

Feeding Your Pet - Explaining the Options

#1 Food selection is, in the end, ALWAYS BY TRIAL AND ERROR.

There are no reliable proven or effective tests for food allergies. You must simply carefully try foods to see how well your pet responds to the change. How you change foods is also important. Food changes should be done slowly and it is useful to add a probiotic (lactobacillus or acidophilus type) to support the growth of the proper flora in the GI tract for the new food. You can also add unsweetened canned pumpkin or some overcooked gloopy white rice (not minute rice) (a tablespoon per meal of either for about a 30# dog) to the food to help the intestines recover their more normal function during a change of food.

THE CORN/WHEAT GRAIN ISSUE

Most food allergies can be traced to another cause – LEAKY GUT SYNDROME (LGS Definition: an increase in permeability of the intestinal mucosa to luminal macromolecules, antigens and toxins associated with inflammatory, degenerative changes in the gastrointestinal mucosa) By changing the diet to one that decreases inflammation in the GI tract, an animal can be relieved of LGS and their “food allergies” or “food intolerances” can disappear. A major cause of problems in the GI tract of carnivores is feeding corn or wheat. It is best to consider diets that have no grains to avoid this problem. Also, protein and fat have lower glycemic indexes than carbohydrates. This is important because lowering the glycemic index (translates as decreasing the spikes in blood sugar, even out the absorption of usable energy without sudden ups and downs) also helps to control diabetes, obesity, arthritis and behavior problems. In large breed dogs this is especially important to help them grow more slowly and avoid joint disease. Carnivores just do better on protein and fat than carbohydrates. Also, overweight animals are twice as likely to develop arthritis in later years than thin animals.

There are a number of dry foods, canned foods and raw foods that are easily available that are grain free or very limited grains.

DRY KIBBLE

Dry food is NOT BETTER FOR THE TEETH. And often it may be worse for the teeth. In order to make each kibble stick together they often use glues and sticky carbohydrates, which also stick to the teeth. And voila! tartar build-up. Canned food is easily licked off the teeth.

RAW DIET/HOME COOKED

Often a great choice, but expensive and still, not for every pet. Raw food does not mean simply raw meat. It must be a completely balanced food, prepared with all the minerals and vitamins needed for the animal. This includes a proper calcium to phosphorus ratio, which is very important. Raw meat alone does not have a proper ratio. There are a number of companies that are making great raw food diets (see our list of recommendations).

Pre-prepared commercial raw foods are carefully processed to avoid contamination; they know that you are going to feed it raw. This is not always the case when you buy raw meat from a grocer, as they expect you to cook it. Many animals with chronic allergies, arthritis or gastrointestinal problems can improve immensely on a pre-prepared commercial raw food.

Some animals need more processed food because they are deficient and can't properly digest raw foods. But if treated to balance the deficiency, they then may do well on raw foods.

If you have small children at home that may crawl into or get into the dog's food bowl, raw food may not be for you.

Pre-prepared vs. homemade – some people prefer to cook for their pets. If you have the time and can commit to doing this correctly, it can work well. Diets and options for ingredients can be found in a number of books and online. If you are considering this option, ask us for a list of resources, not all diets out there are really appropriate.

Animals with special health risks or specific needs should have a veterinary evaluation based on their medical condition.



Dr. Barbara Royal

