

DIET

RAW vs COMMERCIAL

Over the past decade due to the increase of potentially harmful additives and ingredients in our food we are becoming more particular in reading labels and questioning the safety of processed and preserved food. Research is revealing the need to eat healthy organic fruits and vegetables loaded with vitamins and antioxidants to avoid most age related illnesses. So it should be with our precious canine family members. If we won't eat it why would we want to feed it to our little dogs?

I have been appalled to read in USA that some pet food companies use road kill and euthanised animals in their pet food products. These euthanised animals have had a lethal dose of toxic material that will now be in the food can. Commercially produced foods are basically by products and whilst the labelling states the number of vitamins, minerals and goodies in it, the heat processing destroys any goodness. Since the advent of the commercial dog foods there has been an enormous increase in cancer, pancreatitis, dental caries, skin conditions, diabetes, heart disease and arthritis causing much suffering and premature death. What happened to the good old meaty bone and very rarely do you hear of cancer in a dog fed on raw meaty bones.

Whilst visiting a zoo in Melbourne I was eager to talk to the Dingo keeper feeding his Dingos raw meaty bones. I asked him why he didn't feed the commercial dog food, his reply, why would you not feed any dog his evolutionary diet? Why give cooked food and processed foods to animals that have systems to only assimilate raw? His comments made sense.

I have a Bichon Frise who sustained a nasty knock to his left elbow as a puppy. At 6 years he could hardly walk with the arthritis that had set in. His diet up to that point had been all cooked food. I didn't realise that by cooking his food it wasn't a whole lot better than the commercial food. Thinking I was doing my boy a favour I was robbing him of vital nutritional elements in raw food essential for his healing and longevity. Having read Dr Ian Billinghurst's book 'Give Your Dog a Bone', www.drianbillinghurst.com Bruin embarked on a raw food diet. Within a few months he had leaned and muscled up, his mobility increased and life was fun again. His raw food diet makes him a very young, old gentleman! His teeth at 13 years are as white and as good as puppy teeth. Bruin is a prime example of what to feed your dog.

What Not to Feed Your Dog

COOKED bones. The process of cooking bones hardens them and when your beloved dog crunches them up, dagger sharp splinters can potentially pierce any part of the gut on its way down. Bones also lose their goodness in the cooking process. They lose the essential fatty acids, fat soluble vitamins, enzymes and anti-aging antioxidants necessary for the health and vitality of your pet.

CHOCOLATE is lethal to dogs. It contains Theo bromine, which causes increased heart rate, central nervous system stimulation and constriction of the arteries. The clinical symptoms of chocolate poisoning are vomiting, diarrhoea, restlessness, excitability through to cardiac failure, seizures and death.

ONIONS are toxic to pets. Onions damage the red blood cells leading to weakness, anaemia and trouble breathing. My biggest mistake with my first dog, a Bichon called Teddy was to mix sautéed onions with his cooked mince every day. Teddy died too young at 8 years of a virulent cancer in his fatty tissue.

RAISINS AND GRAPES. Recent studies have found that raisins and grapes lead to kidney failure in dogs.

AVOCADOS. They are high in fat and can cause stomach upset, vomiting and even pancreatitis. The pit is also toxic and can get lodged in the intestinal tract leading to severe blockage.

ALCOHOL. It takes very little to intoxicate a dog. They will stagger, bump into things and hurt themselves. They will urinate uncontrollably. High doses can lead to death through suppression of the central nervous, respiratory and cardiac systems.

MILK. Unless it is lactose free pet milk or goat milk. Regular milk can cause diarrhoea, vomiting and other gastrointestinal symptoms as dogs lack the enzyme to break down the sugar in milk.

HAM and other salty meats are very dangerous to pets. In addition to being high in fat, they are also very salty which can cause serious stomach ache or pancreatitis. Ham plus any salty food will cause excessive thirst causing the dog to drink so much water it could develop the life threatening condition called bloat. This is where the stomach fills up with gas and within several hours may twist causing death.

CAFFEINE. Contains methylated xanthine that, like chocolate stimulates the central nervous system.

MOST PROCESSED COOKED FOOD. As already mentioned cooked and commercial food with suspect additives and by products can compromise the health and longevity of your pet. Especially processed food called **KIBBLE** this product is made with the nastiest of all byproducts.

SWEETS, CAKE AND ICE-CREAM. The sugar content can lead to obesity and high blood sugar causing diabetes.

