

Food & Nutrition Concepts & Guidelines

- The short version is: Our dogs & cats are SUPPOSED to eat raw whole foods, very similar to how humans are SUPPOSED to eat! If they (and we) ate right we would eliminate the majority of health and physical and *emotional* problems!
- The long version is broken-down and described in more detail in the sections below.

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Moisture

1. Water content of most terrestrial mammals (people & pets) is supposed to be around 60-75%; Our bodies are basically 60-75% water.
2. Water content of any fresh kill that your pet may eat (rodents, birds, small animals) or commercially packaged raw foods is the same as that of any living animal which is 60-75%.
3. Water content of plants can be 90%. This includes fruit & vegetables and grasses and even big oak trees!
4. Maximum moisture content of dry kibble bagged dog or cat food is 10-15%. Note that is the maximum, meaning that the dry kibble is likely *less than 10% water*.
 - Feeding a desiccated kibble causes long-term dehydration of the brain, heart, kidneys, immune system, skin, ligaments & tendons & intra-vertebral discs; every single body tissue.
 - Adding water to the dry kibble only helps a little, just like drinking a bunch of water at one-time doesn't help as much. Fresh whole foods and vegetables and any varmints your pet may kill and eat all have water molecules included in their individual cells, whereas drinking water or adding water to kibble just puts the water around the food or

soaked in around the cells but not actually in them. This matters because free water from the *stomach* enters the blood stream very quickly, in fact it's usually too fast for the organs and tissues and cells to absorb it from the blood stream and most of it just gets taken by out of the blood by the kidneys and bladder. Whereas water molecules that are already naturally incorporated in the cells of food are absorbed and processed more slowly by the *intestinal* cells and therefore enter the bloodstream at a slower rate that allows proper and more-thorough absorption into all of the organs & tissue cells.

Sourcing

1. The ingredients that go into commercially prepared pet food almost exclusively come from factory farms. Most cattle and bison or beef ingredients *may* have spent part of their life grazing in the field, but they likely spent the final weeks of their life in a miserable prison-like Confinement Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) (feedlot) eating GMO grain. Even while on pasture they received vaccines and dewormers and artificial hormones. When they went to slaughter it was a very stressful experience meaning that their meat will be full of excess cortisol (stress hormone). For chicken, turkey, pork, lamb, dairy and fish it is a much more miserable life. Most of these animals live their entire lives indoors in an over-crowded disease-ridden stressful warehouse (or fish pond). Chickens are de-beaked and pigs have their tails cut off because they will fight or chew each-other's tails due to stress. The overcrowding and stress leads to increased illness and disease, but the added antibiotics result in the artificial selection of much stronger and deadlier bacteria. And, all of these animals are fed GMO corn and grains and added hormones which end up in your pet's food.
 - One reason that the food-animals aren't given a better life and the reason that higher-quality ingredients aren't used is that our current Military-Industrial-Complex factory-farm food system does not provide any other option to find such a huge quantity of ingredients. And, if all of the left-over stuff (which I didn't even mention above) that people don't eat were not added into pet food then so much of the CAFO & warehouse-raised animals would go to waste. And, just in case you didn't know, these CAFO & warehouse-raised animals are the same exact meats & eggs & dairy that you feed your family from the grocery store.
 - It's a very legitimate argument that it would be wasteful to not add the scrap-parts (by-products) not consumed by humans into pet food. But that still does not excuse the miserable lives that these food-animals live.
2. However, it is entirely possible to obtain meat and vegetable pet food ingredients from food-animals who had a happy & healthy life. Where I come from the most famous of farms where the animals lead a happy outdoor eco-friendly soil-building anti-global-warming life is Polyface Farms near Staunton, VA (See the documentary "Food, Inc."); to find a responsibly-sourced farm near you I recommend you search EatWild.com.
3. You may think that buying Organic is always a better option, but unfortunately the term 'Organic' has basically become a trendy marketing lie. Fifty years ago the term 'Organic' may have meant something, but not anymore. The USDA defines 'organic' as not feeding GMO feed and no herbicides or pesticides on the soil for the past 3 years, and that's it. So, organic

vegetables can be grown in plastic buckets and watered through plastic pipes and fed synthetic minerals and never touch real soil and are grown in such an unnatural system that bugs and pests and bacteria grow out-of-control. The vegetables are shipped en masse to huge processing and packaging facilities where any bad bacteria from one farm are mixed in with all of the other vegetables. Processors try to avoid bacterial contamination by washing the vegetables in bleach and chemicals. You end up with chemically processed vegetables that contain little-or-no nutrients, or you have lettuce that is sometimes contaminated with a deadly strain of *Salmonella*. And for the meat, maybe it isn't fed GMO grain, but it still leads a miserable unhealthy life. That's 'USDA Organic'.

