://PetWrites.com>!

— Chiwah Slater

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Chapter 1 – Why It Matters What Your Dog Eats

Do you love your dog? I suspect you do, or you wouldn't be reading this book.

Given that you love your dog, you naturally want to do what's best for him. Or her. The trouble is, you don't always know what that is. Maybe you watch the ads for "balanced diet" dog foods and try to read between the lines so you can buy the best food for your dog. But is that food really what your dog needs?

How can you know? There's plenty of controversy surrounding the issue of dog food these days. Many dog owners have changed the foods they were feeding in response to the high number of dog food recall scares over the last few years. Others feel reasonably secure in the knowledge that their food of choice has not been recalled.

But does the fact that a food has not been recalled make it a good diet for a pet you love?

In this book we explore a variety of doggie diet alternatives, some widely accepted and others that are more revolutionary but gaining an ever larger following. My purpose is to bring to light the pros and cons of each so that you can make more informed decisions.

Because you have to make your own decisions. Believe me, I would make them for you if I could, because I'm pretty sure I know what's best in most cases.

Just kidding. I'm really not quite that presumptive. Since I don't get to decide what's good for you and your dog, I'm going to content myself with presenting a wide range of information I hope you will find both interesting and useful.

People and Their Dogs

I have shared much of my life with dogs. A cocker spaniel, a doxie, a German shorthair pointer, a samoyed, a dalmation/dobie cross, two English bulldogs, and... the list goes on.

Today, I share my home with a friend whose little terrier, Precious, brings joy to both our lives. I love the way she runs to greet me every morning, then turns to run back to my friend to make sure it's okay that she loves me, too.

For the most part, Precious appears to be pretty healthy. My friend has always fed her commercial dog food. Since she's gaining weight and sometimes gets "hot spots" on her skin (she rolls on her back to scratch the itches), and since he knew I was researching dog food, we are making changes to her diet.

Most dog owners who have made changes to their pet's diet will tell you it wasn't until their dogs began scratching themselves silly, or dragging around the hose without any energy, that they noticed something was the matter. One man said it was only when he

saw his dog's stomach dragging on the floor that he realized it was time to look at what the poor thing was eating.

Dog's Best Friend? It's Got to Be YOU!

As a human adult, for the most part you get to decide what you want in your life and what you don't. If you don't like the food in the fridge, for example, you go to the store and buy something different. If you're feeling like you need more protein, or less sweets, or a shot of wheat grass, you can go get it.

Your dog can't do that. But you're there, and your dog depends on you. You're your dog's best friend. So you pay attention, and notice what's going well with your dog and what isn't.

After all, it's not so hard to tell. Like you and me, dogs are mammals, and we have a lot in common. If you find you're gaining unwanted pounds, you know you ought to change what you're eating and get more exercise. So it's not difficult to come to a similar conclusion about your dog if you notice you can't feel her ribs.

If your tummy's acting up, you think back on what you've eaten. And if you see your doggie moping around, you might wonder whether he's eaten something that wasn't good for him. Especially if he barfs up his food.

One look in the bathroom mirror will tell you whether you're doing well or poorly. If your hair and skin are dull and lifeless, you're not doing so well. The same is true for a dog.

In both cases, poor nutrition is probably to blame.

Unhealthy eating habits bring on a whole slew of problems in humans, from heart disease to diabetes. Dogs are no different. Obese dogs become susceptible to pretty much the same range of health problems that affect overweight people.

So, since your dog can't tell you about a stomachache or feeling under the weather or make the decision to change what it's eating, it's up to you to take decisive action to set things right.

That's why it is so important that you understand the effect of your dog's diet on his or her life.

As people age, most have to begin to pay attention to what they eat. That might have been less true years ago than it is today, with all the processed food most people eat. Dogs are eating more processed food than they used to, too. A lot more. And it's up to you to make sure your dog is getting food that promotes his or her health.

Choices, Choices...

Your dog's dietary needs are not all that different from your own. Dogs require the same vitamins and minerals you need, though not in the same quantity. They require protein, carbohydrates and fats, just like you do.

If the food you put into your body can affect your skin and hair, why would anyone think it would be different for a dog? The food you serve to your dog is crucial to his or her well being. While your dog won't be eating the same foods you do, you would do well to pay careful attention to the ingredients in the dog food you serve up and how they were prepared. It is important to make sure your pet is getting a healthy and nutritious meal.

Poor diet in dogs can have many harmful effects. We've talked about low energy, dull coat, dry skin and overweight. But dogs can also be dangerously underweight as a result of poor diet.

Poor nutrition can cause a dog to develop dental problems, bad breath, infections, allergies, arthritis, diabetes, cancer. The list goes on and on. An unbalanced diet for you dog could even mean a decreased lifespan.

And it's not just *what* you feed your dog that matters. *How* you feed him or her can make a big difference, too. For starters, free feeding is an invitation to obesity for some dogs. Setting up a feeding schedule and sticking to it at least most of the time can help maintain a reasonable weight.

Are you feeding in a plastic bowl? Plastic is toxic, and even the most sedate pooch may be affected. Switch to a stainless steel or lead-free pottery dish.

If you're like most dog owners today, you consider your dog part of your family. Keeping him or her on a good diet has tons of benefits. With the proper diet, you could be looking at spending a number of added years together.

Chapter 2 – Feeding Your Pooch Well from Day One

A pup's first meal is the finest that Nature can provide – colostrum straight from his mom's breast, nutritious to the max and filled with protective antibodies.

Colostrum is essential to the health of your pup, essential to its very survival. Rich in the precise blend of nutrients needed to foster growth in those early weeks, colostrum plays a part in maintaining healthy fluid levels and heart function as well.

After the first 24 hours, the mother will start producing milk for her pups. Most experts agree that a pup should nurse for three to four weeks, or until the puppy teeth start to show. Puppy teeth are sharp and can be hard on mom's tender skin, so she will want to wean her pups at this point. It's a good idea to begin introducing a little solid food now. To make it easier to digest, mix three parts solid food with one part water.

Most vets and breeders recommend that puppies remain with their mother and their siblings until they are at least eight weeks old. By this time they are old enough to be weaned from their mother and begin their new life with you.

If you buy your pup from a breeder, double-check to make sure the pup nursed for at least the first 24 hours. Longer is better; pups weaned too early tend to develop chewing and excessive licking habits.

You should also ask what kind of diet the pup has been on since it was weaned. Most breeders feed a kibble designed especially for puppies, usually higher in protein than an adult dog food. What kind of kibble has your pup has been getting? Find out, and check out the ingredients.

Your breeder will probably send you home with a bag of kibble and leave it up to you to determine whether you want to stay with it or introduce a new one.

What Kind of Food?

If you decide you want to try your pup on different food, what kind of food should you buy for your puppy? We will discuss this in detail in the next couple of chapters. For now, let's just say that you want a food that provides all the nutrients your dog needs in an easily digestible form. On top of that, you need a food your dog enjoys eating!

Some people switch to a different kibble because they've read negative reviews of the kibble the breeder supplied. Others switch to a cheaper brand.

Cheap food is cheap because it's made with cheap ingredients. If you do switch, make sure the brand you switch to will provide all the nutrients your pup needs to grow into the loving adult dog it is destined to be. The prime ingredient should be a specifically named meat – not meal, grain, or meat by-products, and not just the generic term "meat," typically found only in lower quality dog foods.

Think ahead. You don't want to feed a food that is likely to lead to vet bills and end up being far more costly in the long run.

If you switch your pup to another processed food, ease into it. Don't give it the food it is used to one day and then a completely different food the next day. This will wreak havoc on a puppy stomach. Your best bet is to mix the new food in slowly to get the pup used to it. It can take up to a week to completely transition a pup from one food to the next.

Another alternative is to introduce your pup to raw food. Frozen or freeze-dried raw food is more commonly available all the time in specialty stores. When switching to raw food, it's a good idea to give your pup's stomach twelve hours to empty out before feeding the first meal. Read on for more information in the section on raw food.

How Often to Feed

By the time your pup is six months old, two meals a day will suffice. But a pup under the age of six months may need to be fed three times a day. If you're gone during the day, get a friend or neighbor to come in to administer the midday meal.

(An indoor pup will need to be walked after a meal, too, as a puppy's developing intestinal tract is won't be capable of holding off until evening.)

It is not a good idea though to leave any dog's food out all day. As mentioned above, grazing whenever they feel like it can lead to obesity. It can also cause dreadful skeletal disorders and undesirable behaviors down the line.

A good way to feed is to offer the food for twenty minutes or so at each feeding. If it goes uneaten, pick it up and make the pup wait for the next meal. He or she will learn very quickly to eat when food is offered. Establishing a schedule, and sticking to it, will help to ensure that your dog stays happy and healthy.

What About Table Scraps?

Feeding scraps from the table is a bad idea. It leads to begging. But that's not the worst of it. Though there are a lot of similarities between human and canine nutritional needs, some of the things people eat contain ingredients that can make a dog sick. Some can even cause death. These ingredients are hard enough on a grown dog, but they're even worse for a pup.

