



# *Fresh & Raw Food Diet for Dogs*

**BY SUSAN L. BEAL, DVM**

The idea behind these recommendations is to provide a diet that approximates that which dogs have evolved eating (and will still eat, given a choice). In spite of the fact that they have traditionally been classified as carnivores, dogs evolved as hunters and scavengers who will eat the whole body of their prey, gorge themselves when food is present and go hungry (fast) when it is not.

Therefore, these recommendations consider both the content of the diet and the frequency of feeding.

A dog's natural diet includes both meat and vegetable matter.

On making a kill or finding a previously killed animal, the wild canid will eventually consume the entire carcass. They begin by eating the contents of the abdominal cavity – liver, stomach, intestines and their contents, followed by the other organs in the abdomen and chest cavities. The last part of the carcass the dog will eat is the muscle meat and bones, and perhaps the hide and hooves. Dogs will also graze on herbs and wild plants, seeking out specific types of plants.

This is the diet we are trying to imitate.

Healthy adult dogs should be fed once daily. Your dog should have access to the food for 20-30 minutes, after which any remaining food should be discarded. Nothing further should be

given, except water, until the next day. Once given, except water, until the next day. Once every 7-10 days healthy dogs should be fasted for a day, receiving water or broth only.

These breaks between meals give the digestive tract time to fully process the food, to rest and regenerate, to optimize enzyme formation, and to cleanse before being asked to work again. By feeding once daily, we see that our companions come to their meal hungry and will eat with gusto. The periodic fasts mimic the feast and famine cycle of the wild canid.

This schedule should be tailored to the individual situation based on the dog's age, health status, special needs and family schedule.

**It is important to recognize that there is no single diet that meets the needs of every dog.** A good starting point is to divide the meal into three food groups – meats, vegetables and grains – each group in equal volume. Once the dog has been on this diet for a time, it can be fine-tuned for the individual.

Dogs do vary, particularly in their needs for grains. Most individuals will do well on a diet that is 40% meat, 40% ground or finely chopped vegetables and 20% (or less) overcooked grain – with all components being measured by volume.

The grain portion of the diet should be overcooked, enhancing their digestibility and mimicking the

*(continued)*

## FRESH & RAW FOOD DIET FOR DOGS

partially digested grains found in the stomach of the prey and the cooked/fermented grains found in scavenger. We recommend cooking the grains at least twice as long as you normally would. To do this, you must add extra water. This will result in a mushy, porridge-like consistency of the grain portion of the diet. Grain choices include (but are not limited to) oatmeal, barley, wheat, millet, speltz, quinoa, grits, bulgar, cous cous, rices and pastas. Whole and raw grains are preferable to processed grains.

The vegetable portion may be raw, lightly steamed or sautéed, pureed, finely chopped, ground or juiced (pulp and juice). The processing simulates partial pre-digestion and is done to break down the plant fibres, making the material more digestible to the dog. Vegetable choices vary with season and availability. Fresh is better than frozen, and frozen better than canned.

Some options are carrots, broccoli, cauliflower, squash, zucchini, cabbage, celery, parsley, yams, green beans, spinach, pumpkin, bell peppers, tomatoes,... Fruit may be substituted for 10-15% of the vegetable portion.

Produce needs to be washed thoroughly to remove any pesticide and herbicide residues.

The meat portion should be given raw or lightly cooked. A good balance of meat over a period of a week includes one or two meals of ground or chopped meat (beef, chicken, turkey, venison, pork,..), one meal of organ meat (liver, kidneys, .. Though called organ meat, heart, tongue and gizzards are muscle meats.), and the remainder of the meals of bony meat (ox/beef tails, beef ribs, chicken or turkey necks, wings or backs, whole Cornish hens or rabbits,...). The bony meats should be given raw so that the bones will be soft, pliable and digestible. Cooked bones may pose a health hazard for some dogs.

Dogs have a higher total fat requirement than do humans. If you are taking advantage of the superior nutritional qualities of grass-fed beef, you will have to add more fat to the meat than is present in this naturally low fat product. You can achieve this by asking the butcher to add more fat to the grind, or by supplementing with extra fat such as leaf fat or suet, or by combining these lean meats with a higher fat meat such as beef liver or chicken or pork. You want the fat content of the meat portion of the meals to be in the 25-30% range. It is important to make these transitions slowly to allow time for the individual animals to adapt.

Cottage cheese, yoghurt, and eggs (raw or lightly cooked) may be substituted for a portion of the meat.

Ingredients produced without chemicals and pesticides are optimal. However, the lack of availability of such sources, organic or otherwise, should not prohibit you from providing a fresh, whole food diet. Explore options such as home grown products, farmers markets, direct purchases from family farms,... Fresh and whole foods, even from the supermarkets, are far superior to any packaged and processed commercial food.

Supplementation of the diet might include 1-2 cloves of garlic, Vitamin C (start with 500mg daily and increase to bowel tolerance), a vitamin/trace mineral/digestive enzyme supplement recommended for dogs, and any special needs supplements recommended by your veterinarian.

The liberal use of culinary herbs such as parsley, basil, thyme, and sage is also encouraged.

In dogs that are not receiving raw nutritional bones, the Calcium: Phosphorus balance of the meat portion of the diet must be corrected. To

Visit us on the Web:  
[hardwickbeef.com](http://hardwickbeef.com)

*(continued)*

## FRESH & RAW FOOD DIET FOR DOGS

do so, add 1,200 mg elemental calcium per pound (approximately two cups, measured as raw meat) of boneless meat fed.

Many dogs (and their caregivers) may need to be introduced to this type of diet slowly to allow their systems to adjust.

To begin feeding this diet, mix a small portion of vegetables, overcooked grains and cooked ground meat with the usual diet, maintaining the same total volume of food. Over a period of 7-10 days increase the home-prepared portion and decrease the commercial portion. Once the dog is managing well with a home-prepared, partially-cooked diet, make the transition to a raw-based ration by decreasing cooking times over the next week until everything except the grains are being given raw or lightly cooked. At this point, if you are going to use them, you may start adding the bony meats to the rotation. If you do not add bony meats, you must add calcium based on the amount of meat that is being fed.

As you increase the whole food portion of the diet, you will see changes in your companion's appetite and relationship with food. S/he will come to the meal more enthusiastically, may have fewer food cravings and seem more satisfied on a smaller volume of food. As you monitor your companion's response to this fresh and whole food diet, you may need to make adjustments in the volume and proportion to achieve and maintain optimal condition for the individual.

It is not unusual to see loose stools, or mucoid stools, as you make the transition to a fresh and

whole food diet. This happens as the body adjusts to the new food and releases stored toxins from the system. Loose stools and mucous should present no problem, as long as the dog remains bright and active.

The only two hard and fast rules with this diet are variety and moderation. As long as you keep this in mind, you will have your pet on a wholesome, nutritious and balanced diet.

Susan L. Beal, DVM  
Big Run Healing Arts  
319 East Main Street  
Box 550  
Big Run, PA 15715  
814.427.5004  
alchemy@penn.com  
Copyright © 2006