4. Responsibly sourced and Human-grade may mean *something*, depending on who is making that claim, but is it enough? (It depends on the ethics & morals of that particular supplier.)
5. The only solutions I have found are: either grow everything yourself, or buy from a local private farm that you have visited and know and trust. Since watching the 2008 "Food, Inc." documentary I now only buy meat and eggs from places that I find on the EatWild website.

Completeness

1. No matter how much detail and time and effort you put into a home-prepared pet food diet, it is likely to be deficient in some vitamin or mineral or other nutrient. So it is best to rotate all of the ingredients often to help ensure that any nutrient that may be deficient one week is included at the expense of some other nutrient the following week. Do not be worried about week-to-week nutrient imperfections because it takes months for nutrient deficiencies to cause a problem (except in young growing animals), as long as you are providing a wide variety and changing it up often.
2. Those who promote commercially-prepared artificial dry kibble (the food in the big bag that you buy for your dog at the grocery store, the pet store, the farm store, your local vet, Chewy...) will claim that their foods are "100% nutritionally complete & balanced" and do not have any nutrient deficiencies, but that is a matter of perspective. I argue that the man-made synthetic vitamin and nutrient mix that they add to kibble may not be bioavailable or properly absorbed by your pet, and their "100% nutritionally complete & balanced" claims are usually based on recommendations from lab experiments instead of real-world results.
3. Those who promote commercially-prepared artificial dry kibble also say that their food has met AAFCO ([The Association of American Feed Control Officials](#)) guidelines for complete & balanced nutrition. There are 2 options for making this claim on the label: Either test the nutrient levels in a lab, which does not necessarily translate into bioavailability in your pet's body, or do a 6 month feeding trial and then test only 4 basic blood values and see if the animals are still alive at the end of the 6 months.
 - Side note: a one-year-old healthy dog can probably live for a whole year or more on the crappiest food, and can live for several months with absolutely no food at all!!! So, testing only 4 basic blood parameters after 6 months on a particular food is not very useful and absolutely does not paint a whole-health picture.
 - Most nutrient deficiencies are chronic (long-term) and take years to result in signs or symptoms.

4. You may say that your own diet is probably not properly balanced and you do fine (this includes me), but you have the ability to act on your cravings when your instinct is telling you that something is missing. And, are you certain that you're doing 'fine' on your unbalanced diet? "Fine", as in 100% perfectly healthy and full of vibrant energy? Unlike humans, unless your pet is a true hunter & scavenger he is not able to respond to his cravings because you feed him what you decide to feed. For example: if he is low on potassium he can't act on his craving for a banana. However, you can offer different whole foods and your pet may pick different ones based on different cravings at different times of the year. So, overall we need to provide a wide variety of ingredients and probably add a whole-food-based (not synthetic) vitamin supplement (I like Standard Process whole food supplements for pets & people) and mineral mix (I like Rx Vitamins Canine/Feline Minerals).

Species requirements

1. Dogs and people are omnivores. We can eat anything and survive, although artificial processed and high-sugar foods are certainly causing major chronic health issues for us and our dogs. Dogs are also truly scavengers. They can survive quite well as hunters, but also do pretty well when eating from a garbage dump.
2. But cats are a whole different story. Cats are strict carnivores. Strictly hunters and meat-eaters. All of the cats- not just the big cats on the Serengeti, but also your little housecat. The Domestic housecat basically evolved from a desert cat. The desert cat had a very limited water supply, but he received proper hydration simply from consuming rodents and amphibians because their bodies are 60-75% water. And, the big cats on the Serengeti will first eat the abdominal contents of their kill. They eat the nutrient-dense internal organs and partially-digested fermenting gut-contents of their kill, as well as bones and ligaments and muscle meat. But unlike what we buy in the grocery store, the bland low-nutrient muscle meats (chicken breast or hamburger) are not the first-choice or first-thing consumed by the big feline hunters. In fact, the muscle meat is sometimes left for the scavengers. The housecat eating a mouse will follow the same concept, but because his kill is so small we may not notice him eating the organs & guts first because he will often eat the whole mouse at once.