Taking Stock of an Older Dog's Diet

After the first year most dogs only need one meal a day, though a large dog or a dog that gets a lot of exercise might benefit from a continuing regimen of two meals a day.

If you notice that your adult dog is listless, that his coat and eyes are dull, that he takes little interest in food or in life, a good place to start is by analyzing the diet you're feeding. It's never too late to start feeding food that agrees better with your dog's system.

Try a new food, one with an ingredient list that makes sense to you. Again, introduce it gradually. If the dog doesn't take to it, go back to the old food for a few days before introducing another, a little at a time, until you find a food he or she can accept. Watch over the next couple of weeks to see whether it makes a difference.

A dog deserves a good life, and a good life means good nutrition from puppyhood to old age. The feeding choices you make will play a major role in determining the quality of your dog's life. By paying attention, you can create an excellent blueprint that will support your dog's health to the end.

Chapter 3 – How Are Commercial Dog Foods Made?

I don't know about you, but I like variety in my meals. French food tonight, Thai tomorrow, Mexican the day after. Or something of that sort.

Now, consider your dog. Dogs like variety, too. And so, the pet food companies have gone to some lengths to provide it. There's beef flavor, chicken flavor, duck flavor, even elk and deer flavor in some brands. And there are different textures: dry kibble, canned soft, and semi-moist, usually a little more chewy than canned food. All of these foods are processed.

In recent years new varieties have been added, including freeze-dried and frozen raw foods.

Let's take a look at how these different varieties of dog food are created:

Dry Food

How are dry foods made? Most companies start out with raw materials such as grain, meat and fat. Then they grind them down to mix the nutrients and increase nutrient availability. Next comes a process known as extrusion, in which the food is cooked as it moves through the barrel of a machine that looks like screw inside a barrel.

The end result is a spongy dough. It is then sent through a die, where it is cut with a knife into little bits. The newly formed "kibbles" now go into a dryer to remove the moisture. The last step, called enrobing, involves the addition of fatty and flavor-enhancing liquids or powders to the outer surface of the kibble. *Et voilà!*

Semi-Moist Food

Semi-moist foods are processed much like dry foods, with the exception that the temperature in the extruder is lower. Since they have a higher moisture content, they also have an increased risk of spoilage. To prevent mold and bacteria from destroying the food, manufacturers add mold and bacteria inhibitors and pack the food in special moisture-proof bags.

Canned Food

Canned foods have been around since the 1800s. The process of preparing them involves putting raw food into a mixer and then cooking it. Then, while it is still hot, the food is moved into a filler/seamer, where it is poured into the cans, which are then vacuum sealed and sterilized at a high temperature.

Freeze-Dried Raw Food

Freeze-drying was first actively developed during WWII for the purpose of preserving serum supplies in the field, where there wasn't any refrigeration.

Freeze-drying completely removes any water from the food while leaving its basic composition intact. First, the raw dog food may be pre-treated to increase stability. Then

it is frozen rapidly enough to avoid the formation of ice crystals that might destroy texture and nutrient content.

During the ensuing primary drying phase, heat is added at low pressure to thaw it out and “sublime” the water into a gas. Then comes a secondary drying phase during which any remaining water molecules are removed. The freeze-dried food is then placed into sealed packets to prevent moisture reabsorption.

Frozen Raw Food

The raw food is packaged and frozen.

Which is Best for Your Dog?

Now that who have some understanding of how each kind of dog food is made, you might be asking how in the heck you can know which one is best for your dog!

Ahhh... you are entering into the core of the mystery.

This is a highly controversial subject. The issues are complex, and the fact that the manufacturers have a lot of money at stake further complicates the question.

There are advantages and disadvantages associated with each of the forms in which commercially produced dog food is provided. Here are the highlights:

Dried vs. Canned and Semi-Moist Dog Foods

First, forget about feeding semi-moist product. As I explained above, the manufacturers have to add large quantities of chemical additives to keep it from spoiling. Those additives didn't grow in nature, and they're probably not good for your pet.

That leaves dried and canned foods.

Dried foods are the most popular, as they are easy to serve and free-feed. Another reason for the popularity of dried food is that owners have been told for years that dry foods help promote good dental health.

Some proponents of raw food claim that this is a fallacy, holding that dry food particles tend to stick between the teeth and create dental problems. Some highly respected veterinarians report that they find less tartar buildup and gum disease in dogs on dry diets.

You can put this issue to rest by giving your dog large raw bones to chew on. Dogs who chew on raw bones get their teeth cleaned naturally. It's not a good idea to give your pet cooked bones, though. Even big, thick cooked bones can splinter and cause untold misery.

Pound for pound, dry foods are much richer in nutrients than canned or semi-moist foods. Why? Because they contain only about 10% water, while canned food is about 75%

water. And, because of their high caloric content, it takes less dry food to satisfy an animal's appetite.

So... if dry food and canned food cost the same amount per pound, you get a much better deal on dry food. My experience is that there is not much difference in the per-pound price of similar qualities of dry and canned dog foods.

The deal gets sweeter if you have a large dog, as you can buy the large bags of dry food. (Be careful doing this if you have a small dog, as the food goes stale if not properly stored.)

The "pro" for canned food? Our canine friends tend to prefer it. Who wouldn't? It's soft and tasty, and older dogs often find kibble a challenge to chew.

Money Talks

What about the quality of commercially produced canned and dried dog foods?

All of the delivery forms we've just discussed involve cooking the food, and we all know cooking destroys enzymes and vitamins. But that's not the worst of it. The worst comes in the lack of regulation of what goes into the mix before it's cooked. The cheap unhealthy fats, cancer causing chemicals, preservatives, and toxins are largely to blame for the huge recent increase in cancer, heart disease, and kidney disease – the three leading causes of dog death in the early 21st century.

The sad truth is that the big dog food manufacturers today are more concerned about making money than about providing quality dog food. As a result, most of the beautifully packaged dog food on supermarket and pet store shelves is nutritionally depleted and rendered toxic by the inclusion of chemicals and diseased animal matter.

And the cheaper the food, the less healthful the ingredients. Count on it.

The good news on the dog food front comes in the form of smaller, privately owned manufacturing firms entering the market with quality products. In response, of course, the corporate giants have rushed to get on the bandwagon.

Again, beware. Look past the pretty pictures and read the labels.

What About Raw Food? (Frozen and Freeze-Dried)

The argument in favor of these diets is that dogs in the wild eat raw food, and Nature knows best. Some people argue that a raw diet is unbalanced, but most raw foods on the market today contain a balance of meat, fruit, and vegetables.

Some veterinarians have raised the argument that dogs are no longer wild creatures, and their bodies have responded to civilization by adapting to respond better to cooked food. There has to be some truth to that. Raw food may not be the best choice for every dog.

Does that mean you shouldn't feed raw? No. It means you should pay attention to your dog to see whether she responds better to cooked or raw food or a mixture of the two.

Another argument sometimes raised against feeding raw has to do with the fact that both freezing and freeze-drying break down molecular structure, so you have to use them immediately after thawing if you want your dog to get the most flavor and nutrition out of them. True... but since the food is raw, it starts out with a lot more nutrients than canned, semi-moist or dried food.

The subject of a raw food diet for their dogs is so novel to most people that I devote an entire chapter to it later in the book.

In the End, It's Up to Your Dog

In the final analysis, you have to give your dog a food it will eat. This often means some form of compromise, a combination of kibble and canned or kibble and raw. Keep experimenting until you come up with a solution you and your dog are happy with.

Can You Make Your Own Dog Food?

Of course. You can do this whether you feed raw or cooked. If you have the time and the inclination, preparing your own raw food is a great way of bypassing the issue of molecular breakdown during freezing.

A significant advantage of preparing your own dog food, whether cooked or raw, is the money you'll save over what you're paying now for commercial formulations.

Shopping and preparing food at home are time consuming, of course, and you need to be attentive to include all the nutrients your dog needs. Don't try to figure it all out yourself, or you are likely to short your pet on some essential nutrients and create problems down the line.

There are a number of recipe books on the market. If you're interested in preparing raw foods for your furry friend, either as a mainstay or to supplement a commercial diet, one choice many have found an excellent source of recipes would be 'Going Rawr!' You can get it at <http://petwrites.com/rawr>. And if you're not necessarily of the raw persuasion, check out John Miller's time-tested homemade dog food recipes at <http://petwrites.com/miller>.

Chapter 4 – What Makes for a Healthful Dog Food?

Shopping for dog food in today’s supermarket or pet food store, you have to pay attention. If you don’t, you are likely to cash in your chips for inferior products.

Don’t be seduced by a fanciful product name or non-specific terms like “premium,” “gourmet,” “human grade,” “natural,” “or even “organic” (as at this time there are no official rules governing the labeling of organic foods for pets).

It’s easy to fall prey to such alluring terminology, and you have to consciously guard against it to avoid being fooled.

Reading the big words on the can or bag is not enough, though there is some governance as to what a food can be called. I will go into that below. For the moment, I want to encourage you to engage in that all-too-contemporary activity so many shoppers hate: Label Reading.

