

Feeding your dog the natural way

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I Introduction

1.1. General

We all know that for us, humans, fresh foods are much healthier than instant food. But it looks like the other way around with our animals. Many veterinarians, pet shops and breeders recommend ready-made “complete and balanced” dog food, because ‘preparing the food yourself can lead to all kinds of deficiencies’, they say. But is preparing food for my animals so much more complicated than preparing food for ourselves? And how come that I experience regularly problems with skin and/or bone structure, under the commercial dog-food eating dogs?

This and the fact that I, at the time, was taking care of a 4 months old rottweiler puppy with hip problems and a Golden Retriever with a problem coat, were the reasons that I started questioning the reliability of the balance and completeness of commercial dog foods. Does it really contain all the necessary vitamins, minerals, microelements, the right proteins, fatty acids, etc. in an easy digestible way, even after all the processing? And how do they know anyway; of some of the trace-elements pretty much nothing is known yet. So, I started searching the Internet for answers (and help). Quickly, I came into contact with veterinarians, breeders and other dog-experts in several parts of the world (America, Surinam, Australia, Holland, Belgium, Curacao, etc.) that all emphasized the importance of raw, fresh and whole food. And I found enormous amounts of information on nutrition.

As a result of my ‘research’ all my dogs eat, since November 2000, solely fresh raw and whole food. They love it and are in fantastic health. They hardly have been sick since and my visits to a veterinary clinic has reduced to an absolute minimum.

1.2. Fresh-and-raw versus commercial

For the last million years our wild dog species have eaten meat with bones and the pre-digested contents of the intestines of prey animals. Their diet is various. Depending on the season, they eat big and/or small prey, insects, ripe fruits, seeds, nuts, roots, soil and even feces. Their food has not been processed, with all nutrients still present, plus that the bacteria and enzymes necessary for a proper digestion are still there. Not one meal is the same. And above all, all of them seem to know exactly how to obtain all the necessary nutrients needed so much to maintain a healthy life!

So, why is it that in the last 50 years or so our domesticated dog species can only survive and stay in excellent health when it eats solely commercial dog food?

This is a result of several decades of commercial pet food companies’ commercials. It’s ingrained in our brains that feeding animals in general, and dogs and cats in particular, is beyond our level of understanding.

All these companies claim their product is “complete and balanced” when it reaches the standards set by a group called AAFCO, the American Association of Feed Control Officials. However, the way the studies and field trials are done, the animal species used and the number of animals used, lots of questions arise about the reliability of the results. Dr. Randy Wysong, DVM, has once said about the “complete and balanced diets”:

“A 100% complete processed diet requires”:

1. 100% complete knowledge of food.
2. 100% complete knowledge of nutrition.
3. 100% complete knowledge of #1 and #2 requires 100% complete knowledge of every science.
4. Since #1, #2 and #3 are not possible, the 100% complete processed diet is a myth.”

What pet food companies do not tell the innocent pet owners is that: by putting a lot of cereals in the commercial dog foods the price can be kept low. Grains are not a natural food substance for our wild dog-species and are often difficult to digest, giving lots of insoluble fiber. But not only that: too many grains in the

diet can also cause allergies, ear infections, skin problems, bloating, joint problems, mal-absorption and digestive disorders, just to name a few. The meat used is often for a small part real muscle meat (high in digestibility, expensive) and mainly meat by-products, such as beaks, feathers, heads, ground up cooked bone, organs (some of low digestibility, cheap). Plus that some of the contaminants found in the raw material, such as pesticide residues, antibiotics, molds will remain unattached by the processing and, thus, go right into the finished pet food. Not even to mention the dead, diseased, decaying and disabled animals that are all processed into your beloved pet's food. During the heating process many of the nutritious matters (vitamins, minerals, digestible enzymes, and fatty acids) are destroyed, that afterwards has to be added again in a synthetic form. Also the proteins are changed due to heating, making them less digestible and can even cause allergies eventually. It is known that animals showing an allergic reaction to certain proteins in commercial dog food are not necessarily allergic to the same protein that has not been heated. The high insoluble fiber and the low digestibility of many commercial dog foods result in large bulks of soft, smelly feces.

