

A Fresh Look at Feeding Raw

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A lot has changed in 25 years: cell phones are everywhere and do everything, TVs are bigger, and we have the internet 24/7. The raw-feeding movement has come a long way in that time, too! Let's look at what has improved and ways to support this menu option.

In the days when I first began exploring natural health for pets, I was initially delighted to discover the raw-food diet -- it made sense to me to feed pets the way they ate in the wild. As I expected, most pets switched from a low-quality dry kibble to the raw diet using human-grade meats and bones flourished ... at first.

However, after using this approach for a while with my own pets and seeing the longer-term results in both my pets and client's pets, I began to suspect that what seemed logical in theory didn't measure up in practice. My expectation of a healthy daily diet was one that pets could not only survive on but thrive. I decided to test my theory by conducting a clinical trial in 1986. When all aspects were analyzed, I concluded that this wasn't the best method of feeding after all.

I discovered that while some pets did in fact thrive on the raw-foods diet, for others it was actually harmful (noticeably elderly pets or pets with poor liver, kidney, or digestive function). Then there were the many risks involved: e. coli, salmonella, bowel obstruction or puncture wounds from bones or feathers, difficulty in ensuring that a complete nutritional profile was met, difficulty for pet parents to ensure that their pets were fed as they intended while on vacation or in the hospital. In my opinion, there were too few benefits to outweigh the risks and work involved in doing BARF right.

That was the mid-80's, before the movement gained momentum and consumer demand led to much needed improvements to the raw diets, such as: carefully monitored and standardized sources available frozen, the addition of fresh fruits and vegetables, and the improvement of natural dry kibble or canned formulas that are easily supplemented by raw or home-cooked diets. With these improvements, the raw diet doesn't carry the same risks it once did, nor does it require the focused time and effort and, with a little tweaking, the full benefits of raw feeding can be realized.

One of my principle objections to the raw diet and why I felt it shouldn't be used for most pets remains the stress it places on the digestive system. Because the proteins, in particular, are not cooked, they are not partially broken down and therefore require more digestive enzymes to fully break down and absorb all the available nutrients. This additional production of digestive enzymes produces stress on the pancreas, gall bladder, and liver. To further compound the stress is the decreased likelihood, over time, of the body to absorb all needed nutrients before the nutrients exit the body. This stress, when coupled with the incomplete digestion, can lead to numerous health complications such as increased incidents of nutrient deficiency and, in my experience, an increased aging effect (graying coat, early arthritis, and early-developments of cataracts). In my experience, these are directly attributable to the increased stress of digestion brought on by raw feeding as it was introduced years ago and as some still implement it today.

Due to the increased digestive stress, I recommended, and still recommend, the use of supplementary digestive enzymes (DigestZymeTM) that can ease the burden placed on the digestive system. I also recommend the use of a multi-vitamin / mineral (Mega Pet DailyTM), vitamin C (Super C 2000TM), garlic

(Garlic Daily Aid™), and a homeopathic detoxifier (D'Toxifier™). This combination is extremely important when switching a pet to the raw feeding regimen. For those pets that suffer from chronic conditions or have known digestive issues, these supportive measures can make raw feeding truly beneficial. Lest we forget, everyone has times when somebody else must care for our beloved pets. Rarely is the pet sitter competent to carry on the raw diet. That is where use of high-quality natural diets, like Azmira, comes in. Having a prepared kibble or can formula to substitute in or to use as a base for semi-raw diets is important! Emergencies happen and most of us never prepare until after the fact. A sudden switch from raw to conventional kibble can cause relapse into old conditions at the worst, or extreme digestive upset at the least.

I have been very pleased to see the evolution of the raw feeding movement, especially in the last 5-7 years. Recognizing that our domesticated pets are countless generations removed from their wild cousins has led many to realize that going raw -- when done consciously and properly -- can improve pet health. My experience shows that even the most dramatic of health improvements gained by switching to raw are increased further with the use of digestive enzymes and nutritional supplements.

All being said and done, you are the guardians of your pets' health and must make a decision you are comfortable with. I can only hope that you can benefit from my 30-year perspective of observing thousands of pets around the world. My goal has been, and always will be, to provide you with the tools to ensure that in whatever feeding method you choose, you are successful and your pet is healthy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Newman holds a Doctor of Naturopathy and a Doctor of Philosophy (in Holistic Nutrition) and has been a world renowned pioneer in the field of natural pet care. The author of nine books, including her latest, *Three Simple Steps to Healthy Pets: The Holistic Animal Care LifeStyle®*, Dr. Newman is also the formulator of Azmira Holistic Animal Care® products and diets.



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