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fat. I only ever feed lean meaty bones, not ones that are full of fat. And though I used to feed big marrow bones raw cut down the middle, we found out that some dogs can splinter these too.

So I now buy brisket bones, chicken necks, chicken frames, chicken wing tips, turkey drumsticks and wings and raw meaty bones that can be easily chewed that are the right size for the dog to eliminate chances of choking or getting large pieces in the gut. And I learned that you really do have to supervise your dogs (and cats) when they are eating bones rather than leaving them out.

Another danger is bones that are left in the fridge too long and start to decompose. With chicken as well

as beef, lamb or pork, bacterial infection is a risk. Same as having bones left out in the yard that start to rot. Though some say that dogs in the wild are immune to this and eat rotten meat or old bones all the time, we have to remember that our dogs aren't wild, don't have that acquired resistance and with the proliferation of antibiotics in meat, they can become immune compromised.

“It is far easier for dogs and cats to become diabetic than humans.”

This brings me to the second confession. I am a diabetic. And I have been guilty in the early dumb years of feeding small pieces of candy and (horrors!) chocolates as a special treat. Chocolate is toxic to all pets and not too good for us either. Same with sugar, it is far easier for dogs and cats to become diabetic than humans. And they can't inject themselves as I have to with insulin every night as well as the pill option being horrifically expensive and hard to monitor. Plus they can react like kids and get a 'sugar rush' and get out of control.

This means no cookies, no candy and no sugary treats. And many commercial dog treats are sugary just as they are fatty. Just as you have to read the packet for your own dietary needs, you should also check pet foods and treats for primary ingredients and hidden sugars as well as colouring agents (do

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“What we often don’t realise is that feeding your pet chunks of fat including chicken and turkey skins can send their cholesterol rocketing.”

dogs need this or us?), preservatives (like sulfur dioxide in pet meat, 220, 240 and other numbers in packaged food) as well as other dubious additives.

I also have heart disease. I have had high cholesterol too though that is in check with diet and medications. What we often don’t realise is that feeding your pet chunks of fat including chicken and turkey skins can send their cholesterol rocketing. Even more dangerous though is the likelihood of them having pancreas breakdown and liver problems from ingesting too much fat at one sitting. So you have to do the same things with pets as you would do for yourself. Eliminate raw animal fats where possible, don’t feed fatty treats and don’t feed them leftovers from your plate, especially the fats and gristle that you don’t eat.

I am also a spice addict. Though I love Mexican food, I know not to feed guacamole or avocado to pets. It can be a poison. But though I used to feed my dogs corn chips and salsa in the bad old days—and they developed a real hunger for peppery things—I know now that the chips are fatty and the spicy foods can cause stomach upset... or worse.



However I am happy to report that parrots LOVE peppers and hot sauce! They do not have the receptors on their tongues that react to high levels of capsaicin (the element of chilis and other peppers that produces pain) but rather taste them as flavour. So they get the hottest habaneros peppers, chilli flakes, fiery chilli peppers and others and eat them with great relish.

Funny enough, the main danger with them is that if they have hot peppers or flakes and we kiss our parrots, well, we are the ones to suffer with sizzling lips or tongues. Same with preparation of peppers—if we cut them and get the juice on our fingers and rub them in our eyes or nose, well, we have hell to pay! And don’t forget where they hold them, in their claws. I’ve been caught painfully a few times.

But fruits and vegetables have their dangers too. I make dog soup a lot where I take leafy green vegetables, orange pumpkins or squash, broccoli, brussel sprouts, carrots, root vegetables and fruit which I may combine with grains, beans or pasta into a liquid delicacy that is served with their kibbles

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or other food. Yep, grapes are out, avocado, too much citrus and rhubarb. But also, many leafy greens have high levels of oxalates which can cause crystals in the urine and urinary tract problems especially with dogs that are prone to this condition.

For example, spinach, beet leaves, some Asian greens (and you also have to beware of Chinese vegetables that may contain viruses, bacteria, pesticides and preservatives) and rhubarb leaves should be avoided. Onions and their greens are also forbidden since they can cause anaemia and other blood problems. However garlic has both its fans and critics. I personally use it a lot for myself but am limiting it in my pets' foods just to be safe. It's about risk reduction.

To peel or not to peel? We've always been taught that that's where the vitamins are, yet that's also where the toxins, pesticides and other nasties can lurk. I've elected to peel where doubtful. And I am very strict on where I buy my vegetables to make sure I know the country of origin, opting not to use imported products from Asia, Mexico and South America, Eastern European

“Though dogs and cats aren't wild about fresh vegetables... there's nothing wrong with giving a base meat like turkey or beef mince and a vege-fruit puree.”



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and other countries where food standards are not strict. I prefer to buy Australian, organic if possible and fresh, not the sort of fruit and veg that are remaindered, tired, and not healthy at the greengrocer or supermarket.

