

Your Dog May Go Nuts for This, but a Little Goes a Long Way

Strange new food boosts your pet's immunity and is also a potent chelator and detoxifier, helping purge toxins and heavy metals from your pet's body with bioavailable nutrients. But even if your dog loves this, please start small to avoid GI upset.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Domesticated carnivores, like dogs and cats, need varying amounts of roughage in their diets for digestive, intestinal and bowel health
- Small amounts of low-glycemic vegetables provide roughage, phytonutrients and antioxidants; fermenting vegetables is a great way to increase their health benefits for pets
- Fermented vegetables are optimally digestible for dogs and cats, and they also offer powerful probiotic benefits
- Fermented veggies are also potent chelators and detoxifiers, and the lactic acid produced during fermentation has cancer-fighting properties
- If your pet will eat fermented vegetables, it's important to start with very small amounts and build up gradually to 1 to 3 teaspoons per 20 pounds of body weight

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While vegetables should represent only a small percentage of your dog's or cat's nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate diet, they are actually very important to your pet's health. Dogs need them for essential nutrients (such as powerful antioxidants) not provided by other foods like meat and bones. In the wild, wolves and coyotes consume grasses, berries and wild fruits and vegetables as sources of these crucial nutrients.

Wild cats, being strict carnivores, consume only the predigested vegetable matter contained in the gastrointestinal (GI) tracts of their prey and occasionally nibble on grasses. To mimic their ancestral diet, only very small amounts of veggies are added to commercial and homemade cat food. The goal is to provide a biologically appropriate amount of roughage, phytonutrients and antioxidants.

The Best Way to Feed Vegetables to Your Pet

There are a few different ways to prepare vegetables to make them optimally digestible for dogs and cats, and one of the best and most nutritious methods is to ferment them. Fermentation actually imitates the digestion of plant foods in the GI tracts of the small prey animals that dogs and cats eat in the wild.

Fermented vegetables are a staple of virtually every native diet, and are highly valued for their health benefits. But what many pet parents don't realize is that fermented veggies can also be beneficial in keeping pets healthy, thanks in large part to their probiotic effect.

Beneficial gut bacteria play a critical role in managing digestive issues and a wide range of other health problems in dogs and cats. The fermenting of vegetables produces beneficial microbes (probiotics) that help balance gut bacteria. This in turn boosts your pet's overall immunity because a healthy gut means a healthy pet.

And fermented vegetables not only provide a wider variety of beneficial bacteria than probiotic supplements, they also provide far more of them. For example, the highest amount of colony-forming units you'll find in human probiotics is around 10 billion. However, 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!

Fermented vegetables are also potent chelators and detoxifiers, so they help rid your pet's body of toxins, including heavy metals. The fermentation process makes the nutrients inside the food more bioavailable as well. It produces vitamin C, B vitamins, vitamin K2 and enzymes (which all support metabolic activity), choline (which balances and nourishes the blood) and acetylcholine as well. In addition, the lactic acid produced by fermentation is a chemical repressor that fights cancer cells without harming healthy cells.

Veterinary researchers are just beginning to study the critical role of a healthy microbiome in maintaining pets' immunologic and physiologic well-being. And the more we learn, the more discover the vast and intricate connections between the gut and the rest of our pets' bodies, including behavioral and epigenetic influences.

How to Feed Fermented Veggies to Your Pet

Some dogs and even the occasional cat will eat fermented veggies on their own. Others want nothing to do with them because the taste is pungent, sort of like very tangy sauerkraut.

If your dog is one who'll eat just about anything, just add some fermented vegetables to his regular food, and watch him gobble them up. Other dogs are more cautious and may not accept this strange new food. For pets who will eat them, it's important to introduce fermented veggies gradually and in small quantities to avoid digestive upset.

If your pet is slow to accept new foods, try starting with a tiny amount, say, half a teaspoon mixed in with her regular food. If she eats it, try increasing the amount a little each day until you're up to around 1 to 3 teaspoons a day for every 20 pounds of body weight. Be sure to let your pet set the pace at which she accepts the new food, and if she doesn't like it, don't force the issue.

If you happen to have a pet who eats anything, you can also feed the fermented veggies directly. Just put them on a plate so they can gobble them up. It's a great way to get probiotics into their diet with just a dollop of veggies on a daily basis.

Pets who absolutely refuse even a tiny amount of veggies should continue to receive a probiotic supplement. Feeding too many fermented vegetables at one time can cause GI upset. If your dog or cat simply loves them, that's great, but you still want to start with a small amount and work up slowly to a teaspoon or two (or more, for larger dogs) per day. You can slowly increase the amount as your pet's digestive system adapts.

The liquid produced by the fermentation process is a rich source of lactic acid and other nutrients. You can add it in small amounts to your pet's food as well.

How to Prepare Your Own Fermented Vegetables

It's possible to buy prepared fermented veggies (make sure the commercial options are onion-free), but many people find that it's cheaper and easier to make them at home. Here's a demonstration video by Dr. Mercola:
