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NATURAL PATH

A newsletter for Canadians interested in the benefits of Naturopathic Medicine

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GIVE YOUR DOG A BONE:

By Autumn Drouin

Should you give your dog a bone?

And if so, what kind of bone? A rawhide bone, a baked bone, a boiled bone, a preserved bone? "Certainly not a raw bone, that's common knowledge." *And what if that were a myth?*

Should you feed your pet table food?

"No, dogs and cats should be fed a balanced commercial pet food." *And what if that were a myth?*

Some sound nutritional research and a whole lot of just plain common sense are now dispelling many myths about pet nutrition.

When I was a student at the Ontario Veterinary College in the mid '70s, animal nutrition was taught in terms of percentages of protein, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins and minerals in a diet. The quality was never addressed. Representatives of pet food companies came to give us impressive mathematical presentations accompanied by wine & cheese (for the most part cheap bubbly rosé, processed cheese and Ritz crackers). We were taught that domestic pets should be fed a balanced commercial diet and that table food was unsuitable for cats and dogs because it led to nutritional deficiencies. That is what we learned, practiced and preached.

Animals seemed to thrive on the pet foods but, as years passed, I wondered why there were more and more degenerative diseases, autoimmune diseases and allergies. And why did so many cats develop urinary blockages? Well, the latter problem was solved when it was discovered that the previously "perfectly balanced cat food" was too high in ash content and was replaced by a "perfectly balanced low ash cat food". However, urinary problems persisted and almost two decades later it was discovered that high ash content was not the real culprit; so the

previous low ash cat food formula was now replaced by a "perfectly balanced pH control cat food". Another great discovery was the importance of taurine for cats. A lack of this amino acid in the diet can result in cardio-myopathy (a degeneration of the heart muscle usually resulting in death) and retinal degeneration (leading to blindness). So taurine was added to commercial cat foods to solve that problem. BUT WHY does taurine have to be added to a meat based diet since meat (i.e. muscle and organ meat) is a good source of taurine? The answer to that question can be found on the pet food labels most of which list "meat by-products" as the first ingredient; meat by-products may be mostly heads, feet and viscera (i.e. guts).

Poor quality basic ingredients are not the only problem with most commercial pet foods. Toxic additives and preservatives, as well as hormone, antibiotic and pesticide residues also present a hazard. The lack of enzymes, which occur naturally in raw foods and are destroyed by the cooking process, makes the food more difficult to digest. And last but not least, the high heat used in the preparation of canned food and kibble leads to a lack of vital force (i.e. the life energy in all living things).

INSIDE

Give Your Dog a Bone

The Best Diet

Nutrition and Diabetes

I have made it a habit to ask about every animal's diet, and in the past 25 years I have made some interesting observations about pets and diet.

Most companion animals are fed exclusively commercial food. Some are fed some table food or scraps and a minority (now a growing minority) are fed mostly or exclusively table food. I have noticed that dogs fed exclusively table scraps tend to have gingivitis, dental tartar, bad breath and body odors, a poor coat, unhealthy skin, as well as a number of other health problems including weight problems, BUT ONLY if their owners have the same general appearance. These animal guardians' (pet owners) diets consist of a high percentage of processed and fried foods, potatoes and gravy and rich deserts.

On occasion, a middle-aged or older pet presents a perfect picture of health. When questioned about the diet, the owner almost invariably says "I don't want to tell you what I feed my animal because you'll just give me a lecture like all the other vets." With a little prompting they usually admit to feeding 80-100% table food. These animal guardians look very healthy and their diets consist mostly of lean fresh meats, fish, a variety of fresh raw or lightly cooked vegetables, cooked whole grains and fruit.

Are all home-prepared diets good?

Feeding dogs and cats home-prepared diets is still considered a dangerous practice by most veterinarians. There is no doubt that gross nutritional deficiencies can occur if the diet lacks essential nutrients. Yet no self-respecting nutritionist would ever recommend feeding children exactly the same thing every day. Why does each morsel of food entering a pet's mouth need to be nutritionally balanced while human diets are balanced on a daily or even a weekly basis (e.g. fish once a week, eggs twice a week)? Why do people need variety in their diet and pets not? Why is "home-made" touted as the best for people and not for their animal companions? Consider this myth dispelled. Animals do thrive on a variety of wholesome home-prepared foods.

Are all commercial foods bad?

No, some commercial canned foods and kibbles made by small conscientious companies, which list meat, whole grains, a variety of vegetables and natural antioxidants such as vitamins C and E, are quite acceptable.

But based on clinical observation, it is my professional opinion that home-prepared fresh food is best. There are now a few pet food companies offering organic frozen pet foods consisting of raw meat, cooked

grains and vegetables. These may be a good alternative to home-prepared diets.

Since "it's the 80% that counts", the high quality commercial diets can be used to fill the gap when there is no time to cook.

Back to bare bones:

Raw knuckle bones (from beef, calf or lamb) with some meat attached and appropriate to the dog's size, and raw chicken necks for cats and small dogs are ideal as calcium supplements

and to keep teeth clean and free of tartar build-up.



Home-prepared diet recipes:

I recommend home-prepared food as a maintenance diet for most of my canine and feline patients. It is essential to meet each pet's nutritional requirements and to this end there are many good books with sound pet food recipes based on research, common sense and good cooking. Variety is important and it is also best to avoid feeding the same food every day to avoid the development of food sensitivities.

In my experience as a holistic veterinarian and naturopathic doctor, a wholesome diet plays an important part and sometimes the only part in an individual's return to health.

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