

RAW FEEDING GUIDELINES

The key points to remember with a raw diet are:

- Balance over time
- The calcium and phosphorus ratio should be 1:1. Meats are high in phosphorus, bones are high in calcium and whole prey, fish, eggs and tripe have a balanced ratio.
- Organ meat should not exceed 15% of the diet. Feed liver once a week (or several small servings per week) and try to find an organic source if possible because the liver is responsible for filtering toxins out of the body.
- Feel free to feed 'weird and icky things' such as chicken feet, beef trachea, tails, lung, kidney, testicles and pizzles. Beef trachea, trim, chicken and turkey feet are loaded in natural chondroitin and glucosamine which help to build healthy joints.
- If feeding pork or salmon, be certain to freeze the meat for two weeks before feeding to reduce the small risk of parasites.
- NEVER feed cooked bones of any type. Raw bones are soft enough to bend and digest easily. For optimal safety, meal times should always be supervised.

Try to find grass fed animals that are not given hormones or medications if possible. Younger animals in general will have accumulated fewer toxins to pass on to your dog.

WHAT TO FEED

One common concern with raw feeding is that it is not 'complete and balanced'. This is untrue for two reasons. First, nobody knows what complete and balanced is, so it is difficult to make this claim. Second, balance can occur over time: every meal does not need to be completely balanced as long as the nutritional needs of the dog are met over the long run. You don't calculate the exact percentages of protein and carbohydrates, and the exact amount of vitamins and minerals in each of your meals, and you don't have to do it with your dog's meals. If you are prudent, then it will balance out over time.

The majority of my dogs' diet (about 40%) is raw, meaty bones (RMB). This can include chicken backs, wings and necks (or even whole carcasses), lamb necks, pork necks, turkey necks, ox tails, beef ribs, turkey tails; any meaty bone that can be completely consumed by your dog. If you are feeding meatier meals (turkey or lamb necks), feed about 50% RMB, if your choices are bonier (chicken backs, pork necks, wings or ribs), feed about 30% RMB.

Large, weight bearing bones such as marrow and knuckle bones are not considered RMB's if the dog is not able to consume the bone. These can be given as a recreational bone although I do not use them because they can break teeth and the softer joints can cause impactions or blockages. I do find beef neck bones to be a wonderful recreational bone for my dogs.

Raw fish (preferable whole) can be fed for one or two meals per week. You may also opt to feed fish oil. This supplementation is necessary if the meat you feed is not grass-fed because grain-fed animals lack Omega-3 fatty acids which protect the dog's joints and immune system. Flax seed

oil also contains a good amount of Omega 3 but it is plant based and some dogs do not do well on it. It has also been linked to reproductive issues. Organic butter or Omega-3 eggs might be a good, safe alternative to the above if the mercury and toxin levels in fish are a concern (and they should be).

Raw offal (organ meat including heart and liver) from a variety of meat sources should be fed for one or two meals per week or 10-15 % to of the diet. Some dogs do not tolerate offal well, so it may be best to divide it up and feed a little each day to avoid loose stools.

Raw green tripe should be fed two or more meals per week (try to find green tripe, not the bleached human stuff: it is very stinky, but very nutritious). Tripe is a perfect balance of calcium to phosphorus (1:1), is rich in digestive enzymes and Lactobacillus Acidophilus, vitamin B, and contains the essential fatty acids, Linoleic and Linolenic in the proper ratio. Tripe from grass-fed animals is preferred.

Raw muscle meat from a variety of sources should be fed several times per week. You can feed heart as a muscle meat but not exclusively.

Raw eggs with shells (a perfect ratio of phosphorous to calcium) should be fed about two or more times per week. Whole eggs have a balanced ratio of calcium and phosphorus. You might have heard that raw egg whites contain a protein that binds with biotin and that is true. To avoid deficiencies, feed the entire egg yolk and all. The yolks are where most of the nutrition is found anyway. Egg yolks are an excellent source of magnesium, calcium, iron, folate, vitamins A, E and B6. It is best to feed Omega-3 or free-range eggs. If you buy your eggs commercially, they are likely sprayed with wax and other chemicals to improve their appearance. These chemicals are harmful for your dog so if you can not find fresh farm eggs, feed commercial eggs without the shell and count them as a meat meal.

Fruits and vegetables can be beneficial as supplemental feeding. Vegetables must first be run through a juicer or food processor or lightly steamed. Dogs will not get the entire nutritional value from the vegetables if they are not first physically broken down. Dark green leafy vegetables are high in vitamin B. Ripened fruits are more easily digested by dogs and are also packed with vitamins. Many people choose to forego fruits and vegetables as the dog is most closely related to the grey wolf which does not typically eat vegetables. The wolf does have a significant amount of berries in his scat in the summer months (often around 25%), and for this reason, I feed my dogs fruit on a fairly regular basis (and they forage for it themselves). I do not feed vegetables all that often except when I have leftover vegetables which might need disposing of. In their place, I feed nutritional herbs such as dandelion leaf, nettle, spirulina and alfalfa which are high in vitamins and minerals.

Grains (in my opinion) are not a natural part of the dog's diet and I choose to not feed them to our dogs. Dogs do have the ability to digest some grain content and it might not be too harmful to include a small amount of grains in training treats but try as much as possible to use more species appropriate choices.

WHEN TO FEED

Most people feed their dogs twice per day. I feed once a day and twice a day and some days not at all. Dogs are not omnivores and are built for periods of gorging and fasting. I like to fast my dogs once a week because the majority of immune function is in the gut. If the dog's digestive system is continually digesting meals, there is no time for house cleaning and the dog's immune system will suffer. Once a week, I turn my dogs out with a nice beef neck bone to chew on or give them some fruit and that is their fast day. The exception is puppies under six months of age who eat three times per day in my house.

As you can see, raw feeding is quite simple. If it still seems complicated, try to visualize a rabbit or cow whole, before it gets cut up and put into plastic containers. Try to feed your dog the rough percentage of bone, meat and organ meat that would occur naturally in this animal. This is what we strive to recreate for our dogs with raw feeding.

Remember to feed a variety of meats, not just different parts of a chicken or turkey. Try deer, pork, rabbit, goat, duck, turkey, beef, moose, a variety of fish and any other meat that you can get your hands on.

HOW MUCH TO FEED

As a starting point give your dog about two to three percent of his ideal adult weight. If your dog is very active, you may need to feed a little more and if your dog is more of a couch-potato, you may need to feed a little less. The best way to tell if you are feeding the right amount is to run your hands over your dog's ribs. If you can feel the ribs, but not see them, your dog is at a good weight.

Puppies should also receive about two to three percent of his ideal ADULT weight. My Labrador puppies gain an average of two pounds per week. When puppies are four to six months old, they will require a great deal of food and a good amount of calcium as they are building their adult teeth. If there is not enough calcium in the diet, they will take it out of their growing bones, so make certain that they are getting a good 60% RMB at this age. A good way to tell if your puppy is getting enough calcium is to watch his pasterns (his wrists). If the angle at the wrists starts to increase, he may need more calcium in his diet and it might be a good time to consult with your breeder or a professional to make certain your puppy is getting the energy he requires. Do not let puppies get too thin at this important age as their energy demands are tremendous when cutting new teeth.

Overall, raw feeding is quite easy and there are only a few guidelines to follow. With time, you will become more comfortable with your dog's new diet and you will start to see the results in the form of better coats, cleaner teeth, fresher breath and fewer health issues. Good luck with your dog's diet and feel confident when you feed your last bag of kibble, you will be joining the ranks of thousands of people who have safely and effectively made the jump to raw and have never looked back.