To make the food look, taste and/or smell better and for being able to preserve it longer (chemical) additives are added to the food. However, these additives are a major cause for many health problems such as epilepsy, hypersensitivity reactions, allergies, skin problems, over activity etc.

A lot of commercial dog foods contain nutrient excesses, for instant too much protein gives an excess in waste products, giving the kidneys over-time which can finally result in damaged kidneys. Not even to mention the enormous harm calcium excess can cause. These nutrient excesses may not be noticed on the short run, but over a period of time it can result in heart, kidney, liver and/or other organ diseases and skeleton deformation.

The diet of the wild dog species (especially the wolf, the ancestor of all dog breeds and mix-breeds) can be imitated by giving our domesticated best friend raw meaty bones and a mixture of grounded vegetables and fruit. To this we can add things such as dairy products, egg, starch products or grains and legumes, but also table scraps (if not too greasy or containing too much sugar or salt). Further, you can enrich the vegetable meals with vegetable oil, cod liver oil, fish oil, yeast, herbs, and multi-vitamins.

All ingredients used should also be suitable for human consumption. In other words, if you can not eat it than your animal can not eat it either. Although even the meat for human consumption contains all sorts of contaminants, at least you have control over what you give. You can't say this when giving commercial dog food. And just as for your own consumption you need to wash the vegetables before preparing it into your dog's diet. Feeding your animal you do, like you feed yourself, with common sense. But, as the diet of our dogs and cats (carnivores) is not the same as for us humans (omnivores), it is strongly advisable that, before you start giving a raw diet to your pet you first have to do some reading, so you will understand what you are doing (see chapter III).

II The Raw Food Diet

The Raw Food Diet is based on the BARF (Bones and Raw Food Diet) as explained in the book "Give Your Dog A Bone" by Dr. Ian Billinghurst's (an Australian veterinarian).

2.1. General

The Raw Food Diet is a various diet. In such a way the dog will receive all the necessary nutrients and reach balance over a period of two to three weeks. In these weeks the ADULT HEALTHY dog should get:

60 – 80% Raw Meaty Bones (RMB's), of which 70% can consist of chicken parts

10 - 20% Organ meat

10 - 20% Vegetables and fruit

(Optional: 0 - 10% Others, such as grains, beans, dairy products, egg, left-over, etc.)

The diet of puppies until the age of approximately 5 months should contain onto 90% RMB's, preferable no grains and it is better not to fast them too often. Although, per week skipping one or two meals is quite ok. Dogs with kidney-, pancreas or liver problems have a special diet designed to deal with these problems. Dogs with arthritis and other bone problems should eat a special diet with a high vegetable/fruit content and much lower RMB content.

2.2. The articles of food

- Raw Meaty Bones (RMB's) are exactly what is says: **RAW (!!!) bones consisting of approximately 50% bone and 50% meat**, being soft enough for the dog to eat and digest. RMB's can be beef or pork spinal cord/ribs/tail, fresh- or sea water fish, chicken, duck or turkey carcasses/necks/heads/wings, rabbit carcasses/necks/heads, lamb spinal cord/neck/ribs, etc.

Pork: raw pork meat and bones can contain various viruses and bacteria. Most the dog can handle, but once infected with the Aujeszky virus it almost certainly will die, as there is no treatment against this disease. However, the chance that the dog gets the disease is almost nil. It is up to the individual owner whether to give pork or not.