Genetic Lineage & Ethnicity

Anecdotally, Pacific Islanders eat a lot of seafood and tropical fruit, northern Europeans eat a lot of sausage and meat & potatoes. Some human societies have evolved over millennia to eat mostly fatty meat, others are strict vegans. Dogs are similar, although they aren't made to be vegetarians. Some breeds or genetic lineages are more tolerant of dairy or higher-fat meats or added grains than others; it depends on what their ancestors have been eating for the past few hundred years. But again, cats have little room for variance; they are strict meat-eaters, and by 'meat' we mean that they need to eat the bones and organs and almost all parts of their kill.

Your options

1. Feed mass-marketed FDA and veterinarian-approved dry processed kibble or canned food

2. Feed carefully prepared commercial raw (includes organs, bones, muscle, cartilage, digestive tract contents)
3. Home-cook or feed a raw diet that you create at home
4. Feed carefully prepared commercial gently-cooked whole foods
5. Allow your pet to be a hunter & scavenger (but this is devastating for song-bird populations ☹)

Packaging and Labeling Lingo

Before we further explore your options, you need to know how to interpret what you read on the packaging and the label, whether it be processed dry kibble in a bag, commercially-prepared frozen raw, or the foods you buy in the grocery store for yourself or for your pet's home-cooking.

1. First, the big words on the front of the package:
 - Natural: no defined or regulated meaning, purely used for marketing
 - Human-grade: no defined or regulated meaning, purely used for marketing
 - Wholesome: no defined or regulated meaning, purely used for marketing
 - How a meat-source is listed on the front:
 - If it just says "chicken", then it is required to have some (any) part of a chicken.
 - If it says "chicken meat", then it has chicken muscle meat, like what we eat from the store or restaurant.
 - If it says "with Chicken", or "Chicken Recipe", or "Chicken Flavor", then there may be only a sprinkling of chicken fat or even an artificial chicken flavor added to the food, but may not have any chicken at all.
 - Cage-Free, Free-Range, Grass-fed, Vegetarian-fed: all of these are very loose terms that mean much less than we suspect: Cage-free chickens may actually be even more crowded and more stressed than caged chickens; Free-range only means that there is an open-door on the huge building so they can go out if they want to, but they're usually too scared and too crowded to be able to get out; Grass-fed does not mean that they are out in a field of grass, they can still be grass-fed if someone brings cut grass to them in their warehouse prison; vegetarian-fed only means no meat, but it can still be GMO or a silage waste product.
 - "USDA Organic" is the only label claim that has any defined regulated meaning, although it doesn't mean all that much anymore. For vegetables this labeling only requires that the soil has not had chemicals applied in the past three years. But, all of the controversial chemicals used in the past probably persist in the soil and environment for decades-more-than three years. The Organic label for food-animals doesn't do much in my eyes, and many smaller eco-friendly truly-organic regenerative-agriculture environmental farms don't bother with the USDA Organic label because it requires too much time and expense in paperwork and inspections and certifications, even though their products far exceed the USDA Organic requirements. You need to personally know where your food comes from. This is another classic example of why I exclusively eat meat & eggs only from places I find on the EatWild website or similar farmers at local farmers markets where you can speak directly with the farmer.

2. Then, the ingredient label:

- The same rules about the front of the package in the preceding section also apply here.
- In the simplest terms, you want a food that is complete & balanced but with a short list of ingredients. The idea here is that more-wholesome less-processed ingredients retain more nutritional value and therefore require fewer added synthetic vitamins & minerals. A long list of vitamins & minerals strongly suggests that the primary ingredients don't have much nutritional value.
- Other than that, the ingredients are listed in order by weight or volume. Keep in mind that 'chicken' is approximately 75% moisture and therefore much heavier and more voluminous than any vegetable *meal* such as 'corn meal'. 'Meal' is simply what is left over after cooking off all of the moisture. So, 'chicken' and 'chicken meal' are basically the same thing, minus the water. The big difference is that the same amount of 'chicken meal' will weigh much less and be a much smaller volume than the wet 'chicken'. So, to make you think that chicken is the first and most significant ingredient, when in reality corn may be, they will list 'chicken' first, then maybe 'corn meal' next. But once it is all cooked down and all of the moisture removed you may actually have a larger amount of corn meal and much less resulting chicken meal. In terms of a common metaphor: putting 'chicken' and 'corn' on the ingredient list is fair, like comparing apples to apples; and comparing 'chicken meal' to 'corn meal' is also like comparing apples to apples; but comparing *wet* 'chicken' to 'corn *meal*' is like comparing apples to oranges!