What about fish? Our dogs love them, whole, fresh, ungutted and unscaled but in an appropriate size so they can rip them apart. We often feed fish heads like salmon, tuna spines, whole fish and raw fish pieces. What we don't feed is cooked bones, crustaceans, prawn heads and bodies, which can cause choking or punctured digestive systems.

We used to swear by sardines in the can with oil but then discovered that the Omega 3 oils are often destroyed or diminished by high heat processing. However, the small fine bones are still great for calcium, glucosamine and chondroitin and they also add a lot of flavour with kibbles and more raw vegetables. Then there's home brand mackerel too which can be mixed in with kibble and water or pureed vegetables.



Though dogs and cats aren't wild about fresh vegetables—often spitting out the pieces when they encounter them in their bowls—using a blender, food processor or hand held zinger to make a puree of fresh or cooked orange and green vegetables is a way of getting that type of nutrition into your beast to compensate for meat-centric diets. While I don't advocate trying to emulate the BARF diet as a home-made option due to the complexity, mess and storage potential for contamination, there's nothing wrong with giving a base meat like turkey or beef mince and a vege-fruit puree.

When it comes to fruits, dogs are remarkably adept at adopting. I've seen my pups take to apples, pears, pitted cherries, plums and mango but no raisins, grapes, rhubarb or heavy citrus. They'll spit out what they don't like just as with vegetables but fruit can be pureed in with veges as a mix that can be enhanced with fish and oil or other meaty delights to camouflage the healthy bits, just like with kids! I can especially vouch for ground up chicken frames which have crushed raw bones and meat, which I regularly get from Lenards shops along with necks, wing tips and whole frames.

I often sneak in other healthy additives. Sprouts are easy to make and mix in but often have to be blended to a pulp. While I would never use human grade vitamins, there are animal vitamin compounds that can be added as well as powdered glucosamine and chondroitin for joint and flexibility enhancement. Brewers yeast is great as a flea deterrent when eaten, it seems to produce an unpleasant flavour to parasites, much as garlic does. Don't use baking yeast, but specifically brewers yeast.

And here's a fun tip: I use fish oil capsules as a treat, not more than four on average but the dogs relish popping them open, chewing them and begging for more. I would imagine a cat would love one too. And don't forget the power of a raw egg stirred into the mix for extra health benefits. Not too many over time, but the occasional googly treat mixed into food isn't a bad thing.

On the subject of nuts, they are a tasty treat as well but fatty and should only be used in limited quantities, if your pet will eat them—not roasted and salted or glazed but raw. Brazil nuts, walnuts, pecans and almonds would be good to try. But under no circumstances give your dog macadamia nuts. They produce a problem with blood that can be fatal.

Of course the big no-no is Alcohol! Some people will give their pets beer but this is not good from a number of points, primarily the alcohol content



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Dr Karen Becker, a well known Veterinarian featured on the Mercola.com website gives this intelligent advice:

SYMPTOMS OF SKIN ALLERGIES

- Fur may feel sticky
- Lots of flakes on the skin despite the fact your pet feels greasy
- Red spots with little white heads, which often have black areas around them
- Red inflamed skin covering large areas of the body
- Your pet may act like his or her skin is crawling with something

The vast cause of most allergies, are due to a yeast overgrowth. The best way to address this problem is to remove grains from the diet (corn, wheat, rice, soy). The best replacement food is raw meat (your dog or cat's natural food).

Good regular bathing with a good non-irritant shampoo will help ease this uncomfortable condition. A good medicated shampoo can help cure this condition but the cause usually comes from the inside.



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and their liver as well as the calories and the grain nature of it. Some animals are very allergic to grains which is why so many people are using meat protein foods rather than grain based kibbles and carb packed canned foods to counter itching and skin problems.

Regarding bread, again the grain element of it can produce itchy skin, eczema in some animals and the yeast and highly processed flour can cause digestive discomfort. Even though we might love whole grain healthy loafs, it's not advised to make these a part of their diet and also never feed bread or other foods that have mould on them.

In the end, the one ingredient you always need to add to your pet's diet is veterinary advice. The information I've given here is generalist and there will probably be those 'raw meaty bones' advocates that think I'm crazy suggesting other things. And on the other side, those who work for pet food companies that claim that theirs is a complete nutritional product that neither requires nor needs anything else.

You should go by the vet's advice on any feeding matters if they are knowledgeable about your pet, its breed requirements, activity levels, dietary restrictions, allergies or other factors and make sure that you serve balanced foods. Don't change a diet radically or only give your pets what they have a craving for, especially treats, and instead encourage them to consume what they need at the right levels.



That said, be aware that some vets are encouraged to sell particular food brands with high margins by certain companies and you should be alert to a sell job for a particular brand and type being pushed down your throat as opposed to a variety of options. If your vet has maybe one or two brands only in their practice at full retail and only recommends them, ask them for other recommendations—it's easy for you to find four other brands let's say—and ask what they know about them, their nutritional content, fat, carbohydrate and protein requirements of your pet that can be met by them and listen carefully to the answer. Make your own judgement then.

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