Fish: preferable fresh (small) sea fish, with the heads and guts. You can give these as a whole or minced (if you are afraid of the bones). In case you can not get fresh fish, you are afraid for the bones or for worms you can give, as an alternative, canned fish such as sardines or mackerel or tuna. However, all the canned fish contains mono sodium gluconate (MSG)
- Recreational Bones (RB's) are the big heavy bones such as marrowbones from cow or buffalo. Dogs are able to chew them, but usually do not eat the whole. They are giving , as the name already indicates, as recreational treat, and not as a meal.
- Starchy meal is basically a cooked meal, including (sweet) potatoes, pumpkin (although pumpkin together with the pits can perfectly be given raw), whole grains (such as brown rice, oat flakes, wheat germs, wheat bran, whole wheat bread), pasta (incl. spaghetti, macaroni), etc. In case you couldn't finish your own meal, your dog may love it to eat the left-over.
- Grains and legumes meal is also mainly a cooked meal, including cooked grains (e.g. brown rice, oats) combined with cooked beans (e.g. peas, red beans, kidney beans, sesame, lentils). Also here, your dog may love to eat the left-over.
- Meat meal is solely a muscle meat meal. The meat can be that of any animal you prefer, for instance beef, buffalo, pork, lamb, veal, rabbit etc.
- Milk meal can be prepared as a 100% milk meal or combined with grains and legumes, starch, vegetables and fruit. It consists of goat milk (cow milk is not advisable as many dogs have difficulties in digesting the milk, resulting in diarrhea), yogurt, or (cottage) cheese.
- Organ meal consists of items such as liver, kidney, heart, lungs, brains, tripe's intestines etc. Many dogs eat organ meat without any problems, but some may refuse to eat it in the first instance. In that case you can start mixing a little with minced RMB's or meat, slowly increasing the amount of organ meat and decreasing the mince.
- Vegetables and fruit Vegetables and fruit supply fiber. They also have fatty acids, proteins, anti-oxidants, enzymes, vitamins, minerals and microelements. Fruit should always be ripe or –over-ripe (not rotten as this can lead to botulism). **All vegetables and fruit ALWAYS need to be blended** in the blender or juicer as dogs lack the necessary amylase enzyme needed for digesting the cellulose and hard cell-wall. A vegetable and/or fruit mix (VFX) should contain at least 6 to 7 different items for an optimum of variety. Vegetables can be: green leafy ones (including spinach, morning glory, phak khaad, phak kana, lettuce, cauliflower and broccoli with leaves, etc), root vegetables (such as carrot, radish, horse radish, taro, potatoes, sweet potatoes), pumpkin with seeds, squash, tomatoes, etc. All fresh and dried fruit. In fact all veggies and fruit, except for onion (can cause anemia in some dogs) as long as it is given in moderate amounts. Green leafy veggies should contain the mayor part of each VFX, plants belonging to the nightshade family (tomato, aubergine) and cabbages should be given only in small amounts, garlic only 1 glove twice per week per dog.
- Oils are the Omega 3 and Omega 6 fatty acids. Among others, Omega 3 fatty acids have, important effects on the immune system function, nervous system development and function and on the skin. You can find Omega 3's and Omega 6's in cod liver oil, fish oil, chicken fat, and vegetable oils such as coconut-, safflower-, soybean-, sunflower-, wheat germ-, olive- or corn oil. Do not give rice or palm oil!
- Supplements What you would like to supplement depends strongly on the individual needs of each dog and on the soil on which the product is grown. Some soils lack, due to over-grazing or –cultivation all sorts of nutrients. Supplements can be: brewer's yeast, vitamin C, vitamin E, kelp or another seaweed (for minerals and trace elements), apple cider vinegar (very rich in minerals), oils, etc. The supplements can go very well in the VFX's.

- Fasting To give the dog a fast once in a while is good for the dog's digestive system. However, many dog owner have difficulties with fasting their dog for half or a whole day. Therefore, you can also replace your dog's meal, once or twice a week with a marrow-bone or a cup of yogurt mixed with an egg, honey and/or a little dried bread.

2.3. The daily amount of food

As starting point for the daily amount of food for the animal you take for an adult dog 2 to 2.5% of the average estimated adult bodyweight of that certain breed or mix-breed, or 20 to 25 gram per kilogram of this bodyweight. For puppies under the age of approximately 5 months this will be 3% of this bodyweight.

You give this estimated amount for 1 to weeks. During this period you watch the animal carefully. When it gets skinnier you increase the daily amount, when it get too fat you decrease the daily amount.

Each dog has its own metabolism and thus different needs. Therefore, feeding you do 'with your eyes', meaning that when you can see the ribs and hip-bones the dog is *too skinny* for which you need to increase the amount of RMB's per meal and leave some more fat on it. If you can not feel the ribs at all the dog is *too fat* (or obese), then decrease the amount of RMB's and take out the fat. How much fat there is on the RMB's and in the meat usually depends on where the product has been raised (free-ranging animals usually have less body fat than farm raised ones) .