Dry processed kibble- if it is so terrible, why is it so popular?

1. As a short summary, Modern America started the transition to processed canned and dry pet food in the early-1900's as we came under the influence of Big-Business and the transition was all-but solidified during World War I and/or maybe WWII when meat and tin (for canning) were rationed. This is also when Americans were starting to mass-migrate from rural farms into cities where dogs & cats could not easily hunt for food and our leftovers that we fed them started becoming less-wholesome and no longer fresh from the farm.
2. More recently, as processed pet food manufacturers have been consumed by larger-and-larger multi-national conglomerate corporations, they have gained incredible financial influence (through grants and donations and contributions) over governing bodies such as the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), US Food & Drug Administration (FDA), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the post-secondary schools of veterinary medicine where all veterinarians are trained to become doctors and where most research is conducted. So, the processed food manufacturers have great influence on veterinary students, the veterinary governing bodies, the federal & state governments, published research, and the entire veterinary industry. The icing on the cake comes next: Veterinarians, like all state-licensed professionals, are required to obtain a minimum number of hours of approved Continuing Education (CE) annually. For any education veterinarians may seek about nutrition, our options are almost exclusively provided by the large conglomerate processed pet-food manufacturers (Big Kibble). And, it is obviously in the best financial interest of those

manufacturers to convince all veterinarians and the public that their product is superior and that any non-commercially processed food (home-cooked, or commercially prepared raw) is a *dangerous negligent* choice.

3. However, the vast majority of people cannot afford raw food or do not have time to prepare pet food at home. Although I find dry processed kibble to be very unnatural, I fully understand that it is the only real option for most people. I have tried several times to find a brand of dry kibble that I approve of, but no matter what I find that I like about a particular brand, there is always something undesirable in the same brand.
 - I like what I have read about Orijen, Acana, Anamet dry kibble brands, although they too are not perfect. I know people who have been very happy with feeding Orijen & Fromm & Canidae to their dogs for years.
 - Additional resources for selecting mainstream processed dry or canned food:
 - NOTE: I do not agree with all of the ratings and results on these sites, and often the following sites may disagree on the quality of a particular food, but I still think they provide good information for you to use to form your own opinions.
 - www.dogfoodadvisor.com Years ago I wasn't a fan of information on this site, but I feel the editor's research and opinions have become more holistic and open-minded and I now think this site is a good resource; but remember it is still just an opinion that we may not always agree with.
 - www.dogfoodinsider.com is a good alternative to Dog Food Advisor.
 - www.cleanlabelproject.org This website claims to test foods for known chemical toxins and heavy metals which is very valuable information. Keep in mind that they are not testing or commenting on the quality of nutrition or ingredient sourcing or about GMO content. Again, just another opinion with which I personally do not always agree.
 - www.catinfo.org This website explains why dry kibble is bad for cats, and is a wealth of cat-feeding information and advice. Also, this site has great information about how to help convince your cat to change his diet!

Canned food is very similar in quality to the dry kibble version of the same brand (usually poor), but the canned food provides much better moisture and may not require as many synthetic nutrients as the dry kibble. It is usually higher in protein and lower in carbs (which is a good thing). It is still highly processed, although not cooked at such high temperatures. Canned is a definite improvement over dry kibble as long as it has higher-quality sourcing (cheap ingredients stick to teeth causing dental disease, but high-quality food should not).

Commercially prepared raw (the frozen wet (not-so) nasty stuff!)

The following points about raw apply to both frozen raw (wet) and freeze-dried raw (similar to dehydrated):

1. Not all raw brands are created equal. While in concept I prefer raw over any dry kibble, some raw brands are sourced from highly-crowded GMO-fed factory farms (which is where your grocery store meats come from), and that leads to either more potential for pathogenic bacteria

contamination, or loss of nutrition from Pasteurization to kill the bacteria. Remember, our food (and our pets food) was never meant to be *sterile*; it is meant to contain a normal population of bacteria just as our guts are supposed to contain a certain 'normal' population mixture of bacteria. When Pasteurization is used to kill all of the bacteria and sterilize the food, often the stronger & more opportunistic pathogenic 'bad' bacteria will survive or repopulate. Sometimes the Pasteurization step that was originally intended to ensure food safety will actually select for the survival of the bad disease-causing bacteria.

