

Nearly 1 in 4 Owners Add This to Their Pet's Food – Do You?

There's a growing trend among pet owners, yet the practice clearly isn't always in the pet's best interests. The astonishing interpretation that many owners make, believing this is somehow helping their pets. Plus, five simple ways to turn that around.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- The good news: According to a recent survey, pet owners are adding fresh foods to their dogs' and cats' diets
- The bad news: The people surveyed consider things like pancakes and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to be "fresh foods"
- Many human foods are processed and/or very low quality; just because a food is intended for humans doesn't make it a good choice for pets
- When it comes to fresh food diet for pets, the best ones are unprocessed, fresh, whole foods that are nutritionally complete and optimal for the species
- My recommendation is to feed your pet (and yourself) as much unprocessed, fresh food as you can afford

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According to a headline in a 2017 pet food industry journal:

"Pet food mix-ins: adding fresh foods to dog, cat food ... As more consumers aim for customization of their pets' food, human foods are merging with pet food options"¹

The article cites a Packaged Facts survey of pet owners taken about a year ago.² According to the survey results, 22% of both dog and cat owners add commercially available toppers and mix-ins to their pet's food, which may not be a great idea depending on what those items are. But encouragingly, the survey showed that 18% of cat owners and 32% of dog owners add "fresh food" to their pet's diet.

Since When Are Donuts and Hot Dogs 'Fresh Foods'?

This seemed promising, however, many of the "fresh foods" people are feeding to their pets, according to their survey answers, are downright disturbing. They include:

- Breakfast foods such as biscuits, donuts, pancakes, muesli, sausage and gravy
- Sandwiches such as ham and cheese and peanut butter and jelly
- Fast food French fries, hamburgers, hot dogs, and KFC fried chicken, along with ketchup, mustard and hot sauce

- Hot meals, including beef stew, macaroni and cheese, meat and potatoes, and meatloaf
- International foods and ingredients, including Belgian cheese, curry, mango, papaya and salsa

If you look at just the broad categories of foods, it's only slightly less horrifying. For example, meat (beef, ham and hamburger top the list) and meat drippings are the most common add-ins for dogs, followed by gravies, sauces or broths, and poultry. Vegetables are also a common addition, with carrots at No. 1, followed by sweet potato.

Grains are almost as popular as veggies, with rice at the top of the list. Also in this category are miscellaneous add-ins, including buttered bread, cereal, Nutter Butter cookies and pizza crust. Bringing up the rear are dairy products, starchy vegetables, fish and in last place for some reason, eggs.

The Ideal Definition of Fresh Foods for Pets

The biggest takeaway from the article was that "fresh food" clearly means different things to different people. Based on the list above, to some pet owners fresh food seems to mean anything that doesn't come in a can or a bag labeled "dog food" or "cat food."

That's absolutely not the best fresh diets for pets. The best fresh food diet for pets should be as species-appropriate as possible (meaning it's low in carbohydrates, with high moisture content and unprocessed), and contains a variety of fresh, whole foods that are nutritionally complete and optimal for the species.

Dogs and cats need quality protein, fats and a small amount of vegetables and fruits (roughage). Vegetables and fruits provide antioxidants and fiber to animals that no longer hunt whole prey.

Natural sources of trace minerals, vitamins and fatty acids must be added, since the soils in which foods are grown are depleted of many of the nutrients pets need. Also, food storage, whether it's in a freezer or a pantry, decreases critical essential fatty acid levels in foods.

Pets need unadulterated, fresh, whole foods that are moisture dense. They do not need breakfast pastries, processed meats, sandwiches, fast food or mac and cheese. Processed toppers or mix-ins are also not recommended.

So in a nutshell, the best foods to add to your pet's bowl come from the refrigerator, not the pantry. Foods that are considered "perishable" are also considered "fresh" (which means they rot or spoil in a short period of time if not kept cool). The take away message — don't add anything to your pet's bowl of shelf-stable pet food that doesn't come from the refrigerator.

The Fresh Food Diet That's Recommend for Dogs and Cats

The top five types of pet food contain a variety of nutritionally balanced, unprocessed (living), whole food diets. That's because the goal in feeding pets a diet they can truly thrive on is to mimic their ancestral diet as closely as possible without breaking the bank.

Feed your pet (and yourself) as much unprocessed, fresh food as you can afford. If you can't afford to feed an entirely fresh, living, raw food diet, offer fresh food snacks instead. Research shows that providing any amount of healthy foods to dogs and cats is better than no healthy food at all.

Other options to consider: Feed, for example, two to four fresh food meals out of 14 in a week, or do a 50/50 split, meaning one meal a day is a processed pet food, and the other is a fresh food meal. Take baby steps toward providing the best diet you can afford for your dog or cat, and keep in mind that any amount of species-appropriate fresh food snacks and meals is better than none.

Every bite of food your pet swallows is either healing or harmful; all foods impact the body in some way. The more fresh, living, whole foods your dog or cat consumes, the better.

5 Superfood Toppers to Supercharge Your Pet's Diet

1. **Pumpkin** — Fresh pumpkin, either steamed or boiled (or canned 100% pumpkin), is relatively low in calories and high in soluble fiber, which is beneficial for pets with gastrointestinal (GI) upset. Pumpkin helps regulate bowel function, which relieves both diarrhea and constipation. Pumpkin is also an excellent source of potassium.
2. **Kefir** — Kefir is a fermented milk beverage that contains beneficial probiotics that support the immune system. Although regular, pasteurized cow's milk can be irritating to your pet's GI tract, fermented milk is different. One of the best and least expensive ways to add healthy bacteria to your pet's diet is to **convert raw milk to kefir yourself**.

All you need is one-half packet of kefir starter granules in a quart of raw milk (preferably organic), which you leave at room temperature overnight. Add 1 to 3 teaspoons of this super probiotic to your pet's food one to two times daily for overall improved GI defenses.

3. **Mushrooms** — Some mushrooms are poisonous, so obviously you'll want to avoid those. Nontoxic, beneficial varieties include shiitake, reishi, maitake, lion's mane, king trumpet, turkey tail and himematsutake mushrooms. All mushrooms that are safe for people are safe for pets.

Mushrooms can help regulate bowel function, but even better, they also contain potent anticancer properties and immune system enhancers. You can either lightly cook the mushrooms in a very small amount of olive or coconut oil before adding them to your pet's meal, or try out my mushroom broth recipe.

4. **Sardines** — Fish are a rich source of omega-3 fatty acids, which are essential to your pet's well-being. If you supplement your dog's or cat's diet with fish, use sardines packed in water. Sardines don't live long enough to store toxins in their bodies, and they're a terrific source of omega-3s.
5. **Fermented vegetables** — Fermented foods are potent detoxifiers and contain very high levels of probiotics and vitamins. Beneficial gut bacteria provided by probiotics break down and eliminate heavy metals and other toxins from the body, and perform a number of other important functions.

Adding 1 to 3 teaspoons of fermented veggies to your pet's food each day (depending on body weight) is a great way to offer food-based probiotics and natural nutrients.

Superfood toppers, like all additions to your pet's diet, should constitute no more than 15% of the overall caloric intake.

Sources and References

¹ [PetfoodIndustry.com January 9, 2017](#)

² [Packaged Facts](#)