

# The Price of Health

My favourite part of the day is when I take Adhara, my faithful companion of six years, on our daily walk.

Just as with her diet, I try to infuse variety into our daily saunters and have visited almost every off-leash park in the lower mainland. While my hound shares a moment with the other members of her species, I take the time to converse with their guardians about their favourite subject – their dog. Inevitably, these conversations lead to the subject that’s on every dog lover’s mind – their health and nutrition.

We all want to offer our animal companions the very best, so they can live a long, happy and healthy life. A good diet and exercise are key ingredients in this formula. However, with so many pet food products on the market and conflicting information on nutrition, it is easy to get overwhelmed and confused. Since for people, the “best” diet means fresh wholesome ingredients, I believe a similar principal with some species-appropriate adjustments applies to my dog e.g. raw meat, bones, organ meat and a bit of roughage.

Some people I talk to have never heard of the raw diet and listen to my stories with fascination and curiosity. Others are not totally alien to the idea but haven’t had the time to “look into it.” But more and more I find people that agree that raw is the best diet for dogs, but believe, especially in these economic times, that it is beyond their financial reach. “It’s just too expensive!”

Having fed Adhara raw for over six years, it has been long since I looked at her food bill. Watching my “senior” giant hound tear around a field like a 2-year-old is, after all, priceless!

However, my curiosity got the better of me and I decided to do a bit of digging into this cost issue. I visited a number of pet stores in the lower mainland and browsed through their selections of dried and canned dog foods and here is what I found ...

FOOD TYPE	SAMPLE BRANDS	PACKAGE	COST/DAY*
<b>PROCESSED DOG FOODS</b>			
Supermarket Brand	Purina, Alpo, PC, Kirkland	Kibble	\$0.50 - \$1.00
		Canned	\$1.00 - \$2.00
Premium Brand	Science Diet, Iams, Eukanuba	Kibble	\$1.00 - \$1.75
		Canned	\$1.50 - \$3.00
Natural / Organic Brands	Wellness, Nutro, Innova	Kibble	\$1.25 - \$2.50
		Canned	\$2.00 - \$5.00
<b>RAW DOG FOODS</b>			
Raw – Human Grade	Club Canine, Mountain Dog Food		\$1.50 – \$3.00
Raw – Premium**	Red Dog Deli, 3P, Natural Instinct.		\$2.00 - \$4.00

\* Based on average daily portion for an average 50 lb adult dog based on the manufacturer’s feeding recommendations. The average kibble prices are based on the largest sizes available in each brand.  
 \*\* Premium raw contains no medications, hormones and uses some organics.

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A generic supermarket brand kibble is definitely cheaper than raw but how much nutrition is your dog really getting out of this food? What are the long-term costs of such a diet? I can go on about the reasons why this food should not even be on any pet-owners radar but I think its ingredients list speaks for itself.

A “premium” kibble diet that has better ingredients and formulations backed up by research is still quite affordable. However, for almost the same price, you could be feeding a raw diet with human grade wholesome ingredients! By mixing some of the meat and vegetables yourself and adopting a good food rotation plan, the cost of raw can be as little as \$1.50 per day for an average size dog. And of course, the rewards and health benefits for your pet far outweigh the cost!

So what about the “natural” and grain-free foods – aren’t they as good as raw? They certainly cost as much as real food! The ingredients in these foods are unquestionably better and more digestible, but they are lacking in three essential areas – moisture, variety and these diets are still subjected to a high-heat processing step that chemically alters these ingredients.

While moisture is not considered an essential nutrient by governing bodies, it is essential in the digestive process. Dry food is harder for dogs to digest and can cause them to drink excessively after eating, increasing the risk of bloat. Dogs and cats are designed to derive optimal nutrition from raw protein and animal fat – cooking these changes the chemical properties and nutritional profiles of these foods. Dr. Pottenger demonstrated this in his (1940) ten-year study of four generations of cats; those fed raw meat were much healthier than those fed a cooked diet.

Most of the dog owners I have met want to do the best for their dogs within their means. The first step is to understand that feeding dogs a natural raw diet is not a departure from the norm but rather a return to how they were meant to eat. The second is to overcome the misconception that raw food is significantly more expensive and complicated than processed food. While switching your dog to a raw diet can seem a bit daunting, a trip to one of the lower mainland’s pet stores that specialize in raw diets or a call to a raw manufacturer can quickly get you on the right track.

Hopefully, the information above has illustrated that the best diet for your dog is NOT out of your reach!