

Finally, the Real Science Behind the Benefits of Feeding Raw

Dr. Conor Brady's new book, 'Feeding Dogs: The Science Behind the Dry Versus Raw Debate,' is a well-written, well-referenced thorough examination of the raw dog food debate. Pet parents everywhere need to read it and recommend it to their veterinarians.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Dr. Conor Brady is the author of a groundbreaking new book titled "Feeding Dogs: The Science Behind the Dry Versus Raw Debate"
- Dr. Brady's passion for food-as-medicine arose from the plight of his 7-year-old dog with debilitating hip dysplasia
- Dr. Brady was improving the health of his own dog and the guide dogs he trained with raw diets, but the vets and others he worked with were uninterested — so he struck out on his own to make the case for feeding raw
- His incredibly well-researched and footnoted book is the result of a decade of work; it makes complex topics understandable and digestible for both veterinarians and pet parents
- Of particular benefit is the proof the book provides that ultraprocessed pet food is tied directly to the epidemic of diseases in today's canine companions

Today I'm talking with Dr. Conor Brady, author of the fantastic new book, **Feeding Dogs: The Science Behind The Dry Versus Raw Debate**. The following article covers many of the highlights of our discussion, but I encourage you to watch the full video as well.

I've read Dr. Brady's book cover to cover and love it. I asked him to tell us a little about how he became so passionate about dogs and food.

A Pet Crippled With Hip Dysplasia Got the Ball Rolling

"I think my passion for dogs began with my first dog," he explained. "I come from a family of five boys, and my parents got the dog on the day I was born. Prince grew up with me and I was really attached to him.

I knew straight away when he died that I wanted another dog and my mom and dad said, 'Slow down, let's get you into an animal shelter.' So, I was only 12 or 13 years old and working in animal shelters. It's kind of the same progression that a lot of people have had. I became passionate about animal welfare and animal health because you see a lot sick, sad dogs in shelters.

My next dog was a shepherd collie cross, Meg, who I spent six or seven years with. She was such a lovely dog, and she was hobbled with chronic hip dysplasia by the time she was about seven years old.

We neutered her too young, and she was fed poor-quality food. She's walking around like an old woman at seven. The veterinarian was giving her shots of cartrophen and other things, and we were feeding her an amazingly complicated diet, but none of it was helping. And I said, 'What's the prognosis here? How long is this going to go on?'

I was in college at the time, so I knew a little bit and I wasn't given any good news. I said, 'You know what? I'm going to remove everything from this dog's life and start again.' I decided to put her onto real food and go with a raw diet. I bought whatever books I could get my hands on, like "Give Your Dog a Bone" and others. Then I added a couple of natural supplements like omega-3s and said, 'Let's see how this goes.'

The dog went from walking painfully to running back up the cliffs beside the beach within about a week. And I was like, 'Bloody hell, look at the difference in this dog! This is incredible!' I took her to the vet and said 'Look, Meg is a different dog. Look at the walk, her gait is fixed.'

He asked me what happened, and when I told him, he was no longer impressed with the dog's improvement. He had the standard reaction we've come to expect to raw food. I was a bit disappointed. But it was the change in Meg, despite the lack of response from the vet that convinced me I wasn't wrong."

Dr. Brady Met With the Typical Resistance to Raw Diets

"Another thing that convinced me was the result of my work as a guide dog trainer in Australia," Dr. Brady continued. "Guide dog schools over there are sponsored by dry pet food companies, so the dogs are fed whatever dry food is cool that year. I had about 18 guide dogs in my care, as well as dogs I was training as a sideline to make a bit of extra cash.

Of the 18, around six or seven were on full-time meds because they were chronically itchy. They were driven mad with allergies. People blamed it on living in the 'allergy capital of the world,' but it's a widespread problem and not just in Australia.

I knew it wasn't normal that of the 18 kids I was looking after, seven were on steroids. They were seeing top-notch vets several times a month. I knew there had to be another reason. I was doing a lot of nutritional work with dogs, so I decided to take three of the worst cases and do a small trial."

Dr. Brady transitioned the dogs from dry food to raw and added in some supplements and all three showed dramatic improvement. After three months, he met with the vets and stressed the difference in the dogs, all of whom no longer needed medication. He explained the dogs could once again focus on their work. He asked the vets to meet with his superiors in the guide dog organization about what the animals were being fed.

Again, the vets weren't impressed. Dr. Brady gave his superiors a three-hour seminar, including the available science on raw diets. After the presentation, they told Dr. Brady the information was "very interesting," but they were going to stay with dry food.

"I just couldn't believe it," said Dr. Brady. "That was it."

Helping Pet Parents and Vets Understand 'Good' Science

I asked Dr. Brady when he decided to put all the information he'd collected into his book, which is a remarkable resource.

"It started the day I quit guide dogs in Australia," he replied. "Once you don't believe me, I'll kind of show you. And I love research. I like to see the data behind things. Especially today, we're always hearing 'Trust the scientists. Trust the science,' and that's ridiculous. I trust data. If you show me the data, then I'll trust you."

These days, all you need to say is, 'There's science behind this. This is scientifically proven,' and people just fall for it. I'm really very sad about the fact that science is being destroyed. It's gotten a bit dark. The editor of the Lancet for the last 20 years says that less than 50% of the studies they print are true. This is the case with top scientists and top journals."

Dr. Brady tries to show readers of his book just how easily the public can be misled with manipulative promotion of "the science" of things. Another of the many reasons I love his book is because it offers veterinarians an all-in-one resource that fills in gaps from veterinary school training. It's laid out in a logical fashion that makes it easy to find the information and different perspectives it offers.

