

Prevention is better than cure!

What's best to feed my pets?

Susanna McIntyre, BVSC MRCVS, discusses the benefits of natural feeding for carnivores (e.g. cats and dogs) and herbivores (e.g. rabbits).....and even omnivores (e.g. people)!!

Hot tips for keeping yourselves and your bunnies, doggies and pussies in the prime of health!

In line with the human medical profession, we are working towards the prevention of disease, largely through a more natural diet. If your pets are already ill, you will need to get professional help, but you can help your pets to stay healthy and recover more quickly by feeding them the food they are designed to eat.

How can diet help?

In the human field, there is an enormous amount of evidence to show that the more raw food is included in the diet, the less disease is suffered, particularly cancer, heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, skin disease and digestive problems.

All animals (including people!) evolved to function on raw food. There were no cookers or fires at that time, and certainly no tin-openers!

The basic energy currency for the body is enzymes, which are only present in raw food. They are destroyed by heat and most other forms of food processing.

Let's look at what carnivores, like dogs and cats, and herbivores, like rabbits, would eat in the wild and see how we can do this for them at home.

First, let's look at the carnivores, like cats and dogs.

In the wild, dogs and cats would eat herbivores, like rabbits, so they would be consuming raw meat, bones and the guts. This combination is important because :

- 1) **Raw meat and bone** together provide the right balance of minerals, especially calcium and phosphorous.
- 2) **The guts** contain well-chewed partially digested grass and vegetation, full of enzymes, minerals and vitamins – a highly nutritious raw grass soup!

They also eat eggs, bark, herbs, roots, soil, ripe fruit, droppings and insects.

How can I do this for my pet?

Most pet shops sell packets of frozen minced raw meat and bone mixtures; Prize Choice is a very good quality make of minced rabbit, lamb or chicken which

Prevention is better than cure!

contains raw meat and bone together, from a reputable source. This makes feeding raw food so easy!! Frozen food should be allowed to defrost at room temperature to preserve its enzyme activity. Do not defrost it in a microwave as this will damage those precious enzymes.

Carnivores also need raw fruits and vegetables (mostly liquidized) mixed with the meat and bone. Greens, like spinach, celery, parsley and broccoli are excellent. Avocado is easy to mix in once or twice a week and helps the skin as it provides many essential fats. Dogs need about half their meal as pulverized vegetation, while cats need about a quarter. If you have a compost heap, they'll help themselves to extras too! Beware of corn-on-the-cob; do not throw it on your compost heap and do not feed it to your dogs as it seems to be indigestible and can block the gut.

A civilized version of the 'grass soup' is available, called **Pet Plus** for Cats or for Dogs. This complements the natural raw food diet beautifully, and is given in addition to the pulverized raw vegetation.

When added to a processed food diet, this powdered raw food concentrate helps to improve its digestibility and hence its availability to the body. So if changing your dog or cat onto a raw food diet is too hard for some reason, at least adding the Pet Plus will provide those much needed enzymes, vitamins and minerals.

Once your pet has got used to eating raw food, you could offer some raw meaty bones. They love them. Chewing raw meaty bones (like chicken wings and drumsticks, **RAW**) and fibrous vegetables (like broccoli stalks and carrots) helps to clean their teeth and provides entertainment and satisfaction for carnivores. Cooked bones cause lots of problems because they splinter and are relatively indigestible so **never give cooked bones**.

The important points of a natural diet for carnivores are raw meaty bones, raw pulverized vegetables, lots of variety and fresh, chemical-free water (i.e. filtered or bottled).

What about rabbits and other herbivores?

In the wild, grass is their staple diet. Sometimes they feel the need for a little variety and seek out dandelions, parsley, lettuce and other greens, but mostly they need grass, grass and more grass!

This is easy to provide for pet herbivores. You can cut clean grass for them (**not** oily lawn mower cuttings) and put in their hutch or better still, put them out in an enclosed garden or a run on the grass. They love hopping about on the grass in the sun; we all need exercise and sunlight to stay healthy! They eat most of the time they're awake, so make sure grass or hay (dried grass) is always freely available with plenty of fresh, chemical-free water (i.e. filtered or bottled).

As their diet is naturally coarse and abrasive, it needs lots of chewing. This wears down the grinding surfaces of their teeth, keeping them sharp enough to pulverize the vegetation they eat. They also grow continuously from the roots.

Prevention is better than cure!

If their food is not fibrous and abrasive (like most processed flake and cereal 'bunny mix'), it doesn't wear their teeth down, so they continue to erupt into the mouth, forcing the jaws apart. Then their curved front teeth don't meet any more, so they stop being worn down, but continue to grow, following their curved shape. Eventually, these front teeth (incisors) grow into the soft tissues of the mouth and nose.

The other problem with feeding processed 'bunny mix' food to herbivores is the demineralisation of the bones, resulting in osteoporosis (same in all animals, including humans!!). The weak bones are unable to support the teeth, which end up erupting up into the eye socket and down, out of the bottom of the lower jaw, because there is no room for them in the mouth.

Overgrowing teeth is the most common problem faced by pet rabbits, chinchillas and other herbivores. It often leads to abscesses and a slow, painful death. It is virtually impossible to cure but really easy to prevent by feeding them a proper natural diet.

Have fun eating healthily with your pets and enjoy abundant energy and lifelong health!

For further information and to order Pet Plus, you can phone 01732 763666 or log on to www.naturalpetcare.co.uk