By feeding my precious Bichon and Havanese their evolutionary raw diet I have benefited from a very friendly 2 edged sword. One, the diet is far less expensive than over priced commercial dog food and two, my dogs are healthy requiring very little veterinary attention (if ever) and live to be very young elderly dogs.

Recently I went into You Tube to look at some video clips of Havanese. I was saddened to see one clip highlighting the antics of Havanese puppies being introduced to their first meal. Their meal was kibble mixed with water to form a horrible guggy paste. This as mentioned before is the worst of all commercial pet food, the elements in this product do not enhance the health of your K9 but is extremely detrimental to its well being and is not a good kick off platform for puppies where little joints and bones are forming.

The first 9 months of a puppies life are crucial for development of all their systems. I have been so fortunate with two beautiful havanese litters. At 3 months when they go to their loving new family they are solid, robust little balls of delight. I allow mum to wean them when she is ready then their first meal is goats milk mixed with either natural yogurt or cottage cheese. Soon after, I introduce tiny pieces of raw chicken neck. I have heard too many sad stories from breeders who have difficulties with their bitches delivering their pups. My girl Twinkle has delivered her total of 13 pups in two litters with ease and I am convinced her delivery, milk capacity and health during the mothering process has a whole lot to do with her ongoing raw diet.

We are fortunate in New Zealand to have an abundance of natural products for our pets and our pups are soon devouring a product called Puppy Tukkathyme. This is a healthy multi-grain, berry and nut product with ingredients including, kelp powder, brewers yeast, herbs which we mix with free range eggs and honey. This is a fantastic starter for healthy bones and system development. A chain of pet stores in New Zealand called Pet Essentials dedicate a whole wall of freezer capacity for every type of raw meat including organ meat (loaded with vitamin K). They have raw puppy starter meat with molasses, meat combo cubes with fish, venison, beef to name but a few in the smorgasbord of healthy raw options which are free flowed, cubed, and minced.

In summary, it is so easy to get caught into the quick pick, fast foods such as 2 minute noodles off the supermarket shelf or quick drive through at Burger King offering a diet that will ultimately be detrimental to our health. So too do we easily grab the kibble off the shelf for our K9 family member. This comes with long term health consequences and costly vet bills. It makes good sense that if the dingo, coyote, fox, wild dog and wolf eat raw we should ensure that we imitate the diet of the wild for our little K9s as closely as we can.

Given our Havanese are omnivore (they need both plant and meat products in their diet) I have outlined below what I feed my treasured dogs. This has been my informed decision having researched the subject from a variety of sources, received advice from several vets including my local Holistic vet and drawing from my own health management background in relation to you are what you eat. I have seen the results in my own dogs, their robust little bodies, energy levels, easy whelping, optimum health, skin and coat integrity, great dentition and infrequent visits to the vet. A new dog food company called Natural K9 in NZ is producing sound, researched evidence and claim that the domesticated dog is only 2.02% different to the wolf in terms of its digestive system.

Before the advent of multibillion dollar pet food companies canine owners had no choice but to feed a diet closer to their evolutionary diet. In my view their pets were way better off.

Do feed (approximate 60%) the following: (ANIMAL PRODUCTS)

1. Raw meaty bones. Particularly chicken necks and wings. I consider chicken carcasses, necks and wings the most important meaty bone. I use kitchen scissors to chop them up into bite sized pieces for my tiny puppies until they can handle a whole one. Chicken bones are a complex source of a wide variety of nutrients. They are nature's source of minerals, proteins, essential fatty acids and fat soluble vitamins. I am particular where my chickens come from and I freeze on trays and free flow into plastic bag all raw chicken components as a safety measure against Campylobacter and Salmonella. NEVER FEED YOUR DOG COOKED BONES. All the valuable nutrients are lost and the risk of hard cooked bone splinters piercing the gut is very high.
2. Raw meaty lamb, beef and rabbit bones. I tend to shy away from lamb shanks and venison as the bones are hard and with game the bones tend to be glassy. Any bone from a young animal will be softer but the good old canon and meaty beef bones are great for grinding and exercising your dog giving them an enormous amount of satisfaction and pearly white teeth until the end of their days.
3. Organ meats such as liver, heart, chicken giblets, brains, tongue, ox cheek, green tripe (not bleached) and kidney are essential for Vitamin A, E, D, K, C as well as the B Vitamins. The nutrients in organ meat are essential for healthy skin, reproduction and temperament. As organ meat is rich, I add 10% only to my dogs diet a maximum of three times a week. Liver is essential for pregnant and nursing bitches every day in the 10% ratio. You do not need to be concerned with hydatid cysts as long as the liver is fresh and sold for human consumption from a butcher or supermarket.
4. Eggs. Especially the yolk. The egg is regarded as having the perfect protein. It contains essential minerals, vitamins, fatty acids and includes excellent levels of calcium; you can also crush up the shell and throw it in! I feed my puppies raw eggs to assist in vital bone growth. Avoid calcium additives; go for the calcium source in food. My dogs regularly get eggs. Foxes and wolves raid nests to get this vital food.
5. Yoghurt. I mix yogurt with pulverised green vegetables. Plain yoghurt with a living culture is a live food. It is like the wild dogs natural food, faeces. It is full of living and dead bacteria. The bacterium present in yoghurt is friendly. Ensure you buy the plain unsweetened yogurt with the acidophilus, bifidus and casei. I sweeten with a little honey or stevia (natural sweetener)
6. Cheese and cottage cheese. Cottage cheese is great in wound healing and building muscle. It is easily digestible and high in protein. I have both yoghurt and cottage cheese in the fridge for my tribe. Hard cheese, although processed is fine in small amounts. I use as bait for show training, obedience or agility.

