

# One veterinarian's experience with owners who are feeding raw meat to their pets

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In this opinion article, I discuss the approaches a veterinarian may take, and the consequences, when owners have decided, for whatever reasons, to feed their dog or cat a raw food diet, or to add raw meat to their pet's other food, or to use as treats. A growing number of pet owners are choosing to feed raw meat-based diets (RMBDs) to their dogs and cats. In recent years, raw pet food sales have increased by at least 15% annually ([1](#)) and approximately 15% to 25% of dogs and 10% of cats are fed some raw meat. In addition, owners often add raw eggs or meat to an occasional meal, or give dehydrated RMBD treats to their pets ([2](#)), usually omitting to inform their veterinarian. I will discuss the various types of raw pet foods, advantages and disadvantages of feeding raw food to dogs and cats, safety issues, and the challenges and opportunities that patients on raw diets present to veterinarians.

My **priorities** are always:

1. Safety for the family,
2. Safety for the pet,
3. That the pet is fed a complete and balanced diet,
4. That we find the food on which the pet thrives, and
5. That the feeding plan is practical for the client, now and in the future.

As no one diet suits every pet, during my nutritional consultations **my pet feeding recommendations** include the following options:

- Good quality commercial dog/cat food, dry and/or canned (the components vary but may include animal protein as the first ingredient, complex carbohydrates, and soluble fiber, but not include corn, wheat or soy, chemicals or artificial additives, colors, flavors, or preservatives),
- Home-prepared cooked complete and balanced diet,
- Commercial raw meat complete and balanced diet,

- Home-prepared raw meat complete and balanced diet,
- To any of these, add some human food, often fiber as vegetables, and
- Any combination of these options.

My recommendations depend upon an unhurried discussion with the client. **Considerations include:**

- What the client wants to feed,
- Family situation such as pregnancy, children under the age of 5 y, any immuno-compromised family members,
- Pet facial hair length (beards are difficult to clean after every meal),
- The pet's nutritional history including which diets and foods the pet wants to eat,
- Pet health conditions such as significant disease, immune-mediated disease, and current medications,
- Owner financial concerns, and
- Client time constraints.

**The final decision** is always made by the pet owner. As the client and I discuss their choice of their pet's diet, I note the client's decision, and my recommendations and safety precautions in the pet's medical record. Then I put together a complete and balanced diet appropriate for that pet. At the end of the appointment, a copy of my notes is sent home with the owner and e-mailed to their regular veterinarian.

**Types of raw diets** available for dogs and cats include:

- **Home-prepared RMBDs.** To ensure that these diets are complete and balanced, calcium, vitamins, minerals, and taurine must be included. This advice can be obtained from a veterinary nutritional consultation by telephone or website.
- **Commercial raw frozen, freeze-dried, or dehydrated meat diets that are not complete and balanced.** These require the addition of a combination of bones, a vitamin and mineral mix, vegetables, and fruit.
- **Commercial raw frozen complete and balanced diets** with a variety of protein sources. Some are limited to one protein source, especially those using exotic meats. Freezing kills a variable percentage of different species of microorganisms (3).
- **Commercial freeze-dried complete and balanced diets** that have been frozen under vacuum to remove nearly all moisture. Freeze-drying leaves the food nearly unchanged compared with raw frozen diets, and kills a percentage of bacteria (4).
- **Commercial dehydrated complete and balanced diets** have been heated slowly to remove nearly all the moisture. Whether the low heat has a significant effect on the nutritional quality of the food is unknown. The drying results in a reduction of microbial