

BOW WOW CHOW

BONING UP ON PET NUTRITION. By Jacquelyn Lewis

In a time where health and global issues force us to take a closer look at what we eat, many people have also begun to scrutinize what they feed their pets. More and more pet owners are turning their noses up at traditional dry foods and going back to basics — with raw food diets they say more closely resemble their pets' "natural" eating habits.

Local veterinarian Doreen Hock recommends switching from kibble to raw foods for nearly all her clients. She says animals, just like people, need fresh foods to stay healthy. Hock says feeding a dog or cat a diet based solely on processed, dry food can result in health problems. "Over time, they might come up short on amino acids," she says, "the building blocks to make different tissues."

A raw food diet attempts to counter this by providing unprocessed, easily digestible and absorbable amino acids, natural enzymes, vitamins and minerals. "It's completely bio-available," Hock says.

These diets usually consist of 40 to 50 percent raw meat, combined with various grains and vegetables. The meat content is usually higher for cats' diets, given that domestic cats evolved from carnivores, while domestic dogs originated from omnivores. Specific mixtures run the gamut, from the

"BARF" (bones and raw food) diet, based on larger amounts and various types of meat, to more modest diets incorporating smaller portions combined with regular, canned pet food. There are also several raw foods on the market available frozen or in bulk.

Hock says some of these diets are better than others, but "any of it is a huge improvement over kibble."

She adds that her concern over dry, mass-produced dog and cat foods centers not only around what the food doesn't contain, but also what it *does* contain — meat byproducts from rendering plants, preservatives and, she suspects, carcinogens. "I think that's a huge issue," Hock says. "You have to wonder why so many dogs at 10 years of age get cancer What are they being exposed to?"

For many pet owners, a growing disdain for big business might also factor into the recipe. "I distrust the pet food companies," says Hock, "I have to be honest. I don't think that's paranoia. We recognize that advertising sells us a bill of goods, and if you're making your pets' food, you circumvent that. With the raw food diet, you're taking complete responsibility for the health of your pet, whereas when you open a bag, someone else is taking that responsibility."

Scads of internet sites and books echo Hock's sentiments, and more and more pet owners are jumping on the bandwagon. Pet health internet chat forums are crammed with testimonials to the diets' success, citing everything from improvements in coat appearance and energy to the alleviation of cancer symptoms.

Cary Simons, a 34-year-old local x-ray technician, says he has been feeding his dog, Rosco, a diet based on raw chicken, fish and leafy green vegetables for more than a year. Rosco, a 6-year-old yellow lab mix, was suffering from allergies, and Simons came across the raw food diet while looking up health topics for dogs on the internet.

"Initially it was for the allergies, although it turned out Rosco's allergies weren't based on food," says Simons. "But I've continued it because I feel that it's healthier than regular dog food."

Simons says he researched the ingredients typically found in commercial kibble and was shocked at what he found. "I basically equate dog food to junk food," he says. "They take all this food that is unfit for human consumption and destroy any nutrient that's in it. I said, 'Oh my god, I can't believe I'm feeding this to my dog!'"

Simons says he has noticed great improvements in Rosco's teeth and coat since starting the new feeding plan, and, "his fecal matter is down to about one-third of what it used to be."

However, Simons says feeding his dog in this manner requires more time and money than a traditional diet — he has to shop around for the best prices on raw meat, and prep time is about four or five hours of work per month.

But Rachel Ulloa, who manages The Healthy Pet store and feeds her three dogs raw foods, says the difference is made up in the time and money pet owners will save on veterinary care. "You get what you pay for," she says. "You will inevitably go to the vet less."

However, even with the praise raw food diets have garnered, many veterinarians still see this as a dangerous trend. A recent study released by the University of Georgia College of Veterinary Medicine concludes that pet diets containing raw meat can pose the risk of a potentially fatal salmonella infection — for both humans and their pets. Humans can come into contact with the infection through raw food preparation, as well as through contact with exposed pets. *Pet Age* magazine reports that the American



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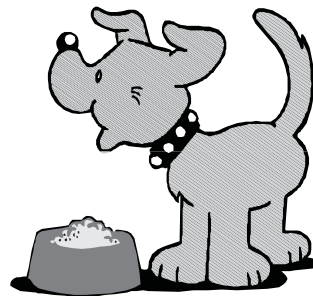
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