2. Many brands are sourced from ethical-eco-friendly regenerative-agriculture farms that may not be USDA Organic certified, but the ingredients are certainly from happier & healthier animals and plants. Other than the ethical and nutrient benefits of these healthier farms and animals, they are not burdened with all of the bad pathogenic bacteria so that they don't need the Pasteurization and therefore they still have the good beneficial bacteria that actually helps your pet's microbiome when he eats them. (Look up [Answers Pet Food](#) and/or [Kure Pet Food](#))
3. Don't be afraid of bacteria! Remember, dogs are scavengers. Their guts are more acidic than ours, and much tougher; they are designed to eat 3-day-old road-kill! However, the CDC and FDA apparently want us to be very afraid of *Salmonella* and *E. coli*, but this is something that is presented to us out of context. I have been told that there are over 2000 species of *Salmonella*, but less than 10 of them are pathogenic (meaning that they cause disease); and something similar is true of *E. coli*. All bacteria have many different strains, and only certain strains (often caused by human use of antibiotics or poor sanitation) are dangerous to us. So, 'Salmonella contamination' in general means nothing at all, but contamination with *a specific* pathogenic strain of *Salmonella* may be true cause for concern.
4. **Caution:** For as much as I like and promote raw feeding, remember that raw food is very rich and can be more difficult to digest. For a young adult healthy animal this is not usually a problem. But for a very young puppy (in the wild mom would regurgitate already partially-digested kill that is easier to finish digesting), or a very sick & weak pet, or an animal with chronic GI issues brought on by too much of the sludgy inflammatory dry kibble, the raw food can be too harsh. For these animals partially cooking the raw food or just going with home-cooked or crock-pot food is often better. See the **Gut Repair & Proper Digestion** section.
5. There are several reputable raw brands to choose from:
 - I think Kure www.kurepetfood.com is the best American raw pet food company because they source ethically and their raw has added fermentation cultures. Their website and Facebook page share a wealth of information and recommendations. Kure is a regional-local company from Pennsylvania.
 - I personally feed my dog Darwin's raw www.darwinpet.com and have for years. I recommend Darwin's. They also source ethically and locally in the Pacific Northwest and do not Pasteurize.
 - Steve's www.stevesrealfood.com is another ethically-sourced company that does not Pasteurize, but does use High Pressure Processing in their poultry products. They are based in the western US.

- Primal www.primalpetfoods.com is another company that I trust who also sources ethically and avoids Pasteurization in most of their lines. They are based in the San Francisco area.
- Small Batch www.smallbatchpets.com is another West Coast company that I trust and I think that also avoid all Pasteurization.
- There are other raw food companies that you will see advertised on various media, and some of them may be very good. There is also a good selection at [Wagnolia's](#) in Stuart. In my experience, they all tout that they use only “human-grade” ingredients, but, that means that most of their sourcing is from factory-farms. Some of their ingredients may come from smaller local healthy suppliers, which is great. You’ll need to explore their website and investigate for yourself to determine quality & sourcing of ingredients. Basically, if it isn’t easy to find links promoting how proud they are of their local eco-friendly sustainable sourcing, then they are sourcing from CAFO factory farms.

Commercially-prepared freeze-dried raw (must be rehydrated before feeding)

Much of what I have discussed above about raw is in regard to frozen raw food. But, there is also the option of freeze-dried raw. Freeze-dried raw is the same frozen raw that has been super-dehydrated, meaning that you add water at home to rehydrate the food. Freeze-dried raw is not as rich and may be gentler on the GI tract than the frozen raw. The freeze-dried is also less expensive because it is not as costly to ship (it weighs much less and does not have to remain frozen). Both the frozen raw and properly-rehydrated freeze-dried raw foods are excellent for your pet’s hydration.

1. Honest Kitchen TheHonestKitchen.com is technically dehydrated instead of freeze-dried. It seems to be sourced from factory farms and some local suppliers.
 - It is relatively mainstream and found in some stores and easy to order online direct from the company.
 - Although dehydrated is supposed to be easier to digest, I have seen a few dogs who do not digest some of the vegetables in this food. I do not know if that is because the pet-parent does not let the food re-hydrate for long enough, or if the vegetables simply do not do well for some animals, or if this is why many recommend freeze-dried instead of dehydrated.
2. K9Naturals from New Zealand www.k9natural.com is sourced from the human-food chain in New Zealand which is far superior to the human-food chain in the US. The food-animals that go into their food are completely free of dewormers, vaccines, antibiotics, and not Pasteurized (except for the eggs). These are all good things because the animals have a more naturally healthy immune system and bacterial balance which is what your pet needs to be eating.
 - This brand presents an ecological/environmental question for you as a consumer: Ordering this food may not be ideal because of the fossil-fuel carbon footprint of having to ship the product half-way around the world, whereas supporting your local economy is better. But the NZ ingredients are *much* cleaner than our own. So in this case you have to decide what is more important in regard to your ethics and your pet's health: to be environmentally responsible and avoid the carbon input of long-distance shipping,