The book is convincingly accurate about how the issues developed and the corporate involvement in the staging of ultraprocessed pet food. The fact is that just because dogs and cats have been domesticated doesn't mean their metabolic machinery has evolved to function on an entirely ultraprocessed diet.

"I want pet owners to be able to understand good science," Dr. Brady explained. "There's nothing scary about it. Trying to remove the fear from people is important. And hopefully the book will, for veterinarians — especially young ones — provide our side of the story."

And if it works for them, great. If it doesn't, they've at least heard our side of the story. At least give us the time. Put in that little bit of effort because nutrition affects every aspect of health."

One Practice That Flipped the Script on Veterinary Care

On a positive note, Dr. Brady knows of a veterinary group in the U.K. that's sort of a ray of sunlight on an otherwise bleak landscape. The group has 20 veterinarians, and they're all raw food advocates. In fact, anyone who doesn't believe in raw diets doesn't get a job offer. They offer a healthcare plan to pet parents. Clients pay a certain amount of money per month, and the practice commits to keeping their pet healthy.

"They flipped the whole thing on its head," said Dr. Brady, because it's less costly to keep a pet well than to cure a sick pet, so it's a win-win-win for pets, owners, and the veterinary practice. The only caveat is that the animal must be raw fed to qualify for a plan.

"I've heard that these vets are 'sucking in clients from a 100-mile radius'," said Dr. Brady. "Conventional vets within that 100 miles are going to lose the argument very quickly because the community is flocking to these vets. They offer huge discounts off raw food if they go on the plan which commits the customer in a positive way."

According to Dr. Brady these vets also don't promote a lot of flea control and they test for worms instead of automatically treating. They don't give annual boosters, and they offer titer testing. Their proactive preventive approach is their business model.

I'm thinking this could be a template I need to show my conventional colleagues, many of whom are burned out or worse, depressed and potentially suicidal. Some of their struggle is they don't have enough tools in their veterinary toolbox. Imagine giving them the tools to prevent degeneration from occurring. What would that do for their psyches?

Could it refresh their souls as doctors and give them the opportunity to put proactive medicine into practice? Wouldn't their jobs have more meaning if they didn't constantly endure the heartbreak of watching their patients fall apart bit by bit, not knowing what to do about it? And food is the foundation of it all.

The Roadmap From Diet to Disease in Dogs

Dr. Brady does a good job in his book explaining why high-glycemic starch and sugar-based diets are so damaging to dogs' health.

"Dogs can digest carbohydrates, sure," he explained. "They have taken some very tiny evolutionary steps toward that ability. Some breeds have fired up a few more genes for amylase production, which is the enzyme for digesting carbohydrates. But people leap on that and assume we can feed them 60% corn. We're feeding pets the foods we're told not to eat as humans."

We know that when you eat huge amounts of carbohydrates, your blood fat spikes. We were once told it was dietary fat that was causing fat people. We dropped the fat content in food and not the sugar and then the obesity crisis exploded because it was always the sugar.

It was the same with pancreatitis. We were taught, it was that little bit of fat that we gave our dog. What was wrong with your dog that he couldn't eat a little bit of fat? He's a carnivore. Why couldn't we eat a little bit? It wasn't the fat, there was something else going on. The pancreas was knackered for want of a better word beforehand.

Bloat with torsion is shockingly prevalent in the canine community, 3% of pedigree dogs are killed by it and 10% are affected by it. I strongly believe soluble fiber is at the heart of that in deep chested dogs."

This section of Dr. Brady's book is a gift to both veterinarians and pet parents. It's not an easy topic to understand, but he has managed to distill a massive amount of technical information so that it is easy to understand and digest and is logical and makes sense. I greatly appreciate that Dr. Brady covers most of the major diseases killing dogs today and their correlation with food. The information has never been knitted together in this way before.

It will be hard for critics to attack the book because it's not just an opinion, it's also the science behind the opinion, laid out in an easy to understand, digestible format. I'm going to order some extra copies, so when people claim there's no science behind raw diets, I can say, "Just a minute, please. Have a look at this book."

Together, We Can Finally Put the Raw Pet Food Debate to Bed

Dr. Brady says he'd like to see lots of online citizen educators feed their dogs real food, see the positive results, and set out to tell the world. Because every mind they change is a pet they are helping. The more people talk about this subject, the more quickly the movement grows.

"I'd really like to get this done quickly," Dr. Brady said. "Let's just get this argument dusted quickly and move on because there's just so much more to learn. We've got a whole new realm of science here that we can explore."

So many studies need to be done. Feeding kibble along with raw, what effect does that have on fresh food digestion? Can you feed raw meaty bones with a little plant matter? There are so many questions we need to find answers for.

We need the universities on our side. We need younger vets to start calling for this information. I want good science to make a comeback. I love the subject and I want to remove it from big corporations and take it back."

I'm very excited about Dr. Brady's work, and no pressure, but I believe in the future he'll be able to do a part two with the foundational comparisons of different types of diets. I don't think he's finished writing. I think he needs a little bit of a break, but I think part two is going to be an unbelievable contribution of new science.

"I do hope that's the case, that I'm sitting here in 10 years and I'm talking to you about the amazing advances that have occurred," replied Dr. Brady. "When I talk to Rodney (Habib) of Planet Paws and others, I realize there are a lot of switched-on people making serious leaps now. Within the next five years there'll be a very exciting collection of works."

Many thanks to Dr. Conor Brady for his time today. You can learn more about him at his website, **Dogs First**.
