

Reminders Before Sharing This Thanksgiving Centerpiece with Your Pet

Most Thanksgiving turkey recipes use a lot of salt, spices and seasonings that may not be healthy for pets. If you want to give them a bite, make sure to feed this plain and without the bones.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)



STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- If cooked without spices and seasonings, turkey meat can be a good addition to your pet's species-appropriate meals or can be given as treats
- Cooked turkey bones should not be given to dogs or cats as they are extremely brittle and may puncture their GI tracts, causing significant damage
- To ensure that you're feeding your pet high-quality meat, choose organic, free-range, human-grade turkey. Follow a recipe that has been formulated to meet your pet's minimum nutrient requirements if you are feeding a homemade diet

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With Thanksgiving just around the corner, recipes for turkey are now popping up everywhere — after all, it's usually the centerpiece in every Thanksgiving feast. If you're a pet parent, you're probably curious whether you can give your pets a few pieces of cooked turkey to include them in the celebrations.

If your dog or cat is begging for a bite of your Thanksgiving turkey, it may not be a good idea to share what's on the table — remember that some recipes include large amounts of garlic, butter and a variety of spices or sauces that may cause digestive problems for your canine and feline friends.¹

But, not to worry — if prepared without spices and seasonings, raw or cooked turkey meat can be a good addition to your pet's species-appropriate meals or can be given as treats. Generally, turkey is a healthy source of protein and other nutrients for dogs and cats, as long as it's unseasoned and cut into small pieces.

You may also give them turkey treats (with the bones removed) that are raw, dehydrated or freeze-dried. Just remember that when giving turkey snacks and treats, they should constitute only about 10% of your pet's daily caloric intake and should not exceed the recommended amount.

Top 5 Turkey Producers in the World

With the demand for turkey meat, especially during Thanksgiving, it wouldn't come as a surprise that the U.S. is the top producer around the globe. The top countries that produce almost 80% of the world's supply include:²

1. U.S.



2. Brazil
3. Germany
4. France
5. Italy



Turkey Is a Rich Protein Source

Compared to chicken, which has about 17.4 grams of protein, turkey may provide up to 19.7 grams of protein per 100 grams of meat.^{3,4} Providing dogs with enough protein is crucial in supporting your pet's muscle mass up to their senior years. Replenishing their protein stores may help prolong their lives by lowering their risk of morbidity and mortality.

In a 2008 study from Top Companion Animal Medicine, dietary protein in dogs was also found to help slow down muscle wasting and the loss of lean body mass in adult dogs.⁵ If you're taking care of older dogs, note that they may require higher protein intake, as protein restriction may aggravate the age-related decrease in body mass.^{6,7}

Boost Your Pet's Mood with Tryptophan

One of the most noteworthy components of turkey is L-tryptophan, an essential amino acid that is the sole precursor of serotonin, a neurotransmitter. Serotonin is known for its influence on mood, cognition and behavior, as well as sleep and stress.⁸

By providing your pets with enough L-tryptophan in their diets, you may be helping them improve or maintain their brain health, as well as their nerve health. Raw turkey is one of the best sources of L-tryptophan, with about 102 milligrams of tryptophan found in a 100-gram serving.⁹

Turkey Should Be Fed in Balance with Omega-3-Rich Foods

Just like chicken and other poultry, turkey meat is high in polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs), particularly omega-6 fats.¹⁰ One example is linoleic acid. According to a study published in the Journal of Applied Animal Nutrition, this fatty acid is "an essential nutrient in dogs and plays a critical part in the lipid component of skin barrier formation."¹¹

However, the high amounts of PUFAs in this meat means it should be balanced with appropriate amounts of omega-3s (EPA and DHA) when given to your pets — otherwise it can upset their omega-3 to omega-6 ratio.

Keep in mind that omega-3 fatty acids are crucial for your pet's health, especially in puppies and kittens. DHA, in particular, assists in healthy brain and eye development in young pets, as well as helps in improving cognition.¹² Omega-3 fatty acids also promote memory-related learning by supporting synaptic transmission, or the communication between your pet's nerve cells.¹³

So when feeding turkey-based diets, make sure to include omega-3 rich foods as well. It's best to follow a recipe that has been formulated to meet your pet's minimum nutrient requirements.



Did You Know?



Turkeys go by different names depending on their age and gender. Male adult turkeys are called “gobblers” — due to the distinct sound that they make — and female adult turkeys are called “hens.” Young male turkeys go by the name “Jakes,” while young females are “Jennies.”¹⁴



Should You Give Your Pets Turkey Bones?

"While gently cooked turkey meat is safe for dogs, the bones are not. Turkey bones, much like other poultry bones, are extremely brittle when cooked."

Turkey bones can damage your dog's digestive tract if left undigested. They also may splinter and puncture your pet's stomach or serve as a choking hazard. Feeding cooked turkey bones may also lead to:¹⁵

- Mouth and tongue injuries
- Constipation
- Rectal bleeding from undigested bone fragments
- Gastrointestinal blockages



Fun Fact About Turkey

A long-running joke was that Benjamin Franklin championed the turkey to become America's national bird, instead of the bald eagle. However, this myth was due to a misunderstanding in a letter he sent to his daughter. In the letter, Franklin criticizes the bald eagle for the way it hunts and notes that turkeys are much more “respectable.”¹⁶



As Much as Possible, Choose Organic, Free-Range Turkey

Choosing organic, free-range turkey from trustworthy sources will help ensure that you and your pets get the highest quality food. An estimated 99% of all farmed animals are currently raised in concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), where they are kept in extremely cramped and inhumane conditions. Because of the poor living conditions, these animals are often given low-level doses of antibiotics to hamper disease outbreaks and infections.¹⁷

This has heightened the risk for drug-resistant bacteria being spread to humans due to direct exposure or consumption of contaminated CAFO meats.¹⁸ Drug-resistant infections have been on the rise in companion animals as well, with pets suffering from drug-resistant skin infections and urinary tract infections.¹⁹

By choosing organic poultry, not only will you help lower your pet's chances of exposure to drug-resistant bacteria, but you'll also maximize the nutrients found in this food. In a 2015 review from Food and Nutrition Research, the quality of animal fat and nutrient concentration in poultry largely depends on the chickens' diet.²⁰

Here's a Delicious Turkey Treats Recipe Your Pet Will Love

If you're looking for an exciting way for your pets to try turkey, go for this healthy turkey balls recipe. Just remember that these treats should make up less than 10% of your pet's daily caloric intake.

Ingredients:

- 🐾 1 cup ground turkey
- 🐾 1 egg
- 🐾 1 tsp. chopped parsley
- 🐾 1/4 cup cottage cheese
- 🐾 1/2 cup sweet potato, cooked, peeled and mashed

Procedure:

1. Mix all the ingredients together, and then roll them into 1-inch balls.
2. Place the balls on a greased cookie sheet and bake at 325 degrees Fahrenheit for 45 minutes. Let cool once done.
3. Store extra turkey balls in the freezer or the refrigerator and consume within one week. If frozen, turkey ball treats can stay fresh for up to three months.

Sources and References

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