2.4. Example of a feeding program over a period of 3 weeks for a 27 kg average dog

27 kilo x 25 gram = 675 gram per day. Over a period of 21 days (= 3 weeks) this will be a total of 675 x 21 = 14,265 kilo of food. Fasting = 1 morning and 1 evening per week (in the example both on Sunday, although it can be any time of the week).

60 – 80% RMB = ca. 10 kg, of which 70% (= ca. 7 kg) can be chicken parts

5 - 15% Organ = ca. 0.7 - 2.2 kg

5 - 15% VFx = ca. 0.7 – 2.2 kg

(Optional: 0 - 10% others = ca. 0 - 1.4 kg. These meals can be replaced by left-over, RMB's or VFx's)

	<i>Time</i>	<i>Mon.</i>	<i>Tue.</i>	<i>Wed.</i>	<i>Thu.</i>	<i>Fri.</i>	<i>Sat.</i>	<i>Sun.</i>
<i>Week 1</i>	Mo.	RMB ch	Marrow Bone					
	Ev.	Fish/VFx	Org/VFx	XXXXX	RMB be	Org/VFx	RMB be	
<i>Week 2</i>	Mo.	RMB ch	Marrow Bone					
	Ev.	Fish/VFx	RMB be	meat	Org/VFx	Fish/VFx	RMB be	
<i>Week 3</i>	Mo.	RMB ch	Marrow Bone					
	Ev.	Fish/VFx	Org/VFx	XXXXX	Org/VFx	Fish/VFx	RMB be	

Mo. = morning meal, Ev. = evening meal, RMBch = RMB chicken, RMBbe = RMB beef or other, VFx = Vegetables and/or fruit mix, Org = organ meat,

XXXXX = week 1 starch meal, and week 3 grain and legume meal, mixed with 1 cup of yogurt and 1 egg. (can also be left-over, RMB or VFx)

To each vegetable meal can be added: ca. 2 gram of yeast, 2 table spoons safflower/soy oil mix (50/50), coconut oil or grinded coconut (coconut is what I prefer), 1 teaspoon of apple cider vinegar (with the raw-material still in it. You can find it is a food health store), 200 IU Vit E, 500 mg Vit C, 2 capsules cod liver oil, 1 capsule fish (salmon) oil. As snack you can give seeds and nuts or yogurt with honey.

In case your dog turns out to be allergic to chicken, you can replace the chicken content by another animal protein, such as pork or duck. . If the dog shows an allergy for grains you can replace the starch and grain/legume by VFx and/or RMB's. Organ- or fish meals are given together with VFx on a 50 – 50 % basis. Make sure the dog can not pick out the best parts by mincing the organ or fish, then mix.

Small dogs I give no more than 1 egg per week and big dogs' 2 eggs. For the yogurt I use an 8 Oz. measuring cup, one cup per meal.

2.5. Changing from commercial food to Raw Feeding

Changing from commercial foods to Raw Food you can do so by slowly introducing one or two chicken-wings or –necks, alternating with dry food meals or -days or just ‘cold turkey’. How you change does not really matter, there is no fast rule. Do what works best for you and your animal.

I usually change ‘cold turkey’ for adult healthy dogs, meaning that I change the diet from one day to the other into raw meaty bones. 99.9% I experience no problems. For two to three days I will give only this, then I start introducing first another animal protein and then the vegetable and fruit mix meals and other ingredients. For puppies and elderly dogs I first introduce one or two chicken-wings. When there are no signs of diarrhea or vomiting I slowly increase the amount of raw meaty bones. If the dog shows soft feces or even diarrhea I wait a few days and then try again. Does the soft feces return, it may be your dog is allergic for chicken, so try a raw meaty bone from another animal.

What I NEVER do is mix the bones with the dry food, or even better: NEVER mix animal protein with dry food.

