

Are Homemade Diets a Viable Alternative to Prepared Pet Food?

For some pet owners providing home prepared meals for their pet is an appealing idea. Shopping, hand selecting the ingredients and preparing the meal seems a good way to show their love. Whilst this sounds straight forward enough, the reality is different and unless you have developed a meal plan with a dedicated veterinary nutritionist, there is a strong risk you won't be providing the necessary nutrition. A dog for instance needs around 37 nutrients in his daily diet for healthy bodily function and a cat, over 40.

FEDIAF Nutritional Guidelines for Cats and Dogs detail the nutritional needs of cats and dogs at the varying life-stages from growth to senior and they are peer reviewed by independent veterinary nutrition experts throughout Europe. Providing a pet with a 'complete' pet food is akin to a person having their meals routinely put together by a human nutritionist.

Most recipes for homemade diets are nutritionally deficient

A study at the University of California, Davis School of Veterinary Medicine¹, analysed 200 different recipes for home prepared dog foods. Recipes were selected from websites, veterinary text books, and pet care books. The findings highlighted that 95% of the recipes were deficient in at least one essential nutrient and 84% were lacking in multiple required nutrients. Whilst providing a nutritionally balanced diet from home is not impossible, these results show it is a complicated task with very little margin for error. Calorie control can also be difficult.

Expert formulated diets

Most pet food products on the market are designed to provide total nutrition for pets. These products will have the term 'complete' on the pet food packet. 'Complete' is a legal definition and the product must by law contain all the nutrients a pet needs in the right proportions. Balancing the right quantities of protein, fat, fibre and carbohydrates along with the specific vitamins, minerals, fatty acids and amino acids is complex but that is the day in day out responsibility of pet food manufacturers.



Can I home cook occasionally?

An occasional home prepared meal can be enjoyed by cat or dog and owner alike. If it is 'occasional' it won't interrupt the nutritional balance of the overall feeding regime but please be careful to avoid foods that are toxic to pets.

Human foods to avoid

Certain foods can be toxic for pets including: onions, garlic, raisins, grapes, chocolate, avocados, certain nuts and xylitol-sweetened foods.



¹ University of California, Davis School of Veterinary Medicine 'Homemade dog food recipes can be a risky business, study finds' (15 July 2013)

More advice can be found at www.fediaf.org

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