Always read the label before you buy food for your dog. There’s nothing wrong with starting your search by what’s on sale, but don’t let it end there. Read the fine print.

If you’re like me that means you need to carry reading glasses with you, because sometimes that fine print can be really fine.

Pet food labeling in the U.S. is regulated primarily by the FDA, though states can also enforce their own labeling regulations. Many states have adopted the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) pet food rules. These are more specific than the FDA regulations, and cover aspects of labeling such as the product name, the guaranteed analysis, the nutritional adequacy statement, feeding directions, and calorie statements.

Since AAFCO rules dictate that ingredients be listed in order of predominance by weight, the first ingredient you want to see on the label is a specific meat source, such as beef or lamb or pork. But there are other factors as well that you need to be aware of.

The Product Name

First, look at the name of the product. You can’t afford to be lazy about this. There is a big difference between “Beef for Dogs” and “Beef Dinner for Dogs,” for example. They sound like the same thing, don’t they?

What difference does it make whether a dog eats the beef for breakfast, lunch, or dinner?

None at all. But including a qualifying descriptive term such as “Dinner” allows the manufacturer to put out a product containing only 25% beef, as compared to the 95% required for “Beef for Dogs”!

Other qualifying descriptive terms to watch out for: “Platter,” “Entrée,” “Nuggets,” and “Formula” are common. Like “Dinner,” these mean that the product may contain as little as 25% meat.

(The 25% and the 95% figures are exclusive of added water and condiments; when these are taken into account, a food like “Beef for Dogs” may be as little as 70% beef, while the “Beef Dinner for Dogs” may only be 10% beef.)

Now, don’t jump to the conclusion that the 95% foods are better for your dog. They may be, but only if you balance the meat with a similar quantity of vegetables. That’s not a no-brainer, by the way. Feeding raw is the best way I’ve found to get a good protein content without hassle; next best for protein content is pasteurized dog food.

What about “Chicken ‘n Liver Dog Food”? If the product name contains a mix of meats without any qualifying descriptive term, the two named meats together must comprise 95% of the weight exclusive of water and condiments, or 70% of the total weight. If the product contains more of one of the meats than the other, that one must be named first. Okay, that’s reasonable, right?

Now, I shall tell you about the 3% rule. This rule states that any ingredient listed in the name of the product must be present in an amount not less than 3%. So... our “Chicken ‘n Liver Dog Food” is likely 22% chicken and only 3% liver.

Take my hand, for we are about to wade into treacherous territory.

While it may be fine that “Chicken ‘n Liver Dog Food” probably contains only 3% liver, what about “Dog Food with Lamb”? Pay attention here! Because the 3% rule applies to anything following the word “with.”

So... while “Lamb Dog Food” must contain 95% lamb, “Dog Food with Lamb” may be as little as 3% lamb! And no other meat.

What if the product name is “Lamb and Potatoes for Dogs”? The 95% rule applies only to meat, so in this case the product must contain 95% lamb. Plus, you get at least 3% potatoes. Okay.

But watch out! Because the 25% rule doesn’t work this way. If you pick up a can labeled “Lamb and Potato Entrée for Dogs,” all you know is that the combination of lamb and potatoes equals 25% and that lamb is the predominant product. It could be 13% lamb and 12% potatoes.

Tricky, isn’t it? Do you think maybe the pet food companies might have influenced that decision, to make it harder for an intelligent person to make sense of the labels? I don’t know, but the question does indeed occur to me.

My experience is that it isn't easy to find dog foods without descriptive qualifying words or the word "with." And when you do, unless you're in a specialty pet food store, the percentages of moisture listed on the cans don't always comply in any discernable way with the AAFCO guidelines. Still, if you pay attention you're likely to end up with a better product than if you don't.

But... Wait! Don't Stop There – The Proof is In the Ingredients List!

Whew! Now you know how to identify what meat is in a can of dog food, right? Wrong! Why? Because meats may be included without being mentioned in the product name. If your dog is allergic to chicken, for example, you'd better put those glasses on and check out the ingredient list on that can of beef or lamb or pork dog food.

What Are "Flavors?"

Now, we come to the question of "Flavors." I bet you think that's one of those undefined terms, right? Nope. There is an AAFCO rule governing flavors. No specific percentage is required, but a product must contain an amount sufficient to be detected by an animal trained to prefer specific flavors.

So... is beef flavor beef? It is more likely beef meal (more on that later), beef by-products, or a "digest" (a meat derivative treated with heat, enzymes or acids to form concentrated "natural" flavors). Whey is often used to add a milk flavor.

Many labels claim "no artificial flavors." On the "plus" side, artificial flavors and colors are rare in dog foods, other than the bacon flavor or smoke flavor added to some treats.

Reading Between the Lines

What about the non-meat ingredients in dog food?

The first non-meat ingredient to look for is the fats, which may be of animal or vegetable origin. The fats and everything that comes before them on the label constitute the major ingredients of the dog food.

Among the major ingredients will often be grain of some sort, including the corn and soy that have such negative effects on many dogs, are weighed dry, while meats contain moisture.

Some of the Awful Sounding Stuff is Actually Not So Bad... In Small Amounts

Do not get turned off if the label shows small amounts of by-products (heads, necks or stomach contents) from specifically named animal sources. By law, such by-products cannot include hair, horn, teeth or hooves or manure. But they can include organs, liver, head and feet (usually in the case of chickens), ovaries, and developing fetuses.

Any dog would gladly devour these items in the wild. A top-quality food will not include them, but if you buy a food that contains small amounts of by-products from specific meats it probably won't kill your pet. Though less desirable than meat, these ingredients

are high in natural vitamins and minerals. If your dog food contains them, it's likely your dog is getting a good supply of vitamins and minerals.

The Nitty Gritty: Protein, Fats, Minerals, Vitamins, Fiber, Good and Bad Grains

Protein: Make sure your dog's food has plenty of meat protein. A puppy food should be at least 28% protein. A pregnant or nursing mothers needs about the same amount, as does an adult dog performing heavy physical labor. Other than that, the adult diet should be about 18% protein. My experience is that this isn't easy to find in a commercial dog food. Indeed, 10% is unusually high.

The second source of protein in most commercial foods with names that include qualifiers like the word "Dinner" and its cohorts (see above) is "meal." Meal is a cooked-down product, less costly than meat. Contrary to popular belief, meal from an identified source (chicken, turkey, duck, lamb, salmon, lamb, beef, etc.) is not inferior to meat. In fact, meal is significantly more protein-rich than meat. Be wary of meal from an unidentified source, however, including "poultry" or "fish" meal (a quality food will state "chicken," "turkey," "salmon," etc.)

It is possible for your dog to get too much protein. Usually, any unused protein will come out in the urine and so will not do the dog any harm. However, if your dog has kidney problems, too much protein has the potential to cause kidney failure.

Much more likely if you feed processed food is that your dog will not get sufficient protein. I have not seen a label on any canned, semi-moist or dry food with qualifier words like "Dinner," "Entrée," etc. that showed more than 10% protein.

Vitamins and Minerals: When it comes to minerals, calcium is the first mineral most people think of. Yes, your dog's diet must provide it for strong teeth and bones. But just as for humans, an imbalance or too much calcium can lead to bone and joint abnormalities.

Other important minerals include magnesium, phosphorous, potassium and sodium. And then there is a long list of essential trace minerals.

Dogs require a full complement of vitamins and minerals. The industry standard "Nutritional Adequacy Statement" on the label lets you know that some standard of vitamin and mineral balance has been achieved.

Most dog foods do contain a balanced level of vitamins and minerals. Look for the words "Complete and Balanced." If you don't see them, back away. If you do see them, look for this statement: "Animal feeding tests using AAFCO procedures substantiate that (name of product) provides complete and balanced nutrition." Such a food has actually been tested on animals and found to be adequate.

There is a second, less impressive statement that also qualifies for use of the words “Complete and Balanced”: “(Name of product) is formulated to meet the nutritional levels established by the AAFCO Dog Food Nutrient Profiles.” A food bearing this statement has not been tested directly on animals.

Which would you choose for yourself? Give that to your dog. Look for the word “tests” in the nutritional adequacy statement.

Do NOT use a mineral supplement unless your vet recommends it, as an overdose of minerals can lead to serious health problems.

A good supply of minerals is important. However, it is equally important that the minerals be highly absorbable into the system. “Chelated” or “sequestered” minerals are three to ten times more easily absorbed than minerals in other forms. Look for those terms. Avoid foods with the terms “oxide,” “sulfate,” and “phosphate,” as these generally indicate poorly absorbable feed grade supplements.

Fats: Dogs love the smell of fat. And so, the pet food companies spray their food with fat.

Fats are essential to life. They play an important role for the reproductive organs, kidney function, and absorption of the fat soluble vitamins A, D, E, and K. Fat also helps keep a hard working dog hydrated.

