

# Raw Food Diets

## What is a raw food diet?

A raw food diet, also called Raw Meat Based Diet, consists of uncooked ingredients, usually originating from food animals either farmed or wild caught. These components can include muscles (meat), offal (internal body organs) and bones, unpasteurized milk and uncooked eggs. This raw food diet can either be commercially prepared or home-prepared.

## Nutritional concerns of raw diets

In **commercially prepared raw diets** the ingredients are not cooked and might be provided as fresh, frozen or freeze-dried. These diets are usually formulated based on the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) recommendations to meet the nutritional needs of your pet. In some cases, though, these foods might be intended for intermittent or supplemental feeding, and should not be used as a complete diet.

**Home-prepared** raw food diets can have variability in quality, and likely do not provide the correct daily amount of nutrients that your pet needs.

## Safety risks for your pet...

There are 2 main concerns: 1) nutritional imbalances and 2) health concerns. Dogs and cats have unique dietary needs and nutritional imbalances in animals fed home-prepared diets have been reported. Because both home-prepared and commercial raw food diets are not cooked, the diets and preparation surfaces can be contaminated with bacteria. This includes bacterial organisms like *Salmonella*, *Escherichia coli*, *Campylobacter jejuni*, *Listeria* spp., and parasites, such as *Toxoplasma gondii*.

For these reasons, the Veterinary Medical Center has a strict policy not to allow feeding of raw diets to pets hospitalized under our care.

## Safety risks for you?

Some of these same pathogens can be a risk to you and your family, especially young children, pregnant women and older persons with waning immune systems. It is important, after being in contact with raw food, to carefully wash hands, bowls and surface areas.

Also, if your pet is infected with one of these pathogens, they might carry the bacteria in their mouth or stool. Often times they are not sick but could be passing a pathogen like *Salmonella*. If you are feeding a raw diet, it is important to take precautions when handling your animal's feces. This is especially important for highly susceptible individuals, such as those in hospitals or long-term care facilities. This is one reason that therapy dogs should not be fed raw diets.



## Alternatives?

If you feel strongly about feeding your pet a raw food diet, please consult with your veterinarian to plan the best diet for your pet, guaranteeing that they receive all of the macro and microelements they need to remain healthy and happy.

If you would like additional information, please consult our nutritional specialists at the University of Minnesota, Veterinary Medical Center.

## Additional references:

- Mehlenbacher S, Churchill J, Olsen KE, Bender JB, Availability, Brands, Labelling and Salmonella Contamination of Raw Pet Food in the Minneapolis/St. Paul Area. Zoo and Public Health. 2012
- Freeman LM, Chandler ML, Hamper BA, et. al. Current knowledge about the risks and benefits of raw meat-based diets for dogs and cats. J Am Vet Med Assoc. 2013 Dec 1;243(11)
- AVMA: <http://avmajournals.avma.org/doi/pdf/10.2460/javma.243.11.1549>

*This fact sheet is meant to provide basic information. For specific health concerns please contact your physician or veterinarian. Updated 09/2016.*