7. Fish. Any fatty fish such as herring, salmon and sardines are oozing with omega 3 essential fatty acids. Great for beautiful, lustrous coats. I often throw in some sardines into the vegetable mix for flavour along with yoghurt.

PLANT PRODUCTS (I feed approximately 30%)

The first part of the wild dogs meal having killed his prey is the pre digested stomach contents. This will be all manner of pulverised vegetation including grass, berries, fruits, nuts and roots. As mentioned above the dog is an omnivore, it will eat raw meat, vegetables, fruits, berries, and nuts, pretty much anything it can scavenge. The essential benefit of raw vegetable is FIBRE which is important in preventing and treating conditions such as obesity, pancreatitis and diabetes. The fibre in raw vegetables is soluble rather than the insoluble fibre in commercial dog food which has no nutritional value. Vegetables also contain a wealth of enzymes, vitamins, Omega 3 and antioxidants. Raw nuts, particularly cashews have huge anti carcinogenic properties.

1. Green leafy vegetables crushed up in juicer or food processor. Silver beet, spinach, leaves of broccoli and cauliflower. The stalks of the later two tend to be too bitter. Not too much cabbage or brussel sprouts. Spinach and silver beet is very good in the treatment of arthritis. Do not store your processed vegetable/fruit mix. Make just prior to feeding in order to take advantage of the nutrients. Puréed vegetables will lose their essential goodness very quickly.

2. Carrots, pumpkin, squash, kumara. Add to the mix but in smaller quantities. The bulk should be green.

3. Fresh and dried fruits but avoid raisins and grapes. I add half an apple to the food processor for sweetness.

4. Grains. The final 10% of the diet is devoted to grains. Every morning my pets receive a home made biscuit. Whole grains include brown rice, oat flakes, wheat germ, wheat bran, whole meal bread.

5. MSM. (Methyl Sulfonyl Methan) This additive has anti arthritic properties and acts as an anti inflammatory as well as a cartilage strengthener preventing hip dysplasia. Check with your veterinarian re. Dosage suitable for your dog.

An excellent puppy breakfast is to soak some porridge with filtered water overnight then add an egg and honey or molasses with a sprinkling of kelp powder and brewers yeast.

Oils: If there is one oil I would use as a supplement, it would be cod liver oil. I put a few drops in the food bowl with the vegetable mix. All oils are great for skin, coat, joint maintenance and repair. Other recommended oils are corn oil, Soya bean oil, safflower oil, vegetable oil, sunflower oil and peanut oil.

I achieve balance over many different meals rather than the same old same old day after day. Day one of a wolfs diet may be muscle meat, next day may be berries, the next day bones then fasting a day followed by vegetable mix from stomach contents. My little charmers like the variety offered. From a simple array of commonly cheap and available foods I devise a diet for my pets to keep them healthy, active, fertile and long lived.

Each person needs to make their own informed decision on the diet for their pets, for me the raw diet makes good sense.

Information Sources

Give Your Dog a Bone and The Barf Diet by Dr Ian Billinghurst www.drianbillinghurst.com

Keep Your Pet Healthy the Natural Way. Author Pat Lazarus

Holistic Veterinary Services. Tauranga New Zealand
info@holisticvets.co.nz