but your pet may really need the healing that comes from exceptional quality and sourcing... and, not to get too complicated, but the more-environmentally-friendly growing practices in NZ not only (likely) offset the carbon consumed by shipping, but are also less than the carbon-emissions of our American industrial CAFO feedlots!

3. Ziwi www.ziwpets.com is another New Zealand company that is ethically-sourced with all ingredients well-controlled in Ziwi's own kitchen and processing facilities. This product is air-dried and not Pasteurized and no High Pressure Processing.
4. TruDog www.trudog.com is also high-quality dehydrated and freeze-dried from the New Zealand human food chain where they do not Pasteurize or sterilize the food to keep it alive with normal bacteria, although they do still test for 'bad' bacteria.
5. Nature's Variety Instinct www.naturesvariety.com makes dry kibble, freeze-dried, and frozen raw foods. They do use HPP and I am unsure of the sourcing of their ingredients.
6. Other options include Dr. Harveys, Sojo's, Grandma Lucy's, Open Farms, and others.
7. There are a few other brands available at a Wagnolia's in Stuart, FL.

Home-prepared food is by far the best way to know exactly what your pet is eating, but it is also the most difficult to ensure that absolutely all of the vitamin & mineral & nutrient requirements are being met. It is time-consuming, but can also strengthen the bond between you and your pet. Many people will cook a large amount on a Sunday and then freeze or refrigerate the meals to feed throughout the week. (Recipe sources below)

Commercially-prepared gently-cooked whole foods

Cooked foods are becoming increasingly available and are a very good option. Most of these foods are sourced from higher quality ingredients than dry kibble, although they aren't always as eco-friendly as I would like. Most of the foods are prepared by humans in smaller batches- much less commercial and industrial (although I worry that as these brands gain in popularity they could eventually outgrow their ability to remain hand-made).

These foods are cooked slowly & gently at lower temperatures so that they still obviously resemble food instead of brown hard kibble.

The gentle cooking also:

- Starts the digestion process making the food easier for your pet to digest
- Results in much-less destruction of enzymes or denaturing of proteins resulting in less-need for synthetic supplementation

These foods are frozen after cooking and shipped frozen to preserve the foods without the use of artificial preservatives. Although shipping frozen food on dry ice is still expensive, the cooked foods are not as heavy as the frozen raw foods and therefore less-expensive to ship. These foods still provide good moisture (much better than kibble, but not as much as raw since some of the moisture has been cooked-away).

These foods can be heavy on potatoes and grains and other root-vegetables or gourds like squash for carbohydrate content. There's nothing wrong with that (see this [Journal of Animal Science](#) article which de-bunks the recent biased out-of-context fears about grain-free diets), but just like humans, some genetic lineages don't tolerate grains very well.

Personally, I think that dogs (and humans) need only a tiny amount of carbs in their diet, and cats (being true carnivores) need none! But the veterinary community is still at odds on this point.

I have only just started the process of sampling the cooked food brands, but several peers recommend the following brands:

- Raised Right www.raisedrightpets.com contains organ meats, minimal high-carb fillers mentioned above, only minimal synthetic vitamins & minerals, looks great but expensive
- Small Batch www.smallbatchpets.com is local and humane ☺ with organ meats
- Evermore www.evermorepetfood.com contains some organ meat and is somewhat sustainable
- Just Food For Dogs www.justfoodfordogs.com contains some amount of organ meat
- Wynwood www.wynwooddogfood.com contains some amount of organ meat
- Nom Nom Now www.nomnomnow.com is sustainably-sourced when possible
- Chi Dog www.chidog.com Individualized based on Traditional Chinese Medicine Constitution

Lastly, with regard to the richness of raw food and how cooking leaves the food easier to digest, but that so many of the commercially-prepared cooked foods are heavy on carbs and starches- cooking the raw food *MAY* be a good option.

