



WSAVA Global Nutrition Committee: Raw Meat Based Diets For Pets

What are raw meat based foods?

- Foods based on meat, bones, and offal (organ meats) that have not been cooked.
- These diets tend to be higher in fat, lower in carbohydrates, and can be highly digestible but raw foods (similar to cooked foods) are not all equal! They vary in ingredients, energy content, and nutritional profile.

Are raw meat-based foods healthier than dry or canned pet food?

- There is no evidence that raw meat-based diets provide health benefits over commercial or balanced homemade cooked diets.
- High fat, low fiber diets (raw, but also cooked) may be well tolerated by many pets, but others will show gastrointestinal problems, such as diarrhoea, or even pancreatitis.
- There is growing evidence that feeding raw meat can be a health risk both for the pet and the owner.

It is important for the practitioner to know when their patients are fed raw meat based diets, as nutritionally imbalanced or contaminated diets may lead to health issues or contribute to clinical signs of disease.



Risks



Raw meat-based diets have a high risk of bacterial contamination

- Raw meat can harbour various bacteria, including pathogens. A food-borne infection can be serious and even fatal (e.g. *E. coli*, *Salmonella* spp, *Yersinia*, *Campylobacter* spp, *Listeria monocytogenes*, *Mycobacterium bovis*) for pets and people.
- Pet carers and other people in the household can be infected by handling the food or the pet's stools. Individuals with a compromised immune system are more at risk (e.g. small children, pregnant people, the elderly and individuals with illnesses or on certain medications), even if they are not actively feeding the pet.
- Some bacteria found in raw meat-based products can be antibiotic resistant. Studies have found an association between raw feeding and fecal presence of antimicrobial resistant bacteria in dogs.
- Pets on raw food diets can also be a risk factor for other veterinary patients in the clinic as they may carry and shed pathogenic bacteria.
- Freezing, dehydration or freeze-drying do not kill all bacteria in food.



- Bones are offered to pets for enjoyment and for perceived dental benefits, however, they can result in broken teeth, intestinal or oesophageal obstruction, and constipation.
- Feeding bones does not reduce the risk of plaque or tooth loss due to periodontitis.



- Home prepared cooked and raw meat based diets may have important nutrient deficiencies and excesses.
- An unbalanced diet is especially detrimental for puppies and kittens, that may suffer from painful skeletal disorders and pathological fractures.



- Parasites can be found in raw meat based diets, and some (e.g. *Toxoplasma*) can infect humans, too. Pregnant people are at an especially greater risk as toxoplasmosis can affect the fetus.
- Dogs can also spread food-derived parasites to farm animals.

Davies RH, Lawes JR, Wales AD. Raw diets for dogs and cats: a review, with particular reference to microbiological hazards. *J Small Anim Pract.* 2019;60(6):329-339; Freeman LM, Chandler ML, Hamper BA, Weeth LP. Current knowledge about the risks and benefits of raw meat-based diets for dogs and cats. *J Am Vet Med Assoc.* 2013;243(11):1549-1558; Nemser S, Doran T, et al. Investigation of *Listeria*, *Salmonella*, and *Toxigenic Escherichia coli* in Various Pet Foods. *Foodborne Pathog Dis* 2014;11:706-709; Schlesinger DP, Joffe DJ. Raw food diets in companion animals: a critical review. *Can Vet J.* 2011;52(1):50-54; Van Bree FPJ, Bokken GCAM, Mineur R, et al. Zoonotic bacteria and parasites found in raw meat-based diets for cats and dogs. *Vet Rec.* 2018;182(2):50.