

How to Make Fermented Veggies a Healthy Part of Your Pet's Meal

There are many reasons why fermented foods are good for you and your pets. They act as potent chelators and detoxifiers, helping to rid your pet's body of heavy metals and other toxins. Learn the best types to feed your pet and what you should do if your dog or cat refuses them.

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Fermented vegetables are a staple in virtually every type of native diet worldwide — and pets can enjoy them too
- Fermentation mimics the digestion of plant foods that occurs prey animals' GI tracts, making them easier to digest
- Lactic acid bacteria produced during the fermentation process have health-promoting properties, including anticancer effects
- Fermented vegetables are naturally rich in beneficial bacteria, or probiotics, to nourish gut and immune system health
- Some pets will gladly lap up a dollop of fermented veggies while others want no part of them; start your pet out gradually with half a teaspoon and slowly increase the amount to 1 to 3 teaspoons a day for every 20 pounds of body weight

Sauerkraut may not be the first thing that comes to mind when preparing your pet's meals, but it's one type of fermented vegetable that can offer significant nutritional benefits. There's a reason why fermented vegetables are a staple in virtually every type of native diet worldwide — and pets can enjoy them too.

While vegetables should make up only a small part of your pet's fresh, species-appropriate diet, fermentation makes the vegetables they do consume easier to digest. Further, they provide beneficial bacteria, vitamins, enzymes and other nutrients to support your pet's gut microbiome, immune function and overall health.

Fermented Vegetables Mimic the Predigested Veggies Animals Consume in the Wild

Cats are obligate carnivores that, in the wild, get the bulk of the vegetable matter they consume via the gastrointestinal (GI) tract of their prey, along with the occasional nibbling of grasses and plant matter for their roughage needs. Wild dogs also consume animals that have plant matter in their digestive tract, along with plants, berries, fruits, roots, nuts, seeds and grasses.

Some **vegetables** can be harder for dogs to digest, but feeding a small amount of fermented vegetables is a simple way to imitate the plant matter found in their natural diet. Fermentation mimics the digestion of plant foods that occurs in the prey animals' GI tracts, making them easier to digest.

In the wild, wolves and coyotes consume sometimes sizable quantities of fermentable roughage (grasses, berries and wild fruits and vegetables) as sources of important fiber, phytonutrients and antioxidants. Fermented vegetables provide these healthy compounds to your pets, as well.

Fermented Veggies Provide Vitamins, Enzymes and Lactic Acid

There are many reasons why fermented foods are good for you and your pets. They act as potent chelators and detoxifiers, helping to rid your pet's body of heavy metals and other toxins. They also increase the bioavailability of nutrients and contain vitamins C and K2, B vitamins and enzymes, which support metabolic activity, choline and acetylcholine.

Lactic acid bacteria (LAB) produced during the fermentation process also have health-promoting properties, including potential **anticancer effects**. As explained in Seminars in Cancer Biology, "LAB inhibit tumor growth through various mechanisms, including antiproliferative activity, induction of apoptosis, cell cycle arrest, as well as through antimutagenic, antiangiogenic and anti-inflammatory effects."¹

Supplementing cats' diets with lactic acid even led to significant reductions in dental plaque, calculus and tooth stains,² which means fermented foods may even be useful for your **pet's dental health**.

In a study of beagles whose diets were supplemented with probiotics extracted from kimchi, a traditional Korean fermented vegetable dish, HDL cholesterol improved, triglycerides decreased and lactic acid bacteria count in the feces improved, suggesting it may "positively affect the health status of adult dogs."³

Probiotics — The No. 1 Benefit of Fermented Foods

Fermented vegetables are naturally rich in beneficial bacteria, or probiotics, to nourish gut and immune system health. In dogs and cats, the GI tract typically includes a mix of Firmicutes, Bacteroidetes, Proteobacteria, Fusobacteria and Actinobacteria, along with other microbes.⁴

Imbalances in these organisms may lead to inflammatory and other diseases, while the use of probiotics may be beneficial for GI issues, allergies, diabetes, obesity, liver disease, mood support and more.⁵ Gut issues are the number one reason pets visit the vet. Your pet's microflora can be altered by stress, illness, use of veterinary medications, including antibiotics, anti-inflammatories (steroidal and nonsteroidal drugs), and flea and tick chemicals, as well as changes in their diet and environment.

This makes providing a variety of probiotics crucial for restoring balance. While supplementation is an option, fermented foods are an ideal source of probiotics because they come from food. They provide a wide variety of beneficial bacteria in high amounts, and they're relatively inexpensive, especially if you make them at home.

For example, the highest number of colony-forming units you'll typically find in human probiotics is around 10 billion. But fermented veggies produced by probiotic starter cultures can produce 10 trillion colony-forming units of bacteria. That means one human serving size of fermented veggies provides the same benefit as an entire bottle of high-

potency probiotics — at a fraction of the price.

How to Feed Fermented Foods to Your Pets

It's important to start gradually if your pet is new to fermented foods. If you feed a large amount right off the bat, they may experience digestive upset and gas. A reasonable amount to start is half a teaspoon mixed in with their regular meal. You can increase this to 1 to 3 teaspoons a day for every 20 pounds of body weight. Always let your pet set the pace, however, and don't force them if they don't like the taste.

Some pets will gladly lap up a dollop of fermented veggies while others want no part of them. If your pet won't eat fermented veggies, I recommend pureeing them and mixing a tiny amount in bone broth, plain yogurt or cottage cheese, which can help buffer their sour taste.

If your pet absolutely won't give them a try, offer a variety of **probiotic supplements** and continue to feed other **fresh fruits and vegetables**. The liquid produced by the fermentation process is also a rich source of lactic acid and other nutrients. So, if your pet doesn't devour fermented veggies, you can try adding small amounts of the liquid to their meals instead.

You can find fermented vegetables at many grocery stores, but be sure those you choose are onion-free and not pasteurized. Another option is to **prepare fermented vegetables at home**. It's a simple process that can provide valuable nutrition for the whole family, pets included.

Sources and References

¹ [Semin Cancer Biol. 2022 Nov;86\(Pt 3\):356-366](#)

² [J Vet Dent. 2019 Jun; 36\(2\): 129-134](#)

³ [Animals \(Basel\). 2019 Aug; 9\(8\): 581](#)

⁴ [Vet Rec Open. 2019; 6\(1\): e000368](#)

⁵ [Clinician's Brief February 2013, Probiotics](#)
