

Getting Started with Raw Feeding

If you're new to the world of raw feeding then this page is for you! It contains all the information you need to get up to speed quickly and start raw feeding confidently!

Raw Feeding: The Definition

So what's it all about? A raw dog food diet is the process of mimicking a dog's natural diet, one they would find in the wild. It's no secret that dogs evolved from wolves, and their gastrointestinal systems are exactly the same as they've ever been, uniquely designed to digest their prey; bones, fat, muscle, flesh and organs – the whole shebang!

Dogs have been eating raw food as part of their natural diet long before man invented kibble, so why change things?

Kibble was created for convenience and not for the benefit of man's best friend.

Raw food contains roughly 75--85% fresh meat with the rest being a mixture of animal bones, vegetables, organs, and other natural ingredients designed to give your dog a healthy balanced diet.

Why would you feed raw? A raw diet introduces many health benefits such as an improved immune system, healthier teeth and gums, an impressively shiny coat and a longer life span.

BARF

BARF stands for Biologically Appropriate Raw Foods (but can also mean Bones And Raw Food). This is the easiest way to start with raw, and the route most people first go down. A BARF diet consist of a mix of raw meat, bones, fruits and vegetables carefully formulated to mimic a dogs evolutionary diet.

Prey (also known as Prey Model Raw, PMR) takes BARF to the next level by striving to feed whole prey whenever possible, instead of a pre-mixed meal. This includes animals whole deer, chickens, rabbits, turkeys and many other small mammals that dogs would hunt or scavenge in the wild.

How much raw dog food to feed

You should aim to feed a varied and balanced diet over the course of a week, alternating different meats wherever possible.

The ideal combination of food types are:

80% raw meat

10% bone

10% offal (organ meat, half of which should be liver)

Remember, these percentages don't need to be exact per meal or per day, just a target for the week.

Dogs need to consume 2-3% of their ideal (healthy sized adult) bodyweight per day, usually split over two meals. This figure may be different from one dog to another as you will need to adjust for their current size and activity levels.

If your dog is overweight then feed 2%, likewise if you dog is too skinny, you may want to increase this amount to 3.5%. Start with a percentage and fine tune it over time.

Don't forget that treats count towards the daily allowance so if you're doing heavy training sessions, you may want to compensate during meal time.

Making the switch to raw

The best way to switch your dog onto raw food is to just do it a.k.a. going cold turkey. Stop feeding your dog kibble one day, then start on raw food the next morning. You can introduce a starve day in between if you like to help clear the dogs system of kibble, starving will not harm your dog, in nature dogs are used to going a day or two without food after an unsuccessful hunt.

Don't be tempted to mix kibble in with the raw food, you're best off sticking with 100% raw. Meat and kibble are digested at different rates which isn't ideal for your dog.

For the first week or two, stick with one variant of food, a safe starter flavour is chicken. Mixing flavours so early on can lead to an upset stomach and unwanted trips to the toilet. Likewise, don't introduce offal (organ meat) too early, it's best to leave it 4-5 weeks then introduce it slowly.

If you have a puppy, switching is the same process, perhaps even easier. Puppies love raw dog food, and will very easily take to it. Start puppies off with three meals a day rather than two until they are around 6 months old.

Once your dog is happy eating raw food, you can look into other raw treats and snacks which your pooch will love. Just remember to keep a close eye on your dog whenever they're given bones as they can be a choking hazard, most dogs are fine however some do struggle.

Is raw feeding safe?

You bet it is! Follow basic food hygiene precautions and you can't go wrong.

One of the biggest concerns that dog owners considering a raw diet have is whether or not it's safe. We've been taught our entire lives that raw meat can contain dangerous pathogens like salmonella and e-coli, but how concerned should we really be?

The answer is not at all. Wild dogs have been eating raw meat for thousands of years, and all around the world people are feeding their domesticated dogs a raw diet without problem. The key is to follow a simple set of rules when handling raw meat.

Handling Raw Meat

I'm going to keep this section brief as it should be common knowledge, however it's still worth mentioning.

Stay clean. Wash your hands after handling raw meat, also clean off any surfaces, utensils and of course, the dog's bowl. Do anything you can to avoid spreading bacteria when working with raw meat.

Freeze right away. Once you've got your raw food home, freeze it as soon as possible, if it has arrived partially defrosted it should be okay to freeze again, if it has fully defrosted you may not be able to

refreeze it – check with your supplier. If you have acquired fresh meat, it is best to freeze it for at least three days to kill off any potential bacteria it may be carrying.

Defrost safely. When defrosting meat, don't just leave it on a plate on the worktop, or in the fridge, always keep it in an airtight container until you're ready to serve.

As you can tell, this is all just basic food hygiene, something you likely follow when cooking for yourself with raw ingredients, feeding raw to your dog shouldn't be any different.

Sources:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC339295/>

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1716752/>

<http://k9joy.com/dogarticles/doghealth01salmonella.pdf>

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