

# It's All the Rage in the Pet World – And a Boon for Our Favorite Animals

In recent years, pets have enjoyed a 300% boost in this positive trend. That's a big plus for our beloved animal companions. And hey, even some industry insiders now acknowledge it, which constitutes a major awakening. Are you helping drive this new trend?

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- The pet food industry has at long last accepted that raw pet food is here to stay
- Raw pet food sales are the proof, more than tripling from 2012 to 2016
- Pet food industry experts also agree that raw diets “may meet demands for pet foods with no preservatives, processing or extraneous ingredients”
- The great thing about homemade fresh food diets is you get to handpick the ingredients
- The best choice for optimal nutrition for dogs and cats is actually a homemade, nutritionally balanced raw diet; alternatively, you can purchase prepared frozen, freeze-dried or dehydrated raw diets

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A pet food industry journal article boldly stated that, "Raw pet foods may meet demands for pet foods with no preservatives, processing or extraneous ingredients."<sup>1</sup> Gee, do you think? Looks like someone affiliated with big pet food has had an awakening!

All kidding aside, the fact is that raw pet food sales (which includes frozen, freeze-dried and dehydrated raw pet food, and "kibble+" — kibble mixed with raw freeze-dried ingredients) in the U.S. have more than tripled in the last five years. The pet food industry simply has no choice but to give credit where it is due! According to the article:

*"Raw pieces of meat inherently contain no fillers, preservatives, gums, thickeners or other pet food ingredients that a growing number of customers avoid. Plus, raw pet foods tend to be high in protein and nutrient rich, thus meeting the criteria of other pet food trends."<sup>2</sup>*

With all those things to recommend it, what's not to love about raw diets for dogs and cats? They can certainly be more expensive than processed diets, but a growing number of pet parents seem willing to trade a little short-term pain in their pocketbooks for longer-term gains in the health of their animal companions, and fewer vet bills.

## Why Pet Parents Are Turning to Raw Diets

The steady rise in the popularity of raw pet food is due in no small part to the growing awareness among pet guardians of the link between processed pet food and many of the disorders and diseases occurring in today's dogs and cats. Some pet parents come to this realization out of sheer desperation. They have a seriously ill dog or cat, and traditional veterinary medicine has repeatedly failed to help them.

They take a leap of faith and transition their sick pet to a raw diet, and soon their furry family member is feeling and looking well again. They have fed their pet back to good health. Other pet owners, wary of processed pet food recalls past and present, decide to go raw. Still others do their own research on the ingredients and manufacturing methods used to produce processed pet food, and decide unprocessed raw diets are the way to go.

The pet food industry often refers to the growing interest in raw diets as the part of the "humanization" of pet food. They're missing the point, obviously, since most humans don't eat raw meat. It is believed that more and more pet parents are simply realizing the benefits of species-appropriate food for their pets, recognizing that dogs and cats are not human and do best when fed unprocessed, meat-based diets.

Pet owners are also seeking out brands and companies that are open and transparent about where ingredients come from and how the food is manufactured, something that the big brands of the last hundred years have not done.

## Optimal Nutrition for Dogs and Cats

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 don't need grains, fillers, artificial preservatives, colors, additives, chemicals, byproducts or processed foods. Although animals can eat some processed foods, they aren't designed to consume a lifetime of dry or canned diets.

## The Top Recommendation

The best choice for optimal nutrition for dogs and cats is a nutritionally balanced, fresh homemade diet (offered raw or gently cooked). Of course, it's very important not to wing it when preparing your pet's meals at home.

Many homemade and prey model diets fall far short in trace minerals, antioxidants including nutrients like manganese, magnesium, vitamin E and D, copper, zinc, iron, choline and essential fatty acids.

Additionally, if the diet doesn't have a proper fat or calcium to phosphorus balance, it can actually cause a myriad of health problems, especially in growing animals. So, it's critically important that you know your homemade diet is balanced.

The great thing about homemade fresh food diets is you get to handpick the ingredients. You know the quality of the meat you're using. And if your dog is allergic to chicken, for example, you simply pick a different protein source.

You can also carefully wash the veggies to remove any pesticide residue. Making your own pet food provides peace of mind because it's becoming increasingly more difficult to find ethical pet food companies that use locally sourced or even U.S.-grown ingredients. With homemade food, you're in complete control of every ingredient that enters your pet's body.

And of course, raw food is just that. It's raw and unadulterated. It contains all of the enzymes and phytonutrients that are typically destroyed during extensive pet food processing. Homemade food also gives you the flexibility to include a lot of nutritional variety in your pet's diet. You can buy seasonal fruits and veggies on sale. You can use produce that comes from your local supermarket, your local farmer's market or even from your own garden.

## **Commercially Available Raw Pet Food**

If you don't have the time to prepare homemade meals for your pet, an alternative is a commercially available nutritionally balanced raw food diet. Again, it's critically important that the diet be balanced. There are a lot of raw diets on the market these days that are nutritionally incomplete.

These diets are often substantially cheaper than balanced diets and for good reason; many are comprised of inexpensive fatty ground beef or poultry carcasses and liver.

These unbalanced foods should say right on the label, "For supplemental or intermittent feeding." Unfortunately, many of them don't. I don't recommend feeding unbalanced diets without adding in the missing nutrients, or your pet can develop nutrition-related health problems.

Commercially available, balanced raw food diets are found in the freezer section of small or privately owned pet stores. Some big-box stores are now starting to carry a larger selection of frozen raw diets, and you can also find an excellent selection online.

Since commercial raw diets are a fast-growing category of pet food, you should be able to find a food that fits your requirements, with the added convenience of not having to make the food yourself.

## **Smart Pet Parents Are Changing the Face of the Pet Food Industry**

It's happening! Raw pet diets are positioned for continued market growth, and money talks. Where there's consumer demand, the market finds a way to supply it. As increasing numbers of nutrition-savvy pet guardians, veterinarians and other animal advocates request whole, fresh, real food for dogs and cats, the more the pet food industry will attempt to meet the demand.

### **Sources and References**

<sup>1,2</sup> [PetfoodIndustry.com](http://PetfoodIndustry.com) April 25, 2017.

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