

# The Right Kind of Raw

By Inna Shekhtman

Over one million animal species call our planet home. Each species has evolved to select foods from their surrounding ecosystems which best allow them to survive, reproduce and achieve optimal health. Our dogs and cats are part of this system, but unlike their wild counterparts, they have limited access to the foods that they evolved with. As their owners and guardians, it is up to us to ensure that they get food that is biologically appropriate and healthy for them. In the past century, our pet's food has turned into a multi-million dollar industry and has unfortunately strayed very far from its evolutionary roots. Fortunately, an increasing number of pet owners are starting to question the suitability of commercial pet foods for their animals and are rediscovering raw diets. I have heard many wonderful stories of dogs and cats rediscovering health and vitality with a raw diet. But this article is not about those stories ...

Some time ago, I received a phone call from a very frustrated and concerned dog owner. "I started feeding my dog raw almost six months ago. At first he seemed to really like it, and now he is scratching again and has really bad diarrhea! I don't know what's wrong!" she said. After a brief conversation, I discovered that she had been feeding her dog a diet consisting almost exclusively of ground beef from a local grocery store and adding a bit of ground carrots and celery to it. I asked her how she came about to feeding her dog this diet. "My friend told me she feeds a raw meat diet to her dogs and they are doing great!" While many people find their dogs and cats thriving on a raw diet, many are not aware that an inappropriate raw diet will not be beneficial in the long run, even if you witness benefits in the beginning.

Inna Shekhtman is a pack leader of an amazing hound - Adhara - who inspired this article!

She is the co-founder and full-time manager of Red Dog Deli Raw Food Company Inc. - a manufacturer of premier raw diets for cats and dogs in North Vancouver, B.C.

To learn more about raw food or for help building a diet that is best for your dog and your budget, email [Inna@reddogdeli.com](mailto:Inna@reddogdeli.com).



While feeding your dog or cat raw foods is definitely a step in the right direction, feeding a proper raw diet is more than just feeding raw meat. A nutritionally appropriate raw diet for dogs and cats should include muscle meat, bones, organ meats, vegetables, and some supplements. To determine a diet suitable for our animal companions, we need to consider their gastrointestinal anatomy, their nutrient requirements and the sources of these nutrients in the diet of their free-ranging relatives. There are a number of opinions and interpretations on the proportions and ingredients - the information presented below is a result of my experience and research. Every dog and cat is different and I encourage you to use the information provided below and from other resources as a starting point for finding the diet your furry friend can enjoy and thrive on.

The closest wild relative to the domestic dog is the grey wolf - they belong to the same species, *Canis lupus*. Although most dogs appear visibly different from a grey wolf, they differ by only 0.2% of their mitochondrial DNA. Despite years of domestication and intense human-imposed "artificial selection" to create various breeds, most dogs, with a few rare exceptions, still have the same digestive anatomy as their wild relative, thus allowing us to use their diet as a foundation.

The domestic cat is a direct descendant or subspecies of the African wildcat, which is placed in the genus *Felis silvestris*. Cats are true carnivores and are designed to eat a diet consisting of primarily meat. Their wild counterpart's primary food source consisted of rodents, other small prey such as birds and reptiles, and occasional larger prey

such as young antelopes.

The natural food choices of wolves and wildcats suggest that the weekly diet of domestic dogs and cats should consist of the proportions shown in the table below.

Proportions for Dogs		Proportions for Cats	
40%	Muscle Meat	60%	Muscle Meat
10%	Bone	28%	Organ Meat
10%	Organ Meat	10%	Bone
20%	Green Tripe	2%	Plant material and fibre
20%	Plant material		

In choosing the specific ingredients for your pet's diet, remember that variety is an essential element to any healthy diet for us and our pets. The most common choices for meat are beef, chicken, lamb, and turkey. However, many other game meats, such as buffalo, elk, and ostrich are available to most consumers. In the wild, when given a choice, wolves seem to prefer to eat large ungulates (hoofed mammals such as elk, deer, and buffalo) instead of small animals. Wild cats, on the other hand primarily feast on small prey. These preferences should be reflected in the frequency of different meats in their weekly regiment. For example, a typically weekly schedule for a dog could consist of 3 days of large prey (beef, buffalo, venison, lamb), 3 days of small prey with bone (chicken, turkey assuming meals contain 20-30% bone), 1 day of green tripe and occasionally fish.

Organ meats such as liver, heart and kidney are a very concentrated source of high-quality protein, vitamins and minerals. For example liver is an excellent dietary source of essential nutrients such as vitamin A, and vitamin B1 (thiamine), while heart is a source of dietary taurine and folic acid. Ideally, the organs should come from the same animal as the meat.

While there is some controversy over whether wolves actually eat the content of the prey's stomach, there is no question that the walls of the digestive system (i.e. green tripe) is a regular part of the wolf's diet. Tripe contains a high concentration of essential nutrients and enzymes, and should be included in your dog's diet at 1-3 times per week.

The meat, fat, organ and bones in the diet should

come from an inspected human-grade source. While animals can handle high quantities of bacteria, meat from a questionable source can be contaminated to the point where it can cause harm to your pet. Wherever possible, try to use hormone-free, antibiotic-free and non-medicated meats and bones to avoid exposing your pets to these additives.

Vegetables play a small but essential role in the raw diet formula and can include pre-digested plant matter from a prey's stomach and fresh grasses, greens and some starchy vegetables, such as squash. All vegetables should be juiced or pureed to make the nutrients bio-available to our dogs and cats digestive tract, since they cannot digest cellulose - a component of vegetable walls. If possible, use organic vegetables to avoid exposing your pets to artificial chemicals that are common-use in the modern conventional farming industry. Because organic foods are allowed to grow naturally without any chemical or genetic intervention, and are grown in healthy soil, which has not been depleted of nutrients through years of over-farming, they are believed to contain more nutrients than conventionally grown foods.

Today's pet owners have many options for getting raw food for their pets. You can source out many of the ingredients at local butcher shops and prepare it yourself. There are also a number of companies making convenient premixed frozen meals, available through your local pet shop. If you decide to purchase premixed meals, make sure you are aware of the ingredients and proportions in this diet, since not all raw diets are the right kind of raw.

## REFERENCES

- Eliassen M. The wolf's natural diet - a feeding guide for your dog? Idaho USA, 2004.
- Andersone A. Wolf diet in Latvia: seasonal, geographical and sexual variations. Acta Zoologica Lithuanica. 13(1):87 2003