2.6. Myth about the raw diet

- **Never give (chicken) bones to your dog** This myth probably comes from the habit of cooking our own food and feeding the leftover bones to our dogs. However, cooking changes the chemical composition of the bones. This can result in diarrhea and/or vomiting, as the dog is not able to properly digest cooked bones. Cooked bones also become brittle, making it extremely sharp and dangerous. Most cases of perforation of the stomach are due to cooked bones and not raw bones (90 to less than 1 %, based on findings by veterinarian who is Head of two emergency veterinarian clinics in The States). Therefore, **NEVER FEED COOKED BONES TO YOUR DOG!**
- **Salmonella and other bacteria** Salmonella bacteria live in and on raw chicken meat and bones, but it is also on vegetables, on your counters, floors, in the garden, outside the house, on the street, everywhere! A dog’s intestinal track is designed to digest meat and bones, including decaying food. A dog with a healthy digestive system is able to kill the salmonella bacteria and other bacteria. And even stronger, a research in Germany has shown that dogs fed on a raw food diet have less salmonella in their feces than dogs fed on kibble.
- People, however, are more susceptible in getting infected by these bacteria. Therefore, it is important to wash your hands and counters each time after handling raw meat, just as you should do each time you handle raw meat for your own consumption. And now, during the bird flu epidemic, wearing gloves during food handling is strongly advisable. Common sense and proper food handling is always a must!
- **Every meal must be complete and balanced** Why should every piece of dog food be complete and balanced, and how do they manage such a thing anyway? Do we eat every meal complete and balanced? No, of course not, that’s impossible!!! It is just a sales stunt of the pet food companies.
- **Dogs have a changed digestive system; weakened by the domestication process** This is a blunt lie. Genetically it is impossible that dogs have a changed digestive system, evolution does not go this fast. And there have been done no studies to prove this statement, on the contrary, studies have proven that the dog’s digestive system is still the same as that of it’s ancestors and wild relatives.

2.7. Costs

The costs you will spend on the BARF diet will not differ much from the best quality commercial dog food available in Thailand, which are Hill’s Science Diet, Nutro and Advanced Pet Diet. And, as the over-all health of your pet improves considerable, your veterinary costs will definitely go down.

III Interesting literature and web-sites

Before starting to give a raw diet to your dog it is strongly advisable first to inform yourself carefully about this diet. You can do this by reading the books from Dr. Ian Billinghurst (www.drianbillinghurst.com) or Dr. Tom Lonsdale (www.rawmeatybones.com) :

On the Internet you can find loads of information about BARF or other natural diets for dogs, just by typing “BARF” in the search machine. Interesting web-sites, next to the above mentioned are: www.barfers.com, www.rawsetters.com, www.barfworld.com, and www.member.aol.com/addieloo/index.html (information about the effects of feeding grains to your dog).

IV Resources

Books:

Billinghurst, Dr. I. 1993. Give your Dog a Bone

Donath, Prof. Dr. W.F. 1973. Wat moet mijn hond eten?

National Research Council. Subcommittee on Dog Nutrition. Committee on Animal Nutrition. Board on Agriculture. 1985. Nutrient Requirements of Dogs. 1985.

Pitcairn, DVM, PhD., Dr.R. 1982. Guide to Natural Health for Dogs and Cats

School of Veterinary Medicine, University of California, Faculty and Staff. 1995. Book of Dogs –The Complete Reference Guide for Dogs and Puppies-

Strombeck, DVM, PhD, Dr. D.R. 1999. Home-prepared Dog and cat Diets -the Healthful Alternative-

Articles:

Bodewess, DVM, J. and Foster & Smith, Drs., Inc. Veterinary Services Department Glucosamine and Chondroitin

Billinghurst, Dr. I. 2000. Bone and Joint Disease in Young Dogs –Are we barking up the wrong tree? -

Christopher, K. for RAOT, INC. General Nutritional Information for Dogs

Cosby, Susan and Wolfratshausen, Otto vom. Feeding grains to dogs?

Hofve, DVM, Dr. J. C. 1999. Nutrition the Foundation of Good Health –Dr. Jean’s Four-Point Program for Optimal Health-

Hofve, DVM, Dr. J. C. 1999. Feeding Your Animals Selecting a Commercial Food

Lewis, RVT, Dr. B.A.N. Nutrition –Nutrition for Companion Animals-

Swift, DVM, Dr. R. To Feed or Not to Feed ... Grains. Reprint from ‘Healthy Pets - Naturally

Web-sites: see chapter III

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