

Hey there, and welcome to Lesson Six: You are what you eat and so is your pet.

It's really important to talk about what our pets are eating on a daily basis because, very literally speaking, nutrition is the foundation of good health. It's very, very difficult to maintain good health for any period of time, if you or your pet are not eating an optimal diet, and I think that there's a lot of confusion out there about what actually is optimal nutrition in pets. What should our pets be eating? What kinds of things should we be avoiding? Let's look at what today's pet foods look like and really sort of tease this out. So, if you walk into the pet store today, you're going to see a wide, wide range of pet foods.

Most of which you're going to see are going to be dry foods, and kibble, and canned foods, and you will probably hopefully see a smaller section in your pet food store with more fresh food options. Things like frozen foods, like raw food, frozen cooked food, maybe some freeze dried or dehydrated fresh foods. And that's really pretty much the spectrum of the foods that are out there. When I talk to people about what you should feed your pet, I present it from the standpoint of, "Think about what we know about our own nutrition." We all know as people, that the more fresh whole foods that we're eating, the healthier that we are likely to be. And conversely, the less processed food we're eating, the better off we tend to be.

If you think of dry pet food, like kibble and canned pet food through the lens of it being highly processed foods, you can start to see some of the shortcomings here. You may think, why am I describing canned food and dry food as highly processed. Well, think about it this way. If you take a bunch of fresh food ingredients and you want to make those ingredients shelf stable for two years, you kind of have to do things from a processing standpoint in order to achieve that. And as a general rule, most of those things that get done are not usually for the benefit of the animal or in the case of human food, for the benefit of the person.

Generally speaking, what winds up happening is those foods, they are cooked at very high temperatures. They are produced at very high pressures in order to effectively sterilize them and make them shelf stable. And some of these foods may even have artificial preservatives in them. Many foods do not these days, but some of them still do. And the unfortunate reality when we're looking at these processed foods that are produced at these high temperatures and high pressures, one of the things that that happens just as an unavoidable circumstance of this processing, is there are chemical compounds that are produced in these foods that are not good for us and not good for our pets. For example, there's a class of compounds called advanced

glycated end products. This is something that occurs just naturally when food is cooked, particularly at very, very high temperatures.

Advanced glycated end products are very well known to promote inflammation. In some cases they are even suggested to be cancer causing chemicals. And yet these are present, sometimes in very, very high levels in these processed foods. So, canned foods and dry foods. In addition to that, as it pertains to dry foods in particular, dry foods also tend to be very, very high in carbohydrates. Because it is just, again, it is sort of a necessary ingredient in making these foods. If you think of dry food as a baked good, effectively, you can't really make a baked good without carbohydrates. It's kind of like saying low carb bread, it's just not really a thing. Maybe you can do it without wheat or without grains, but you can't do it without some sort of carbohydrate source.

Since I'd mentioned the grain issue, I want to just take a little side moment here, to talk about grain free diets. There's a lot of talk about the benefits of grain free diets, and I got to be honest with you, a lot of that is marketing. There is very little, if any evidence, to suggest that grain free diets are better for animals. Now, certainly what is true is grain should not be used in pet food as a filler, to bulk up the food and therefore sort of make it less expensive. That is absolutely not ideal from a nutritional standpoint. But particularly as it pertains to dogs, dogs are omnivores. They are very carnivorous as omnivores, but they are adapted to eat everything.

And from the standpoint of them eating whole grains, it's absolutely fine for them to eat whole grains. And there's even been some studies and been some research to suggest that some dogs can actually develop a particular type of heart disease if they're on grain free diets for a very long time. So it may actually be that some of these diets are flat out not good for dogs. So now that we've spent so much time talking about sort of all the shortcomings of highly processed foods, let's talk a little bit about what would be more ideal, from a food perspective and I think, as I said before, the ideal situation just as it would be for us humans, is getting our pets as close to a fresh, whole food diet as possible. And there are a number of ways to do that.

These days you can go to your pet store, or even there are some things that are available online. But there are foods that you can buy frozen, so frozen raw food, frozen cooked food. There's also freeze dried and dehydrated foods. All of these foods are, relatively speaking, minimally processed compared to some of these, like dry food, canned food, that sort of thing. From a nutrient standpoint, they tend to do

better from a lack of unintended byproducts, like advanced glycated end products that are just not really present in these foods. They tend to be better, and I can tell you just from a veterinarian's perspective, I cannot tell you how many animals I've seen that have come to me with chronic issues, whether or not it's gastrointestinal or skin or something else.

And we put them on a fresh, whole food diet and their whole life turns around. It is something that we see very, very commonly. So even in a real world sense, this is definitely a thing. Now, one of the things that people often bring up as a concern about fresh foods, particularly raw food, is concerns about bacterial contamination. And I think that, that is a legitimate concern that people have. Certainly, if you were to go to the grocery store and buy a package of raw chicken and eat it raw, that probably would not be a real good move, and you legitimately would be asking for food poisoning, if you were to do that.

But there's a couple of things to realize when we're talking about animals and commercial pet food, that is made this way. The first one is, as a general rule, dogs and cats are more resistant to foodborne illness and bacterial contamination than we are. If you think about a lot of these dogs and cats that are living on the street, they're eating food that is essentially rotting sometimes, and this is certainly true in the wild as well. So it really would not be in their best interest to be particularly susceptible to food poisoning, if you will. It absolutely can happen. I wouldn't say that it never happens, but it's actually quite uncommon. It does not happen frequently. So, that's one thing about the bacterial issue.

The other thing, and I think this is very important to realize when we're talking about commercially made foods, is that the good companies that make raw food on a commercial scale, most of them are taking a lot of precautions to make sure that their food is safe and free of bacterial contaminants, before it ever it ever leaves the processing facility. Now, I do want to say that, the same cannot always be said for some little local company, that's making it in your neighborhood. They may or may not be taking those kinds of precautions. And certainly if you're going to try and make raw food for your pet at home, again, that can be a concern. And it's important to realize that, not only can that be a concern as far as your pet goes, but there is potentially a concern as far as cross contamination from your animal to people in your house.

My suggestion to people, if they're going to feed raw food, is that you is that you use a commercially prepared food and then you make sure that, that company is taking

appropriate precautions to make sure that there are no bacterial issues. It certainly is possible to make food at home. A lot of people do it, and I would certainly encourage people to look into that if it's something that you're interested in doing. You can certainly do that. Although it's very, very important if you are going to make food at home, that you work off of a recipe that is appropriately balanced, so you can make sure that your pet is getting all of the nutrition that they need. One of the things to realize is that as people, certainly every meal that we eat as a human, is not perfectly nutritionally balanced.

I mean, certainly that's true for me. But the hope is that in the aggregate, because I eat a wide variety of foods, that everything is balancing out. When it comes to our dogs and cats, because they have a tendency to be eating the same thing or very similar things every single day, if there's a nutritional shortcoming in their diet, it is something that is going to be amplified over time. Again, from a home feeding standpoint, really important if you're going to do that, that you work off of an appropriately balanced recipe that was balanced by a veterinary nutritionist.

Just to kind of sum up, I would certainly recommend that all animals, if at all possible, our eating fresh whole food diets. Whether that is raw, or it's cooked, or it's freeze dried, that decision is somewhat up to you. And if it's something that you feel comfortable discussing with your veterinarian, I would certainly recommend it. And again, if you're going to make food at home, make sure you're using a properly balanced recipe. So thanks again for tuning in for this lesson on: You are what you eat, and so is your pet.