Allow your pet to be a hunter or scavenger

This would work in theory for cats since they are obligate carnivores (whereas humans and dogs are omnivores, and horses & cattle are strict herbivores that need to be out eating grass), but it would be at **a devastating loss to the local bird population & diversity** because after all, cats are an artificial invasive species introduced by humans. Although nature intended for all cats to be hunters, we humans have done too much damage and modification to the natural environment already, and it would be unfair to wildlife for us to provide shelter in the house for an unnatural human-introduced predator. So hunting isn't appropriate in our man-made urban & suburban environment. And, even if a rural barn-cat is an outdoor hunter there are other risks; the risk of being picked off by a larger predator (coyote, dog) or hit by a car, or abuse by deviant humans.

Other Options

None of us are perfect, and we do not live in a perfect world! So, just do the best you can. Make whatever changes you are capable of and know that any improvements are better than none!

1. You can mix & match and piece together any of the above 4 main options (dry, raw, home-cooked, commercially cooked).
2. Considering refrigerated preservative-free foods such as FreshPet may be an option;
 - FreshPet sourcing is not ideal and therefore needs to be Pasteurized, but otherwise the food still contains good moisture and no apparent chemical preservatives.
3. What does your pet really need? What is the underlying problem?
 - A pet suffering from poor nutrient absorption may do well on anything other than dry kibble;

- A pet suffering from any chronic dehydration issue may do well on anything other than dry kibble (this includes many chronic diseases!);
 - If your pet is suffering from allergy or atopy or chemical toxicity issues then you may have to go 'all-in' with super-clean Kure brand raw or super-clean home-cooked to avoid GMO feed and herbicides and pesticides, but you may be able to do a reintroduction elimination diet after a few months.
4. It really is difficult to eliminate all potential triggers of atopy and toxicity and any auto-immune problem, so for those I highly recommend the cleanest and safest of food choices at least until you get the problem under control. These are obviously more expensive, but they afford the greatest chance of eliminating the underlying cause of a chronic disease process. Remember, you'll have to be equally clean & healthy with any treats and avoid the artificially-flavored monthly flea & tick and heartworm preventatives.
 5. Don't let this stress you out! Just do your best. And remember, although nutrition is often 90% of the problem, **don't forget lifestyle**: your pet needs exercise, fresh air, sunlight, mental stimulation with you & also with other animals, and a loving positive-outlook from his human!

Making the change; Transitioning away from dry kibble

- **Make all diet changes slowly!** Your pet's GI tract is likely stressed by chemicals and chronic inflammation leaving it weak & unstable and very vulnerable to any food changes, especially a change to the very rich frozen raw food, which could result in serious GI issues. If not made slowly, the gut response to some of these changes could even become life-threatening.
- Your pet may need herbal and nutraceutical GI tract support for a few weeks before and during the initial phase of any major diet changes.

Gut Repair & Proper Digestion

Providing better food to ensure improved/proper nutrition ends-up being a waste of time & money if your pet is unable to digest and absorb those nutrients. For many animals this is not a problem, but unfortunately, most of you reading this are looking to improve your pet's poor-health or a disease-state which implies that their digestive processes is likely also unhealthy or diseased.

There is A LOT to proper digestion! Most animals are born with or develop very early all of the myriad complex enzymes and endocrine secretions that they need to properly digest and absorb their food. But, due to genetics, or poor health & nutrition in the womb, or an early problem with parasites and/or antibiotics, the ability to properly digest AND absorb nutrients may be impaired.

Additionally, and quite often, years of trying to digest the highly-inflammatory artificial dry kibble that Big-Kibble has convinced your veterinarian is best for your pet either causes Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD), or leaves the enzymes and endocrine organs depleted and unable to properly function because they (along with the rest of the cells in the body) have not received the nutrients they need to function properly, and/or causes such an extreme gut-microbiome imbalance that it cannot be fixed with proper food alone but needs additional support.

Dry kibble is cooked and processed at very high temperatures that destroy all of the enzymes and most of the nutrients that were in the raw ingredients, such that artificial synthetic additives are necessary. Most of our pets either do not recognize the synthetic 'nutrients', or the highly-cooked kibble leaves a slimy residue in the gut that impedes nutrient absorption and causes chronic inflammation which further impedes the digestion & absorption process, and also leads to Leaky-Gut and resultant allergies. And remember, when we discuss nutrients we are not 'just' talking about vitamins & minerals- we're talking about everything including protein and fats and carbs and the infinite co-factors & unknown vitamins & minerals that Modern Science has yet to discover.