Unlike humans, dogs metabolize fats well. They don't suffer from diseases related to high fat intake. Does that mean you should serve up a high-fat meal? Since fats are high in calories, over-ingestion can lead to obesity. But too little fat or low-quality fat can lead to a coarse, dull coat and dry, itchy skin, among other problems. Dogs need a food that is ten to fifteen percent fat.

What kinds of fat your dog ingests is also important. Avoid products containing tallow or lard. Look for products containing omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids in a ratio of at least seven to one. These are plentiful in fish, flaxseed, poultry fat, safflower and sunflower oils and vegetable oils.

Grains: You want to make sure there is no soy in your dog food. Nearly all soy on the commercial market is genetically engineered, and dogs, like people, tend to have a problem with it. Many are allergic to it. Eating soy could be really uncomfortable for your dog.

No quality dog food will have a grain as the first ingredient. The best contain no grain at all.

Indeed, as mentioned above, even a listing as the third or fourth ingredient can be misleading, as by dry weight there will be more grain than meat. Watch for separate listing of corn and corn gluten, and/or corn gluten meal; together, they add up to a lot of

corn. Corn is high in sugar, and is probably a prime contributor to the rising rates of canine diabetes.

Another thing to watch for is the word “fines.” Grain fines, or cereal food fines, are inexpensive by-products of processing and can contain sugar left over from the manufacture of breakfast cereals. You don’t want to be feeding your dog Lucky Charms!

Fiber

Fiber is important in your dog’s diet. A good dog food will be between 2 % and 5 % fiber. Too much fiber might upset your dogs stomach. It can cause loose stools, and some accidents. For an overweight dog, your vet will probably recommend a diet high in fiber to help your dog feel fuller.

Chemicals to Watch Out For

Make sure there are no chemical preservatives listed on the label. Look for words like ethoxyquin, BHA or propyl gallate. If you see these on the label, take heed.

Ethoxyquin is used as a preservative in many pet foods, and may be hard to avoid. You can find tons of information on it on the Internet. Note that ethoxyquin can also show up on labels as just “E,” but it is not vitamin E. Also, it is often added to fish meals as a preservative; if added to the raw fish before processing, it most likely will not appear on the label. Another good reason to avoid fish meal.

If you’re open to exploring the possibility of making at least some of your own dog food, here’s a source you might want to check out for delicious dog-appreciated recipes:

<http://petwrites.com/revealed>.

(If the links don’t work, copy and paste them into your browser address bar.)

DANGER: Foods to Avoid

Don’t feed your dog anything containing **onions or mushrooms**, as these are toxic to dogs. As to **garlic**, in rare cases it has been linked to canine Heinz body anemia. However, garlic offers a slew of health benefits, and in small amounts is probably fine.

Avocados are toxic to dogs in large amounts. Tomatoes are okay but keep your dog away from **tomato plants**, as the leaves are highly toxic to dogs.

Dogs do not do well with **grapes or raisins**. No one seems to know why, but dogs that eat raisins or grapes in any quantity can react with kidney failure, and even death.

Other fruits to keep your dog away from include whole persimmons, peaches and plums. It’s not the meat of the fruit that poses a danger, but the seeds, which contain elements that can cause inflammation or poisoning. The seeds themselves have been known to create intestinal blockages. Feed slices if you like, but don’t give the whole fruits, as most dogs will eat the seed, too.

Do not feed your dog **nuts**, as they are high in fats and not easily digested by dogs. Especially dangerous are **macadamias**. **Almonds** can also cause problems, too. **Peanuts** are legumes, not nuts, but they are subject to mold and can create intestinal havoc for your pet. In general, it's just best to keep your pet away from nuts.

Chocolate is another no-no. A little bit probably won't hurt your pet, but then again it might. The reason chocolate is so bad is that it contains **caffeine** and **theobromine**, two stimulants that can build up in your dog's body and even cause death.

Where Should You Shop for Dog Food?

What you will find in supermarkets is commercially produced dog food. With all the recalls lately, a lot of dog owners are cautious about buying these. So where else can you look for dog food?

The first place you can look are pet stores. Some pet stores carry brands not available in the supermarkets. Another bonus is that some of these stores train their employees on dog food and they should be able to help you with any questions you have. And specialty dog stores are springing everywhere to provide foods from smaller manufacturers.

The Internet will show you a world of natural and organic pet food that can be ordered and delivered right to you. Sites provide detailed descriptions of the foods and the ingredients. The only downside is that sometimes these foods can be costly, and there is always the possibility your dog might not like the new food you purchase. After all, the final decision does come down to your dog's tastes. You might want to purchase the smallest size of dog food available to test on your dog.

Though there are many dog lovers out there who gasp at the thought of using pre-made dog food, there are still many dog lovers who swear by dry dog food. There are many, many brands of dog food out there, and many manufactures. No one will be able to tell you what the best one is. You and your dog will have to work together as a team.

You can do your part by carefully reading the labels on the food you are going to buy. Remember, cheaper is rarely better. A lot of times the cheaper brands add a lot of fillers and use cheap ingredients. The more premium dog foods tend to use better ingredients with no fillers.

Your dog is going to do his part by letting you know whether he likes the food you provide. If you are switching food for any reason, make sure to give your dog a transition period. Going cold-turkey from one brand to another could upset your dog's stomach.

Spend a day or two adding it to the brand you already use, giving more new food and less of the old food each day until your dog is completely switched over. This transition can take a week or so, but it is in the best interest of your dog.

Chapter 5 – What About Feeding Raw?

The flood of dog food recalls over the last few years has prompted ever larger numbers of dog owners to consider turning to feeding a raw diet. Those who have chosen this path rave that their animals no longer have “doggie breath,” that their eyes are bright and their coats thick and shiny.

The raw diet for dogs is not a new trend. It is as old as animal life itself. Proponents often credit its origin under human administration to the pioneering work of Juliette de Bairacli Levi, who published three books on herbals for dogs in the 1930s, combined in 1955 into *The Complete Herbal Book for the Dog*.

The current leading version of the raw diet for dogs is Dr. Ian Billinghurst’s BARF Diet. (Not an appetizing acronym, if you ask me! But Dr. Billinghurst didn’t.) The acronym stands for “Biologically Appropriate Raw Foods,” though others seem to prefer “Bones and Raw Food.”

Basically, the raw diet attempts to mimic the diet your dog would eat if he were out in the wild. In the BARF Diet – and this comes as a surprise to many people – raw meat and bones predominate (60 to 80%), but there is also a generous supply of fruits, vegetables, eggs, dairy foods, and even offal. No grains.

Oh, so you thought dogs were carnivores? Not really. Cats are true carnivores, and must get their protein from an animal source. Dogs, on the other hand – as you well know – will eat anything as long as it tastes good to them. They are opportunistic scavengers, somewhere in the gray area between carnivores and omnivores.

On the other hand, another raw diet model, known as the “Prey model,” recommends just meat, including organs and bones, with no other supplementation.

Which is the best model for your dog? You have to decide that. Consider, however, that supplementation with non-meat foods mimics more closely the conditions found in nature, where dogs eat prey whose stomachs tend to be filled with vegetable matter.

Is a raw diet better than a top-grade conventional diet?

As mentioned above, the protein content of raw foods is considerably higher than with foods that have been heated to high temperatures. Most of the argument against feeding raw seems to center on lack of balance, the assumption being that the raw food does not include vegetables and fruits. Some raw foods do, and some do not. Your dog needs fruits and vegetables, so keep that in mind when you shop.

A recent 12-month study at the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine showed improvement in stool and coat quality in a group fed raw rabbit, as opposed to a control

group fed a high quality commercial diet. Offsetting this positive note, however, was the death of one dog and negative changes in others that indicated taurine deficiency.

So... there are no guarantees in life. Taurine is an essential amino acid found in meat, milk, and eggs; it may have been that the rabbits in question were deficient in this vital element.

Though only minimal clinical research into raw diets has been performed so far, I'm sure we can look forward to more in the near future.

Should you decide to feed an all-raw diet and have the time to prepare your dog's food yourself, you might want to get your meat from a butcher to ensure freshness. If you're really concerned about your dog's health, buy organic hormone-free meat, preferably grass-fed as opposed to grain-fed. Start off with just meat for a few days when you are switching your dog. Once your dog has settled into this you can start adding some bland veggies, such as carrots. You should use a blender or food processor for your veggies.

It may be easier to get your dog to eat his vegetables if you liquefy them and mix them into the meat. Pureeing with a blender will break down the cell walls, which your dog can't digest anyway. Once those walls are broken down, your dog will get all the vital nutrients and enzymes it needs.

An easy way to get greens into your dog's food is to buy wheat grass tablets at a health food store. The tablets I buy recommend seven a day for a human; I use one twice a day for our little Terrier. If her poop gets runny, I ease up on it. If she's constipated, I make sure she gets it.

Do remember the food is all raw, and so are the bones. Never under any circumstances give you dog cooked bones. As I said before, they can splinter and cause internal damage.

After you try your dog on meat and vegetables, you can then start adding richer foods like eggs, cheese or yogurt. Once you have the hang of it, start adding different veggies to make sure your dog gets the best vitamins and nutrients.

