

- **What is a raw diet?**
  - They are made of raw (uncooked) meats and organs, with occasional fruits, vegetables, and/or carbohydrate ingredients.
  - Raw diets can be homemade or commercially prepared (i.e. bought in a store)
    - Depending on how they are prepared, they may contain bone (ground or whole) or other ingredients.
- **What do commercial raw diets look like?**
  - They are often frozen or freeze-dried.
  - However, they can look like regular kibble (e.g. contain a “raw coating” or “freeze-dried raw chunks”)
- **Aren't raw meat diets healthier?**
  - There is no scientific evidence demonstrating or proving that there are any health benefits to eating raw.
  - Any benefits reported or advertised are truly anecdotal.
- **I thought that raw diets are more digestible than cooked?**
  - While it is true that some studies have shown a *marginal* increase in digestibility, the studies are unfortunately not well-controlled.
    - The diets that were compared were not identical in terms of ingredient inclusion nor in terms of nutrient profile
  - It is more likely that the interaction and inclusion of ingredients affected the digestibility of the diet rather than raw state of the product
- **So what are the risks of feeding raw?**
  - Homemade diets
    - Gastrointestinal obstruction/perforation and fractured teeth
      - If a raw diet contains bones or bony fragments, this puts out beloved pets at an increased risk of fracturing teeth (painful and expensive) and/or having their GI tract become obstructed/ blocked (painful, expensive, and a life-threatening emergency)
    - Hormonal imbalances
      - If the raw diet contains external thyroid tissue, there are reports of dogs becoming hyperthyroid (life threatening if untreated)
  - Homemade and commercial products
    - Nutrient imbalances
      - If the homemade diet recipe hasn't been formulated by a professional (i.e. a veterinary nutritionist), it is likely to neither be complete nor balanced
      - If it is a raw commercial base diet (i.e. intending for the client to add raw meat) any deviation from the recommendation can result in nutrient deficiencies.
        - Additionally, all meats have different and unique nutrient profiles which means that the recommendations likely were not calculated with all protein sources in mind.
      - Nutrient deficiencies and excesses, when prolonged, can be lethal
    - Food borne illness due to higher risk of bacterial contamination
      - Like any raw meat encountered in stores or restaurants, raw meat diets all have the potential for carrying pathogenic (disease causing) bacteria

- While it is true that some bacteria do not cause illness, some studies have found up to 48% of tested *commercial* raw diets contained Salmonella. Other studies have shown contamination with E. coli, Listeria, and Clostridium.
  - All of these types of bacteria can cause illness (and sometimes death) in *both* people and pets.
- This means that the raw diet *not only* poses a health risk to the pet and pet's immediate family, but also to everyone the pet interacts with
  - While most healthy individuals can fight infection and may even be symptom free, there are many that cannot. This is critical to optimizing public health as most at-risk pets and people may look healthy.
  - Even if a pet is healthy, if that pet goes to doggy daycare or volunteers at a hospital, they could put many other individuals at risk.
- The population (of both people and animals) that are the highest risk of developing illness due to raw foods include (but are not limited to):
  - Pediatric and juvenile- immunoincompetent due to their under-developed immune system
  - Pregnant/reproducing and lactating- immunocompromised due to increased stress on the body
  - Geriatric- immunocompromised due to natural aging processes
  - Immunosuppressed populations- cancer patients, lupus patients, Crohn's / IBS patients, etc.
  - Anyone who is chronically ill and has increased demands on their body: i.e. patients with diabetes, liver disease, kidney disease, heart disease, etc.
- **Both raw and dry diets have recalls though**
  - While it is true that all types of pet (and human foods) can be recalled due to risk of bacterial contamination, raw diets are significantly more likely.
    - In 2015, there 20 times more recalls for raw-based diets than for non-raw kibble
- **But this is what animals eat in the wild**
  - While it is absolutely true that wolves and wild felids (tigers, etc.) eat raw meat (in addition to plants and berries), it is important to note that their life spans are considerably shorter. For example, most pet dogs live between 10-16 years old, while wild wolves often live no more than 3-4 years.
  - It is also important to recognize that wolves/ dogs and tigers/ cats are different species. Thus, what may be considered "optimal" in the wild is often less than ideal to help our fur babies thrive.
- **But freezing and freeze-drying kills bacteria!**
  - Unfortunately, there are certain bacteria species that can survive the freezing and freeze-drying processes.
- **But cooking destroys enzymes needed for digestion!**
  - If there are any enzymes in the diet, then yes, cooking *can* destroy them. However, all the enzymes that healthy cats and dogs need to digest their food they already have in their own bodies.
- **But cooking decreases the nutrition values of the diet**
  - While it is true that some nutrients are less stable and may be denatured at elevated temperatures, a high-quality and reputable manufacturers take this into consideration with their formulations to ensure that your pet does not develop deficiencies (or excesses!)
  - This is one reason why it is so important to have expert nutritionists on staff to ensure that the pet food formulations take this into consideration. The nutrient values of the diet should be reflective of the final product, not of the combination of ingredients pre-processing.