So, most dogs & cats in Modern America are living with a 'functional' IBD- They eat grass often, they vomit or have diarrhea intermittently, or have terrible gas or 'gurgle-belly'. For these animals you have probably found a particular brand and flavor of food that keeps it all under control, but still, anytime there is a new food introduced or they get a new treat or they eat something 'unauthorized' it results in serious diarrhea or maybe even pancreatitis. This is because even on that 'one food that works for them', their GI tract is constantly inflamed and 'on-edge' and acts like a ticking time-bomb.

Compared to 'functional IBD', end-stage IBD is classic & obvious with ongoing diarrhea and/or vomiting, but functional IBD is what most animals (and humans?) live with.

I use Standard Process and a few other companies' products (along with several 'hands-on' modalities) to help heal and restore the gut and endocrine function during or before a food transition for the dogs & cats who can't tolerate the slow transition away from dry kibble to one of the options we have discussed in this paper.

It would obviously be helpful for me to tell you which products would be most beneficial, but it's just not that simple. This is a Holistic approach to health and nutrition, meaning that we recognize that each individual is different. Sure, they all have gut inflammation, but what supplements or other help they need depends on their Traditional Chinese Medicine Constitution and the concepts of Functional Nutrition; which part of the gut is primarily affected (Saliva? Esophagus? Stomach? Which secretions in the stomach, or is it physical motility in the stomach? Same for the small or large intestines? Gall Bladder? Liver? Lymphatics? Sympathetic (Stress) Overdrive which shuts down the whole digestive process?); age, ambient temperature and local climate, and plenty of other factors!

But, rest assured, with the right help and positive energy and healing intent, you can improve your pet's health and improve or resolve chronic disease problems with proper nutrition and some digestive help.

Recipes

This is where I had planned on listing detailed recipes that I have obtained from trusted advisors and mentors, many of which were handed-down from previous generations of trusted advisors and mentors.

However, all of the recipes that I have are either too simple & vague, or include directions to use any source of ground meat from the grocery store (whereas I argue that feedlot meat is undesirable), or include directions to use vitamin supplements that I do not approve of.

If possible (and I understand that it's not always possible), you need to use vitamin & mineral supplements and bone-broth or bone-fragments and calcium supplements that are also ethically and ecologically-sourced, as opposed to whatever supplement happens to be popular or inexpensive. Again, I know this is not always feasible or affordable, but we need to at least try.

So, given that 1) I didn't want to include any recipes that suggest something different than what I have preached about up to this point, and 2) because I'm not certain that a recipe I create would be absolutely complete & balanced, and 3) because there are SO MANY other good recipe sources out there; I have decided to not list recipes here and instead to list sources of recipes for you to explore.

- Remember to add a whole foods nutrient supplement for complete balance even if the recipe says it is complete (such as Catalyn by Standard Process and Canine Minerals by Rx Vitamins).
- The sites listed below also include recipes for specific disease-processes.
- Raw and Home-cooked/crock-pot all follow the same basic ingredient guidelines.

Resources for detailed & varied recipes and blogs about preparing and feeding cooked or raw home-prepared diets:

- <https://healthypets.mercola.com/sites/healthypets/dr-karen-becker.aspx> Dr. Karen Becker is an exceptional expert on home-prepared diets for pets. She has written books and numerous articles. Other than the website above you can find much more from her simply by Googling her name.
- <https://www.dogsnaturallymagazine.com/> This site is about much more than just nutrition; it is full of useful information.
- <https://theholisticcanine17.com/> This is probably the site and philosophy with which I am most aligned- it is possible that I agree with every concept and recommendation on this website.
- <https://drruthroberts.com/the-original-crockpet-diet/> Access to guidelines and detailed recipes.
- There are innumerable blogs and Facebook groups about certain diets for certain diseases and breeds. Most of them provide very good information, but you have to weed through them and decide for yourself.
- <https://www.drasko.com/portfolio-items/fresh-food-ancient-wisdom-book/> Trusted advisor and speaker to the entire Holistic Veterinary community.
- <https://catinfo.org/> Again, good advice on how to get your stubborn cat to eat something different. Their advice also works well for feeding supplements or medications- treat them the same the food suggestions. This information should also work for picky dogs.
- Feel free to email links to any sites that you find useful and reputable so I can share them with others and include them in future versions of this document:
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