The choice of veggies depends on you. If you have the time, mix it up a bit. Carrots, spinach, chard, squash. Watercress and mustard greens can help clean out your dog's intestine. Stay away from broccoli and cabbage, as they can give your dog gas. You might have to sleep with your windows open because of the smell!

Our dog loves frozen raw food. Since she's been eating raw, she has lost her doggie odor and her breath is sweeter. And she has more energy than ever. Her eyes have regained their sparkle.

However, she did not like the dehydrated raw food. I think it was more the texture than the taste that didn't appeal to her.

CAUTION: Feeding a raw food, you have to be really careful about hygiene. Don't let the food sit out before feeding or if the dog walks away during a meal. And be sure to wash the dog's dish between feedings to avoid bacterial contamination.

The Pasteurized Alternative: If you are not sure you can maintain the level of hygiene necessary for feeding raw, you might consider pasteurized food. It is minimally processed compared to normal processed foods, and therefore has a higher protein and vitamin content—though not as good as what you get with unpasteurized food.

The reason this is a better choice for people who forget to wash their dog's dish or who tend to leave food out is that pasteurization kills all the bacteria in the meat. It comes frozen; you can store it up to three or four days thawed in the refrigerator.

I know of only one brand of pasteurized meat for dogs, and it is expensive—twice the cost of frozen raw food where I shop. The brand is Stella & Chewy's. Their website says the pasteurization is done via pressure as opposed to heat.

I personally do not care for this option because of its odor. Fresh or frozen unpasteurized meat, on the other hand, has almost no smell. Our Terrier didn't like it, either. But your dog might. Every dog has its own unique taste buds.

What Kinds of Bones Should You Give Your Dog?

What kinds of bones can you give your dog? Chicken backs, necks, and wings, or turkey necks are high in nutritional value and soft enough for a dog to chew and eat. They also provide and exercise for your dog's jaw and upper body muscle.

Larger bones are all right, too, especially for a dog with a big mouth. Our little terrier has a terrific time with medium-sized lamb bones.

If your dog tends to inhale her bones, or if she's older dog and her teeth are not all that good, you can always grind up the bones and sprinkle it on her food. In fact, some proponents of the raw diet recommend ground bones over whole bones, as whole bones have been known to cause dental fractures, intestinal obstruction, gastroenteritis, and intestinal perforations.

I recall that my mom always told me it was okay to feed my dog beef bones, but not chicken bones, as they would splinter. But she was talking about cooked bones. Apparently, raw chicken bones are all right. (I'm still an old school thinker, though. I go for beef or lamb bones.)

It is recommended that you also give your dog some fish or flaxseed oil, rich in essential fatty acids such as omega-6 and omega-3 to support the heart and promote healthy skin and coat. These will also help to regulate blood pressure and reduce shedding – a blessing

to owners of dogs who shed constantly. And the fatty acids are natural flea control agents, too.

What Are the Benefits of a Raw Food Diet?

What changes can you expect to see as a result of feeding raw? First, as mentioned above, your dog's breath is likely to smell good enough that you enjoy those doggie kisses. His skin will probably be more supple, his fur thicker and shinier, his eyes brighter.

The raw food diet seems to be great for a dog's teeth. On his site, Dr. Billinghurst explains: "The processed or cooked foods eaten by dogs today are high in two substances; soluble carbohydrates and soluble calcium. These two nutrients attack a dog's mouth at every meal. In addition, processed foods do not contain the naturally occurring enzymes found in raw foods so necessary for clean teeth. Through the use of raw bones and a healthy Barf diet, your dog can have a sparkling smile!"

Finally, the raw food diet tends to change a dog's stool. The first few weeks it is not uncommon for a dog to go through a detox period, where you might see her stools being a little more mucous than before. However, once your dog gets through this detox period you will notice that her stools are smaller and degrade naturally into the ground.

Some people get nervous about handling the raw meat. Words like salmonella and e-coli come to mind. This is absurd. Every piece of meat you've ever eaten was once raw, and either you or someone else handled it. If the raw food you give to your dog is of good quality, it will be perfectly safe for them if you handle it properly.

Proper storage and handling are key anytime you're handling raw meat. For while the intense heat used in manufacturing commercial dog food destroys any potential bacteria, and while a dog's short intestinal tract makes bacteria less of a danger for her, raw meats may contain bacteria that are unsafe for dogs and humans.

Be sure you defrost the meat properly in small quantities, and keep any unused portions in the fridge. Wash the meat before serving it, and serve it promptly. Wash your hands afterward, and also the knife, the cutting board, and any other surfaces that came into contact with the meat. Use hot, soapy water.

Another reason some people are afraid of using this diet is because of the old wives' tale that the raw food will turn their otherwise calm and mellow dogs into the bloodthirsty hounds you might see in a scary comic book. Don't worry. You will not be programming your dog to be a killer in any way, shape, or form.

How to Learn More About Raw Feeding

If you are interested in going raw for your dog, I recommend the book *Going RAWR!* You can get it at <http://petwrites.com/rawr>. I also recommend you search the Internet to get a full range of information and opinions on the subject. Read more about the benefits of a raw diet. Read more about dog food.

If you're thinking you'd like to serve raw food at least part of the time but don't want to do the prep yourself, look online to find out whether there is a raw dog food store in your area. In San Diego, where I live, one such small chain, Dexter's Deli, carries ten brands of raw dog food.

An increasing number of holistic veterinarians are recommending a raw diet. If you talk to your vet about this, keep in mind not all vets are familiar with the raw food diet. As far as I know, it is not taught in veterinary school. So your vet might not be able to give you an informed or unbiased answer.

You might want to consider joining a forum for dog lovers. There are a lot of them online; all you have to do is Google "dog forums." You will be able to get opinions from people who have "been there and done that." Sometimes talking to other people who share your love of dogs makes things a lot clearer and more understandable than if you were to talk to an expert.

Whatever you do, don't let anyone bully you into deciding to provide a specific kind of food to your dog. To avoid that, it is important to look at all the pros and cons. You have to decide for yourself whether you want to try it out for your dog.

The raw food diet is not for everyone, nor is it for every dog. Some dogs will thrive on it, while others may not. It may not be the answer for you or your dog, but the benefits that come from it make it worth a try.

Chapter 6 – Is a Vegetarian Diet Healthy for Dogs?

More and more people are considering switching their dogs to a vegetarian diet. Many have already taken that step.

Why? There are many reasons. Some spiritual paths do not sanction meat eating, and people don't want to feed their animal companions what they themselves would not eat. For others, the move to vegetarianism is a health choice: many feel that even organically grown, hormone-free, antibiotic-free meat from grass-fed animals should be avoided because they over-stimulate the system and may lead to heart disease.

I have vegetarian friends who are in the process of switching their Irish Setter to a vegetarian diet. They are health professionals themselves and love their dog. They are being very watchful. Should they find that she lacks energy or shows any signs of malnourishment, they have agreed to switch her back to a meat diet.

There is no reason to believe that a dog cannot do well on a vegetarian diet. The primary challenge would seem to be protein, but non-meat foods, especially beans and grains do contain significant amounts of protein.

You can buy commercially produced vegetarian dog food in most pet food stores. Most of it is soy-based, however, and nearly all soy today is genetically altered to be immune to Roundup. That means the soy farmers are using Roundup, and your dog will be ingesting this dangerous herbicide.

If feeding a homemade vegetarian diet fits with your beliefs and your schedule, this is an option you might want to try. Do your research, though, to make sure you are providing your dog a sufficient complement of protein, minerals and vitamins, especially vitamin B-12. And watch closely to make sure your canine companion is thriving on the vegetarian diet.

It's all a matter of remaining conscious and aware, and responding accordingly.

Chapter 7 – What About Giving Your Dog Vitamins?

Vitamins are important to the quality of your dog's life. They play a role in regulating the body processes and protecting it from toxins in the environment. Vitamins act to break down proteins, fats, and carbohydrates to make them available to the body. They also work with enzymes and minerals to ease reproduction and aid in digestion, muscle and bone growth, and producing healthy skin and a warm, shiny coat.

If you get your puppy from a breeder, he or she will probably send you home with extra vitamins for your dog. Or your vet may give you vitamins on your visit.

It's tough to know whether your dog is getting a sufficient balance of vitamins in his food, whether commercial or home prepared (cooked or raw). So giving extra vitamins is something to look into.

Why Do Dogs Need Extra Vitamins?

Every dog has its own unique nutritional requirements. Since your dog didn't come with a sign around her neck telling you what those requirements are, you need a way to figure out whether there are deficiencies.

Yes, you could take your dog to the vet for vitamin testing. But you really don't need to do that in most cases.

Puppies and older dogs especially need vitamin supplements because they are not eating as much food as they used to and could be lacking certain nutrients.

