

*I do not offer professional advice on nutrition but I am asked frequently about my views on raw diets and so this represents a summary of different viewpoints and scientific research carried out on this subject. It is not comprehensive and I would always encourage owners to do their own research and speak to their vets before making changes to their dog's diet.*

Raw food diets for dogs have become increasingly popular in recent years as some owners see them as a more 'natural' option. Raw meat-based diets (RMBDs) consist mainly of raw meat (muscle, offal or bone) but also include other raw ingredients, such as eggs, fish, vegetables or fruit.

### **The Perceived Advantages**

In addition to perceiving RMBDs as a more natural choice, owners may also feel they are closer to what the wild ancestors of domestic dogs would have eaten, before they adapted to live alongside humans.

There are several different reasons for their use by owners, either as a sole diet or in combination with other diets. These include;

- a lack of confidence in the components of commercial diets (e.g., additives, grains)
- the overprocessing of commercial foods
- a belief that a raw diet is more suited to the carnivorous nature of the domestic dogs' forebears
- that cooking reduces the nutritional value of meat by decreasing protein digestibility and destroying enzymes naturally present in food<sup>1</sup>.

A significant proportion of the claims regarding the benefits of RMBDs remain largely unproven and lack scientific evidence. But the reported health benefits of RMBDs include;

- cleaner teeth
- a shinier coat
- better digestive health
- improvements in energy, behaviour and immunity,
- a reduction in inflammation-related diseases

### **The Perceived Disadvantages and Research**

The principle negative aspects of a raw diet can be nutritional deficiencies that pets may suffer as a result of incomplete ration formulation and health problems for both animals and pet owners.

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<sup>1</sup> Freeman, L et al. (2013) <https://doi.org/10.2460/javma.243.11.1549>

Nutritional deficiencies have been partially addressed by nutritionally balanced commercial raw diets being made available commercially, but there are still some concerns that deficiencies of vitamins A, D and E, calcium, phosphorus, iodine, zinc and copper remain in some raw diets<sup>2</sup>. As with any commercial product dog food, owners should carefully study labelling for reassurance that their pets' nutritional needs are being met.

Another negative aspect of RMBDs is the potential health problems. It has been shown that raw products may contain numerous pathogens, including E. coli. Studies have indicated that handling raw pet food and dried pet treats may be associated with instances of bacteria and other pathogens being shared between dogs and their human owners and therefore that raw feeding is not the safest dietary choice. Where raw diets are chosen, the advice given is that **owners take extra precautions when handling raw meat and additional precautions were taken when cleaning up dog faeces.**

Furthermore, studies<sup>3&4</sup> have also found that raw fed dogs may excrete antibiotic-resistant bacteria (E. coli) in their faeces which is of particular concern due to the potential for limitations in the effectiveness of the use of antibiotics in human medicine. The researchers emphasised that measures are needed to reduce the circulation of antibiotic-resistant E. coli and other bacteria, adding to evidence that **not** feeding a raw meat diet to dogs may be of help in the efforts to decrease antibiotic resistance.

While many experts (such as the World Small Animal Veterinary Association) state that RMBDs carry a risk, a global coalition of veterinary professionals, the Raw Feeding Veterinary Society, contend that the evidence base for raw feeding dogs is growing. In the UK, DEFRA (the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs) has stated that raw pet food should always be produced from products of animal origin which are fit for human consumption, and should be handled in the same way as any raw meat product to avoid food-borne infections and increasing the risk of antimicrobial resistance spreading between pets.

If you do decide to adopt a raw food diet for your dog, good hygiene practices are essential. It is also advisable to choose a complete, balanced raw dog food formulation from a manufacturer who is registered with and participates in the UK Pet Food's Raw Pet Food certification scheme. Any change of diet should always be done gradually, and in discussion with your vet. The studies to date highlight the importance of improved vet-client communication regarding pet nutrition.

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<sup>2</sup> Dillitzer N, et al. (2011), <https://doi:10.1017/S0007114511002765>

<sup>3</sup> Sealey, J. E. *et al.* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/jac/dkac208>

<sup>4</sup> Oliver Mounsey, et al. (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.onehlt.2022.100370>