

Eye-Opening Study Confirms the Healthiest Pet Food

Finally, there's scientific evidence to help you choose the best food to feed your pet. Find out what happened to one group of dogs who switched from raw food to kibble, and another group that ate kibble throughout their lives but switched to raw food for three months.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- All dogs and cats ate the equivalent of raw diets until the introduction of processed pet food in the 1920s
- Now that most pets eat processed diets, many “experts” in the field of veterinary nutrition refuse to endorse or even suggest raw pet food, citing lack of scientific studies on their “effectiveness”
- Fortunately, there are independent studies and other research underway that will ultimately validate the nutritional benefits of feeding pets fresh food
- In addition, dogs and cats can show us through their own food choices what diets best meet their nutritional needs
- For optimal nutrition, the goal in feeding your pet should be to mimic his or her ancestral diet as closely as possible

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An article about trends in pet food mentioned that while raw diets have been “all the rage” over the last few years, there's still no scientific evidence available as to their effectiveness.

On the one hand, this is accurate. Processed pet food companies fund the lion's share of studies and have no financial incentive to study raw diets. Commercial raw pet food producers are small operators without the resources necessary to conduct this very expensive research.

However, the point that is always missed in discussions about the lack of research into raw pet food is that canines and felines have been eating raw prey for as long as they've been in existence. And while advocates of processed diets may argue otherwise, biologically, domesticated dogs and cats are nearly identical to their cousins in the wild.

Processed pet food has only been around since the 1920s. Prior to that, the diet of most dogs and cats was raw meat and table scraps, plus whatever food they hunted for themselves.

The biology of dogs and cats hasn't changed — only what we feed them has changed over the last century. But now, in order for the raw food they've always eaten to get an official stamp of approval, it needs to be studied scientifically as though it's something new and unfamiliar.

While the desire for raw pet food studies is understandable, and while it's vital to have tons of scientific data to back up what is known to be true about raw diets, it seems a bit disingenuous to ignore the existence of the ancestral diet of dogs and cats whenever the topic of raw pet food comes up. However, the good news is there actually are some raw pet food studies underway.

Independent Pet Food Study Looks at the Effect of Raw Diets Versus Kibble on Inflammation and Chronic Disease in Dogs

In Helsinki, Finland, Dr. Anna Hielm-Björkman has been conducting amazing research on pet food and raw meat diets in pets for more than 20 years. Her research involved evaluating the levels of homocysteine, a marker of **inflammation and chronic disease** in the body, relating to diet. She studied four groups of dogs for six months (a quick video summary of this study can be found **here**).

The first group consisted of previously raw fed dogs who were switched to dry food for the second half of the study (the last three months). The second group consisted of dry-fed dogs who were switched to raw food for three months. The third and fourth groups continued eating their regular food (either dry or raw for the full six-month study).

As expected, the dogs fed raw food who continued to eat raw food had the lowest homocysteine levels, at 0.17mM (a good thing). The dogs who ate dry food and continued eating dry food had the highest levels of homocysteine, 10 times more than the raw fed group (1.57mM).

Also as expected, the dogs raised on raw food and switched to kibble had a fivefold increase in levels of the disease marker in the body at the completion of the study (0.77mM). The important takeaway here is the fact that the dogs raised on dry food and changed to raw food for three months had a dramatic decrease in the disease marker (0.3mM).

Eating a biologically appropriate diet isn't just trendy, it's healthier. This type of groundbreaking research will hopefully be pivotal in changing the way pets are fed and how pet food is produced, if the industry is genuinely focused on improving the health of companion animals through the products they manufacture.

Additional Independent Studies Underway

Mercola Healthy Pets has partnered with CANWI (Companion Animal Nutrition and Wellness Institute) to fund the first comparative study of dry, canned and raw foods and the amount of toxic byproducts found in these foods after processing. In addition, Italian researchers Misa Sandri, Ph.D. and professor Bruno Stefanon at the University of Udine completed a study documenting the profound benefits of a fresh food diet compared to processed dog food on the gut microbiome.¹

These results mirror what New Zealand researchers also demonstrated in a 2017 study, which is that raw food diets are healthier (in one way or another) than biologically inappropriate diets.² In addition, the nonprofit group, **KetoPet Sanctuary**, is using biologically appropriate diets as a powerful adjunctive tool in fighting some of the most aggressive types of canine cancers, with stunning results.

This prompts the question, if raw food diets are powerful enough to address cancer (one of the most diagnosed and devastating diseases plaguing domesticated dogs today), why isn't the pet food industry spending more money researching them? One possible explanation: The kibble industry is generating around 20 billion dollars a year.

What Cats and Dogs Eat When They Get to Choose

From a pet food industry journal article:

"When cats were offered three diets with varying macronutrient profiles, they choose a high-protein, high-fat diet. The total consumption of the three diets by cats, when averaged out, showed that cats preferred protein 50% to 52% by energy, fat 36% to 50% by energy, and carbohydrate 2% to 12% by energy.

In the same type of three-diet-offering study, dogs choose a high-fat, moderate-protein diet. The average result for these tests was a preference for 30% to 38% protein by energy, 59% to 63% fat by energy, and 3% to 7% carbohydrate by energy."³

It's clear from these study results and others like them that both cats and dogs naturally choose diets very low in carbohydrates, which is the essence of a nutritionally balanced raw diet, and the opposite of processed pet diets — especially kibble. There's a simple explanation for this: low-carb diets are biologically appropriate for carnivorous canines and felines, and left to their own devices over a period of time, they will naturally balance their intake to meet their nutritional requirements.

The Recommended Biologically Appropriate Diet

The goal should be to mimic your pet's ancestral diet as closely as possible. Feed a nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate diet, which means food containing high-quality animal protein, moisture, healthy fats and fiber, with low to no starch content.

A nutritionally balanced raw or gently cooked homemade diet is the top choice for pets, but you should only attempt this if you're committed to doing it right. If you don't want to deal with balancing diets at home, a great alternative is to feed a pre-balanced, commercially available raw food. A freeze-dried/dehydrated diet is second best. Human-grade canned food is a mid-range choice, but can be hard to find.

If you can't feed an entirely fresh food diet, don't panic. Dr. Björkman's team discovered as little as 20% real food replacing highly processed kibble can confer health benefits. Incorporating a variety of fresh foods into your pet's diet as treats (such as blueberries, raw pumpkin seeds and fresh veggies) can provide your furry family member with a variety of nutrition and flavors.

Sources and References

[PetMD, The Future of Pet Food: Trends to Watch \(Archived\)](#)

¹ [BMC Veterinary Research, 2017](#)

² [PeerJ, 2017 Mar 2;5:e3019](#)

³ [PetfoodIndustry.com April 5, 2017](#)