One way to determine what vitamins your dog may be lacking is to know what body systems each vitamin can help with:

- Vitamin A is for the skin, hair and eyes. If your dog has flaky or irritable skin or night blindness, it can help. Found in liver, fish liver oil, vegetables, and dairy products. Too much can be dangerous. Give your dog a carrot to chew on.
- Vitamin B Complex gives you a balance of B vitamins. B vitamins play a role in a number of important body processes. Most vets recommend daily supplementation. For a large dog, you may need a high potency stress formula B complex.
- Vitamin C is an antioxidant. It's water soluble, but excessive doses can cause flatulence and diarrhea. Your dog's body produces vitamin C, but under stress or when ill it may need supplementation. Vitamin C works with vitamin E to potentiate its antioxidant effect. Some vets recommend giving 250 mg. twice a day to dogs under two years of age, and 500 mg. twice a day to older dogs.
- Vitamin D is your dog's bone and teeth. This vitamin can be especially helpful for muscle loss and rickets or if your dog is losing teeth, and for breeds that are highly susceptible to arthritis and hip problems. While humans get vitamin D from sunshine, dogs cannot. Supplementation is recommended.

- Vitamin E is an antioxidant vitamin and anti-inflammatory. Many dogs are deficient in this vitamin. It is good for your dog's heart and arteries, and can help prevent cataracts and blindness and heal degenerating bowels. Some vets recommend 400 IU daily for dogs under two years old, and twice that for older dogs.
- Vitamin K is the blood clotting vitamin, found in fish meal. Your dog's body can manufacture it, and generally no supplementation is needed. An exception would be if your dog has eaten rat or mouse poison, which causes hemorrhaging. If you see signs that your pet has eaten such poison, call your vet at once. In this case it would be best to leave administration of the vitamin K to the vet.

Some people will argue that a good quality pet food will contain all the vitamins and nutrients your dog needs. Others will tell you that is not true, as the cooking process can kill essential nutrients. In any case, a doggie multivitamin will suffice unless your dog is showing signs of a particular deficiency.

When we talk about vitamins we do not just mean the pills that you can get from your vet. We are also talking about adding certain foods to their diets to make sure they are getting enough vitamins. If you are following the raw food diet, you want to make sure your dog gets a variety of vegetables to keep his vitamin intake up.

If you are not giving your dog a vitamin or supplement, take a good long hard look at him. If you see that he is losing weight, has skin lesions, or is losing his fur, he might have a vitamin A deficiency. Vitamin D deficiency is apparent when your dog loses some of his muscle tone.

If you notice your dog might have a vitamin deficiency, talk to your vet to find out for sure. Your vet may suggest that you begin to give your dog the necessary vitamin or that you change his food.

Chapter 8 – Is It Okay to Give Your Dog Treats?

Treats! Who doesn't love a treat? Dogs are no exception to this rule.

There are, of course, some simple pros and cons to giving treats.

- Pros: Dogs love them! And they make training so much easier.
- Cons: Treats are extra food. Even if they contain healthful ingredients, they also have calories and can contribute to weight gain.

Are treats essential to training? No. There are other rewards you can give for a job well done. A show of special affection from the “alpha dog” (= you) ranks pretty high with a dog. But given in moderation, I see nothing wrong with treats. You should, however, make sure the treats you give contain only healthful ingredients.

Especially around the holidays, pet stores are chock full of special doggie treats. Those rawhide bones can be tempting, tiny ones for the wee breeds and large ones for the big dogs. There is currently quite a lot of controversy around rawhide treats.

The pros? They give your dog something to chew besides your furniture and your slippers, and as they moisten in your dog's mouth they scrape away tartar and bacteria from the teeth.

Beyond the fact that rawhide chews can chip and be swallowed and create intestinal blockages, the cons seem to be mostly associated with rawhide chews manufactured in countries with weaker regulations on manufacture. In some cases dogs have become ill from eating treats containing harmful bacteria, antibiotics, and even arsenic (as a preservative).

Many people give their dogs rawhides treats and never have a problem. If you do give them to your dog, make sure you have the right size bone for your dog. A large breed dog is not may choke on a small rawhide chew.

Better to treat your dog with raw bones, don't you think?

Another common commercially produced treat is pigs' ears. These are real porcine ears. Dogs adore them, but since they are very high in fat they should only be fed rarely, as a special treat. Pigs' ears are highly digestible, so there is no worry about splintering or intestinal obstruction.

If you buy pigs' ears, look for a bag that says they are from the USA, as USA pig ears are the largest and most economical and also have consistently been found to be disease-free. (There have been instances of salmonella found in imported pigs' ears. Another good reason to buy American.)

Read the fine print before you buy. Don't pick them up just because they're cute if the label mentions non-specific terms like "meat meal" "bacon" or other non-natural flavorings. And watch out for sugars and bad fats, often found in commercial treats.

The best commercial treats for training are those that come in small pieces or can be broken into tiny pieces. The reason for this is that you are going to feed a lot of treats, and you don't want to contribute to obesity.

For training, a variety of treats can make a real difference. Just like people, dogs get bored with the same taste over and over again.

The best way to make sure the treats you're giving are made with wholesome ingredients is to make them yourself. It's not hard to do, and if you have kids you can make it a family project. For a supply of treat recipes to suit just about every persuasion, go to <http://petwrites.com/treatrecipes> . (If the link doesn't work, copy and paste it into your browser's address bar.)

Loyal followers of the raw food diet make their treats based on the diet. Some recipes are easier to make than others. The easiest are raw vegetables and fruits, like bananas in lettuce leaves or even raw carrots. Raw carrots? Yes! Dogs love the crunch and the taste, and the carrots are oh, so good for them!

Nearly every pet owner gives their dog treats once in a while. We do love our canine kids, and we like to see that wagging tail! It is a favorite way of showing our dogs they are special to us.

Why deny your dog treats? As long as you are not overdoing them, there is no reason for your dog to gain any extra weight from them. Just be sensible about what treats you give.

Chapter 9 – Can Your Dog’s Food Cause Allergies?

In a word, yes. Your dog’s diet can cause allergies.

Does this mean you need to keep a supply of Kleenex on hand? Hardly. Dogs do not have the same allergy symptoms as humans. They do not get stuffy noses, bad coughs, or watery eyes.

Dog allergies show up as skin problems (usually itching), rectal itching, chewing, and their coat losing its gloss. Some dogs even suffer from chronic ear infections as a result of allergies.

While allergies can be caused by many things, many are caused by food.

Just as an allergy to gluten might take years to show up in a human, you could have been feeding your dog the same dog food for years and see that just recently he has started showing allergy symptoms. Once the symptom comes to surface, though, they can worsen quickly. You may see your dog scratching its face on the carpet or scooting across the floor to scratch its rear.

Rectal itching can have other causes as well, including inflammation or infection of the anal glands. And skin disorders of all kinds can be due to environmental toxins or other causes. If a dietary change doesn’t do the trick, or if the condition becomes more severe, see your vet.

Keep in mind that it is not a brand of food your dog is allergic to, but rather the *ingredients* in your dog’s food. The most common food allergies are to beef, pork, chicken, milk, soy, and corn. If you find that your dog is reacting to a brand of dog food you bought with one of these ingredients, and then you buy another brand with the same ingredients, you are going to find that your dog is still allergic. Yet another reason it is so important to read the labels on your dog food!

The first step to figuring out whether it is your dog’s food that is causing her suffering is to take away the food you’ve been feeding and feed her only a diet consisting of things that she has never eaten.

This food elimination test diet should consist primarily of a single new source of animal protein and vegetables, and fruits, with some rice perhaps, a highly digestible grain. No wheat. No meat she has been eating.

You can try lamb or rabbit mixed with vegetables, a little fruit, and rice. Do not give any other food during this trial period. Do not give any treats, bones, table scraps, or even chew toys. Again, be sure the meat is one she has not been eating.

Keep the dog on this diet for a few days. Once the symptoms start to improve, go back to the original food for a few days. If the symptoms return, your dog is allergic to something in the food.

Your next act should be to return to the test diet, adding one new ingredient a week to rule out allergies.

For example, try chicken one week. If the symptoms continue to get better, you know the culprit is not chicken.

The next week, try beef. If the symptoms return, then it is safe to say your dog is allergic to the beef.

Do this test with all ingredients, though, because your dog could be allergic to a number of ingredients in its food.

Once you identify the culprit or culprits, you can look for food that is free of the ingredients you know your dog is allergic to.

If you are feeding your dog a raw diet, follow these same steps to identify the allergen, and then cut the offending ingredient(s) out of your dog's diet.

Yes, this takes time. It can take a while to discover the cause of your dog's allergies. *But isn't it better to get to the cause of the allergy than to medicate for symptomatic relief?* Especially considering that with most medications you run the risk of moderate to severe side effects.

You can always take your dog to the vet for an allergy diagnosis. The vet will perform a physical examination and a series of tests to determine what your dog is allergic to. This is a quicker way to get to the bottom of the mystery, but it can also be costly. And studies have shown that blood tests do not always show food allergies.

So... is the food trial diet the best approach? If your budget is limited, yes. If not, your best shot would probably be to try allergy testing. If changing your dog's diet based on the results doesn't solve the problem, it may be that your dog is allergic to a second or third ingredient that didn't show up in the allergy testing.

At this point you can try the dietary elimination approach, but of course avoiding the food or foods shown to be allergens in the allergy testing.

