Homemade Diets

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The vast majority of cats and dogs in this country are fed commercial dry kibble or canned food as the sole source of their calori caloriesand nutrition. Since the 1940s, preprocessed commercial foods have become so commonplace that most people would find feeding anything other than dry kibble or canned food very unusual or abnormal. This article will explore the pros and cons of a homemade diet.

Why would someone feed a homemade diet?

There are several reasons why people feed homemade diets. Some people have pets with special dietary requirements that may be hard to meet with commercial foods, such as food allergies or to support a pet with a serious medical condition that may affect the appetite. Some people feed a homemade diet because they want a source of nutrition that is free from the by-products, chemical additives, and processing found in many commercial foods. A third group of animals that may be fed homemade diets are performance dogs such as sled dogs, since they require very high amounts of fat and protein that cannot be met by many commercial diets.

Why doesn't everyone feed a homemade diet?

People do not feed a homemade diet because for most of us it is too much work and most pets do well on commercial diets. It is also difficult to keep up with the new information on pet nutrition. The fact is that pets live longer now than ever before and a lot of that is due to improved nutrition, mainly, commercially prepared diets. In fact, pets do so well on commercially prepared diets, that by far, the single biggest nutritional problem veterinarians see is obesity in pets. Commercial diets have the benefits of affordability and convenience.

The three kinds of homemade diets

There are basically three different kinds of homemade diets being fed. **The first is the true, well-balanced, nutritiously complete, entirely homemade diet.** This diet contains premium protein sources, a balance of carbohydrates, proteins, fats, and fiber and meets the animal's entire vitamin and mineral needs. People that feed this diet are truly dedicated to the health of their pet. This type of diet requires a commitment of time and money.

The second diet is the supplemented homemade diet. It usually consists of a commercial dry food, and the owner then supplements the diet with meat and some carbohydrate sources. The family leftovers usually get scraped into the pet's bowl. If the table scraps account for more than 10% of the diet, imbalances can occur.

The third type of homemade diet is the one where the owners feed their pet only table food and do not balance the diet for protein, fat, carbohydrates, and vitamins. This is not a good diet for your pet. It is often fed to finicky eaters. In an effort to please the pet and to get them to eat, the owner prepares a 'special' diet that may consist of chicken breast or turkey but lacks fiber, and the correct vitamins and minerals.

Some things to consider before feeding a homemade diet

- Preparing a homemade diet takes more time.
- A homemade diet may be more expensive than commercial kibble.
- A homemade diet needs to be supplemented with a multivitamin to ensure that it is completely balanced. Other supplements such as fatty acids and antioxidants may need to be added.
- As we learn more about nutrition, recommendations for nutrients change. People feeding a homemade diet will need to keep current on the new information. What was considered a balanced diet 5 years ago, may not be balanced by today's standards.
- If a homemade diet is not properly balanced it can be worse for your pet than commercial diets.
- Careful attention to the cooking and storing of homemade diets is necessary to avoid any foodborne illnesses.
- Once a pet gets used to eating a homemade diet it will be difficult to return him to eating a commercial food.
- Homemade diets are often soft and do not provide the chewing action that is good for the teeth and gums.
- If you are going to try to feed a homemade diet, you need to switch your pet from the commercial diet to the homemade diet slowly over a period of three weeks to prevent intestinal upset.
- The best diet in the world will not improve your pet's health if he does not receive daily exercise.

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