Another thing to keep in mind is that no matter how much you pay for your dog food, your dog may develop allergies to it. Granted, there are more reports of allergies in response to feeding the cheaper brands, due to the fillers included in cheap food. But on a case by case basis (the only basis that matters in the real world), a dog may be allergic to premium dog food.

If you notice your dog suddenly itching a lot, or chewing at their skin, first check for fleas. If you find none, it is likely that he or she has food allergies.

Don't wait for your dog to outgrow its allergies. It doesn't happen. If anything, they get worse with time.

If your dog is showing signs of allergies, you should begin the food test diet right away, and/or get allergy testing from your vet.

Chapter 10 – How to Help Your Dog Lose Weight

Is your dog overweight?

It's a common condition these days. You don't even notice it coming on, and then, POW! I hits you between the eyes. Your dog is FAT!

Excess weight is as bad for your dog as it is for you. Excess weight can cause extra pressure on your dog's joints and muscles and set the stage for arthritis. The extra weight can also lead to heart problems or diabetes.

Two Tests to Tell Whether Your Dog is Overweight

Here are two easy ways to know whether your dog has gained too much weight. You don't have to take him to your vet to find out.

- 1) The best way to check is to feel your dog's ribs with both hands. It should be easy to feel the ribs. If you can't feel them, your dog is overweight.
- 2) If you look at your dog from the side, the belly should be tucked up. If you look at your dog from the top, you will see a little waist. If your dog's belly hangs down and there you can't see her waist looking down from the top, your dog needs to lose weight.

While being overweight can be the symptom of illness, chances are your dog is just being overfed. Still, it's a good idea to take him to the vet just to make sure.

So... What Dietary Changes Do You Need to Make?

Before you rush out to buy the newest diet dog food, stop and review your dog's feeding habits.

For starters look at your feeding schedule. If you are still feeding your dog twice a day, you can cut that down to once a day – especially if she is older than a year. The schedule of feedings for your dog should go as follows: A puppy gets fed two or three times a day. From 6 months to a year, you should feed twice a day. Once a dog hits a year, she only needs to eat once a day.

Also, keep an eye at how much you are feeding. If you're feeding commercial dog food, read the guidelines on the food bag or can. If it says to feed your dog a cup and a half a day, for example, and you've been feeding three cups, STOP! Some people think they need to double the serving size because they're only feeding once a day. Not so.

Have you heard about the Green Bean Diet? Some say it helped their dogs to lose weight. This diet is fairly simple to follow. You simply cut back on your dog's food and replace it with canned green beans instead. Studies show that if you progressively feed about 10% less of your dog's food every 5 days and replace it with green beans, and then continue feeding that mixture, your dog will lose weight and stay healthy.

For example, if your dog eats three cups of dog food a day, by day five he will be getting 1.5 cups of food and 1.5 cups of green beans. Keep your dog on this until he loses the weight he needs to lose.

But... You should always double check though with your vet before starting any new food regimen for your dogs.

There is such a thing as diet dog food, but I recommend staying away from it. Such foods are usually loaded with fillers to keep the fat and protein levels lower than in regular dog food. These formulas might do more damage than good. You really are better off saving your money and either cutting down his food or trying the green bean diet.

What about those treats your doggie loves? Replace them with extra love. When you are trying to get your dog's weight under control, you should cut out all treats, including table scraps (a no-no anyway) and rawhide chews.

What Other Changes Can You Make?

Are you exercising your dog? This is easier with some breeds than others! Take your dog for walks. If you have a fenced in yard, make sure you are out there playing with your dog every day, tossing a ball around or throwing sticks for him to fetch. You have to get your dog moving.

You will get double benefit from exercising your dog. Not only will you see the weight drop off, you'll also be creating wonderful opportunities to get rid of pent up energy. Your dog will be calmer for it.

Chapter 11 – Doggie Doo Doo

Mother Nature has a favorite rule: What comes in must come out.

In the case of food, what comes out is not always pretty. Sometimes it can be downright scary, depending on what you're feeding.

If your dog's food contains a lot of fiber, you will know. His waste will be runny and large.

Poop smells. The smell can be slight... or huge. Depending on what your dog eats, the smell can vary from a little to a "oh my God, what the...!" odor that stays with you for a few minutes.

My dogs have had some memorably wicked poops! And thinking back over what they'd been eating, I came to realize there was a connection.

By watching what you feed your dog and making sure to feed a balanced diet, you can make the process of "doing their business" easier on them... and make the results easier on you.

One reason it is so important to keep your dog on a good feeding schedule is that it will put him on a good pooping schedule. It really helps if he is eating a balanced diet, too.

Regularity is another reason why you want to avoid table scraps, as the problems they create for a dog's stomach can make a dog have to go more often. The greasier the food, the worse it will be.

What if Your Dog Gets Diarrhea?

There are probably going to be times when your dog has intestinal problems. Diarrhea, for instance.

If your pre-vaccination pup gets diarrhea, call your vet right away. Diarrhea can be a sign that your pet has contracted a virus – the parvo virus, for example, which can be deadly to your pet.

If an older pet has diarrhea, you might want to wait it out a day or so. There are many reasons for the cause of diarrhea in older dogs:

- 1) Switching your dog's food without a transition period can cause stomach upset and diarrhea. Wait it out. She will adapt.
- 2) Have you been giving your dog table scraps? Stop immediately, because more than likely that is what is causing the diarrhea.
- 3) If your dog was outside he might have grazed on grass and sticks. That too can cause diarrhea.

The most common form of diarrhea is acute diarrhea. It can start suddenly and last a few days. As long as your dog is playing or otherwise acting normal, you can treat it at home. Put your dog on a bland diet. This can be about 1/3 cup of cooked meats, like chicken or boiled hamburger without any fat, along with 2/3 cup of white rice or oatmeal.

Stay away from oils and fats when your dog has diarrhea. Adding some plain yogurt can help to settle the stomach.

The key is to keep this up for a few days after the diarrhea has cleared up. If your dog is acting sick, is dehydrated or has blood in his stool, call your vet right away. The diarrhea could be a sign of worms or a virus.

My friend Sally had problems with diarrhea and her golden retriever. He got into the trash (another common cause of diarrhea) and from what she gathered, ate some soiled paper towels. He woke up at 2:30 in the morning having to go out, and then proceeded to wake up almost every hour on the hour having to go. She kept him on rice and chicken for the next two days, and he was back to normal in no time.

Dealing with Doggie Constipation Problems

If dogs can get diarrhea, then you'd better believe he can get constipated also. You can tell by watching whether your dog is constipated. If he is straining to poop, and when he does he produces small round waste, he is constipated.

The chief cause of constipation is lack of adequate water. Your dog needs constant water, especially during hot summer days. Make sure you always keep a bowl of fresh water out for your dog.

Another reason for constipation is waiting too long before potty breaks. Some people have observed that if they keep water from their dog during the day, the dog will not have to poop as often. That's true! But lack of water is also doing a job on the poor dog's intestines, and she will inevitably be constipated.

If you have changed your dog's diet or cut back on her food intake to help her lose weight, adding some vegetables into her diet will help.

You can also use a little bit of Metamucil. Use about half a teaspoon twice a day, and make sure your dog has plenty of water. Water is critical if you are giving Metamucil.

A final suggestion is to give your dog a little milk. Although most dogs are lactose intolerant, a few ounces might help them along and soften their stools. (This is sort of like a person eating prunes to maintain regularity.)

“Doing his business” is a normal part of life for your dog, just as it is for you. And just as there are times when your system gets a little whacked out, the same is going to be true for your dog. It may take a few days to get back to normal.

Most of the time, diarrhea and constipation can be dealt with at home. If you ever have a concern or feel that your dog might be ill, call your vet right away .

Chapter 12 – Do You Feed a Pregnant Dog Differently?

Let me preface this chapter by saying that unless you are planning to breed your dog, you should neuter or spay your pet before it has a chance to mate. There are far too many unwanted dogs in the world.

If you think about the numbers one breeding can lead to, you should be shocked: A litter of four (a small litter) repeated through just four generations will produce 5,460 dogs! And the next generation? 21,840.

That's a lot of dogs.

Unless you plan on opening a dog zoo the size of a small town, you will have no control over what happens to those dogs. The sad fact is that most of them will not find lifelong homes. They will end up on the street and be carted off to animal shelters, where the majority of them will be euthanized.

To avoid perpetuating this ugly scenario, I beg you, take responsibility for the situation before it develops. Have your female pup spayed before her first litter, and neuter your male dog before he has a chance to mate.

Do not buy into the idea that a bitch should be allowed to have one litter before spaying. She will never miss it, I guarantee you.

So... the only people who should be reading this part of the book are those who plan to be breeders.

That said, if you failed to spay your female and she has gotten pregnant, please read on. And please, don't do let her get pregnant again.

Canine Pregnancy

How can you tell if your dog is pregnant? There is no missed period. No mood swings. There's not even a home pregnancy test that dogs can take. Why don't they make them? Someone could make a fortune on them!

Not really. You see, a dog will go through the same hormonal changes whether she is pregnant or not. Her body doesn't produce HGC, so a blood test is out also.

There are signs you can look out for, however: swollen stomach and swollen nipples. Still, the best way to know is to take her to your vet for an ultrasound.

If you are unsure as to when conception took place, your vet should be able to make an estimated guess you can use as a guideline.

If you determine that your dog is expecting, it won't be long until you have a litter of little doggies at your home. A canine pregnancy only lasts 60 to 63 days. Sounds like a dream come true!

Feeding During Pregnancy

Your dog probably won't need any extra nutrients through out most of her pregnancy. In fact, she may lose some of her appetite and vomit a few times in the beginning, usually two to three weeks into her pregnancy. (Morning sickness!) Know that this will only go on for a week or so.

During the last three to four weeks of her pregnancy, you might increase her food slowly so that by the time she delivers she will be eating 25% to 30% more. That is not a big increase. Make sure you increase her food volume slowly, and try not to overdo it. You don't want her gaining too much weight.

A lot of well meaning pet owners start increasing the expecting mommy's food intake right from the start, thinking she will need the extra calories to grow their puppies. This is not true, at least not before the last few weeks of her pregnancy. That is when the puppies really begin to grow, and at that point your dog will need more nutrients and energy.

Some vets will recommend you switch her over to a growth/puppy food to provide the nutrients, especially calcium, for her growing family. Other vets will suggest a nursing/lactation diet.

It is up to you to decide how you want to feed her. You may want to feed her two small meals, in the morning and evening. If her pups are taking up a lot of room in her belly, she might not be able to eat it all at once.

Watch for Signs of Eclampsia, a Dangerous Condition

Those last few weeks, you might even decide to break the rule of not leaving food in her bowl all day. If you do, make sure to watch what she eats. A dog can develop toxemia or eclampsia (also known as milk fever, discussed below) late in her pregnancy if she isn't getting enough nutrition.

Some vets will have give your dog vitamins during pregnancy and others will not. Do not add any vitamins or minerals to your dog's diet on your own. It could be deadly to both the mom and the pups. Especially crucial is the amount of calcium she gets, as calcium can increase the chances of eclampsia following the birth.

Eclampsia, or "milk fever," is a dangerous condition that arises when the mother does not have the ability to move calcium into her milk without depleting her own supply. Increasing calcium supply before birth can bring this condition on.

The signs of milk fever are easily recognizable, but the condition worsens very quickly and will lead to death if not treated immediately with calcium IVs by a veterinarian. Your dog will seem nervous or restless, with tremors that progress to wobbling. Her legs and

other body parts, including her mouth, will stiffen and may appear paralyzed. GET HER TO THE VET IMMEDIATELY.

After recovery, she may need calcium supplementation at home. Do not allow her to nurse. You have to bottle feed the pups.

Exercise

A pregnant dog can and should exercise. A light exercise program keep her muscles toned and help to mitigate weight gain. Just as with humans, obesity in pregnancy can cause serious complications.

Delivery

Your dog will probably stop eating a day or two before she is ready to deliver. This is one of your first signs that delivery is immediate. You might want to keep some food out for her, though, in case she wants to nibble to keep her strength up.

Once she has given birth and all is well, you are going to see a remarkable increase in her appetite. She is nursing, after all, and lactation brings more demands on her body. Her nutritional needs will soon be three to four times greater than normal. This is huge! But it doesn't happen at all once.

Expect to see an increase over the 20 to 30 days following the birth, as the puppies grow and nurse more. By the time the puppies are a month old, your dog should be eating at least four times what she was eating before she was pregnant. Keep an eye on her. If she seems to be getting too thin, you can supplement with flavored canned food.

Weaning

Start weaning the pups six to eight weeks after birth.

To wean puppies, you have to help dry up the mother's milk supply. Withhold food for a day, and give her half of the water she normally drinks. The next day, give her only a quarter of what she was eating before she got pregnant, and half her water. From then on, give her all the water she wants. Over the next five days, slowly increase her food until she is eating as she was before her pregnancy.

By the time she is back on her pre-pregnancy diet, her milk supply will have dried up and the puppies will have been weaned.

Chapter 13 – How Should a Senior Dog Be Eating?

Remember that pup who bounded up to you the day you met? The one who rushed joyously to greet you when you came home at night, who chewed up your favorite slippers and managed to get into the garbage in spite of everything you did?

There comes a day when you are struck by the fact that that pup isn't a pup anymore. And a few short years later, it dawns on you that your dog is walking more slowly, has no interest in chasing cars or sniffing other dogs or fetching the sticks you used to throw.

Or maybe you notice that he tires out faster on a walk and seems to breathe a sigh of relief when he gets home and can curl up in his favorite spot on the rug. You might even see shades of gray coming through on his coat.

Your dog is entering the final stages of life. He, or she, is becoming a senior.

It didn't come on all of a sudden. Age is a cumulative thing. But it can come as a shock the day you realize it's been happening.

By definition, a dog is considered a senior when it enters the last third of its life expectancy. A breed that normally lives to the age of thirteen (golden retrievers, for example) becomes a senior at around 8 or 9 years old. A poodle, on the other hand, can be expected to live to the age of fifteen, and therefore becomes a senior at the age of ten.

There are other changes that will clue you in to your dog's age. Maybe she has grown clumsier. Perhaps he doesn't hear as well as he once did, or his eyesight may be failing. If you not signs like these, it is not a bad idea to see your vet to make sure that it's due to normal aging and not to something else you need to know about.

As your dog ages, it might be a good idea to cut back on the amount of food you're feeding to help prevent weight gain in those last years.

There are specially formulated senior diet dog foods on the market. Double check with your vet before buying one. Some of those diet foods or senior foods can contain more protein than your dog needs, especially if he is experiencing renal failure.

Preventing Constipation

One of the most common problems for senior dogs is constipation. The stomach and digestive system do not work as well as they used to. So make sure your dog's diet has plenty of fiber, between 3% and 5%. Also make sure he has plenty of fresh water. Water can help with the constipation.

Watch your dog when he is trying to "do his business." Is it harder for him than it used to be? If so, talk to you vet to find the best way to help your dog.

Easing Joint and Bone Problems

Keep feeding your dog supplements. Some breeds are prone to arthritis and hip problems as they age. To keep their joints healthy, most vets will recommend a daily supplement containing glucosamine and chondroitin.

Vitamin supplements are important as well, as an older dog's body tends to absorb fewer vitamins and electrolytes through the intestinal tract. And since older dogs tend to eat less, they naturally get fewer vitamins in their diet.

Another thing you can give your senior dog to help with the pain and limitations of arthritis is plenty of essential fatty acids.

Old Teeth

One of the most common problems owners of older dogs report is how hard it is to feed their dogs. A dog will suddenly stop eating altogether. This is frightening! Usually it turns out that the reason the dog refuses to eat is that chewing is painful. If this happens to your dog, you can try giving smaller kibble or moistening the food with water to soften it up a bit.

Sometimes, however, the reason an older dog refuses to eat is that it no longer finds the food as appealing as it once was. Try adding a little cooked chicken and broth or boiled eggs to the food. Some vets will suggest adding small amounts of bacon drippings or hamburger grease to your dog's food.

It is important to feed your older dog quality food, the best you can afford. The BARF Diet works well at this stage of life. The pureed vegetables go down easily, and you can grind the meat as well. The BARF diet supplies all the natural nutrients a dog needs, and some people say it has helped their dog gain back some youthful energy. It has been known to help with the arthritis and weight gain so common in older dogs.

Of course, not all seniors will take to the raw food diet. You have to try it out and see how it works for your dog. The benefits are great, so why not give it a chance?

Whatever you do, resist the urge to dish up table scraps for your senior dog. Some people do this out of a feeling of a desire to indulge their dog, knowing he is approaching the end of his days. While their hearts are in the right place, food scraps are really not a good idea. They could create more problems for your dog.

Watching your dog grow old is never easy. It may help to know that you are helping him through this stage of life by giving him the best diet possible.

A Final Word

As you can see, there are a LOT of opinions out there as to what is best to feed your dog. You really do need to give the topic serious thought and come to your own decisions.

In the end, it's just you and your dog... and it is your dog who will let you know what she likes to eat and is willing to eat, and what kinds of treats will motivate her to learn.

Whether you consider your dog a pet or a child, he or she is part of your family. You want to have many years with him, and when he does become a senior you want to make sure he is as comfortable as he can be. A good diet can help in a big way.

Reading labels is a fact of life for these days for anyone who cares about what goes into their own body. It's no different with what goes into your dog's.

You owe it to your pet to make sure he or she is being fed the best food available. As we said in the beginning, your dog depends on you to be his best friend. Friends don't let friends eat junk!

And... friends watch out for each other in other ways as well. You know your dog. If he is acting strange, you notice. Be on the lookout for uncharacteristic behaviors. If they are acute or if they persist, and you aren't able to identify the cause and treat your dog effectively, do not hesitate to call your vet.

Your dog deserves the very best.