

Hey there, and welcome to Lesson Ten. What should you really feed your dog?

You know, we've talked on multiple occasions about nutrition and about pet foods, and about sort of the good, the bad, et cetera. So, you probably have some real questions of what should you feed your dog? Should you buy food? Should you make food? What's really the best thing?

We've already talked a fair bit about the benefits of fresh, whole food diets, over-processed foods, like dry food and canned food. And as I've said before, if for whatever reason fresh, whole food diets is something that's not possible for you, I don't want you to feel like you're a bad pet owner. You're not. You're not taking good care of your pet. You know what I mean? We all do the best that we can, in a real world sense.

In the sense of fresh, whole food diets, however, let's talk about the pros and cons of buy it, or make it, because I think that's a real good conversation to have. So, the benefits of buying a fresh, whole food diet is, number one, if you're getting a good quality diet, you already know it's going to be nutritionally balanced, so you don't have to do that. Most of the well-established commercial brands are taking a lot of precautions from the standpoint of food safety issues. So, bacterial contamination, that sort of thing. So, that's not something that you really have to worry about.

Lastly, there's really the convenience issue. I mean, you kind of can't beat it. Either you go to the store and you buy the food and it's done, or there's even services these days now that you order it online, and once every two weeks or once a month, a box shows up at your doorstep with frozen fresh food. You throw it in the freezer, and you didn't even have to go out. So, there's something to be said for the convenience. However, that convenience comes at a price, literally. It is going to be more expensive than if you make that food yourself.

So let's talk about homemade food for a bit, from a pros and cons standpoint. One of the great things about making homemade food is that you are ultimately in control of everything your dog is eating. There's nothing behind the curtain, so to speak, of what may have gone on at a processing facility, whether or not they changed ingredients, whether or not there was some sort of quality control issue. If you're making it, you know exactly what went into it, which ultimately is a really good thing.

That said, if you are making food at home, particularly if you're making raw food at home, you're not going to be able to do the same kind of quality control from a

bacterial contamination standpoint. That's certainly less of an issue if you're making cooked food. But if you're feeding raw food at home, there is always that potential that something that you buy could be bacterially contaminated, and could potentially lead to gastrointestinal issues in your pet. Just to reiterate what I've said earlier, any time you're feeding raw food in particular, whether it's commercially prepared or homemade, there's always that chance of cross-contamination from an animal to a person. So, you definitely need to be careful about that. You need to take appropriate precautions, like washing everything, washing the dishes, and treating this stuff with the same respect that you would as if you were preparing raw meat, raw chicken, what have you, in your kitchen. You know, because these kinds of precautions are important.

Getting back to homemade food, you're going to be adding in your own vitamins and supplements, so again, you're totally in control. One thing that you have to realize if you're making food at home is, it's absolutely critical that you are working off of an appropriately balanced recipe. Let me be clear: You cannot wing this at home and have it come out right. You can't say, "Oh, well I'm just going to feed him some meat and vegetables and call it good." That is a recipe for problems, from a nutritional standpoint. And you know what? These problems are probably not going to show up in the first few weeks or the first few months, or even a year or more, but somewhere down the road, it is possible that your pet may wind up having medical issues associated with a lack of vital nutrients, because they haven't been getting enough calcium, enough of some sort of vitamin, et cetera, et cetera. So, it's very, very important that you work off of a properly balanced recipe.

As I mentioned before, on a permeable basis, if you're making it, it's going to be less expensive. So in many ways, kind of the balance that you have to work out is, you know... I mean, it takes more time to make the food at home, but it is ultimately a little less expensive. So, like many things in life, you sort of have to balance the value of your time and your money, and figure out what works best for you at any given moment.

Moving on from there, let's talk a bit about sort of just the basics of making food, because I think it's a bit of a mystery to people. You know, they want to make pet food, but exactly how do I do that? Number one, if you're making pet food at home, and you're working off of an appropriately balanced recipe, there's going to be instructions. So, they're going to give you some instructions. But essentially, what you're going to be looking at as far as a recipe goes, is you're going to be looking at

a list of food ingredients...so, meat, vegetables. Maybe fruit, maybe grains, et cetera... and then a list of vitamin and mineral supplements that you have to add.

Now, let me be clear: Pretty much any homemade diet that you you make is going to have to have vitamin and mineral supplements added to it. It is technically possible to make a fresh, whole food diet that does not need to be supplemented, because it's appropriately balanced. But the trouble is, is you wind up often having like 20 or more ingredients in that recipe, to get all of the various nutrients in. And for most people, making a 20 ingredient dog food recipe at home, or cat food recipe at home, is just... It's just cumbersome, and it's just not practical. So, more likely you're going to wind up with a recipe with four, five, six, maybe seven ingredients food-wise, and then some vitamin and mineral supplements. So, very frequently a multivitamin, and then maybe some other various vitamins and minerals.

So essentially, what you're going to do, just in very broad strokes... You're going to prepare the food. So, you know. If it's cooked, you're going to cook the food and let it cool. If it's raw, you're just going to prepare it from the standpoint of chopping everything up. And then, one everything's put together, then you are going to add in the amount of vitamins that are prescribed in the recipe. All the crushed up vitamins, you'll mix that all in. Then, essentially what you're going to do is you're going to divide it out into portions, and you're going to freeze it back. Then you just take stuff out of the freezer and put it in the refrigerator, let it defrost, and just kind of go from there on a day to day basis. And realistically speaking, the only sort of limitation, if you will, to how much food you make at any one time, is really just how much freezer space you have. So I would suggest that you make as much as you can, so that you don't wind up having to do this super, super frequently.

That's really kind of the basics of making food. One more thought, just from the standpoint of should you make food or buy it: There is one particular instance, which I think may lead us to having to lean towards making food rather than buying it, is when animals have specific medical issues, that requires them to be on some kind of a therapeutic diet. So, let's say you have a cat that has kidney disease, or a dog that has a liver problem, or something to that effect. I'm sure everybody's aware of sort of veterinary prescription diets. They've been around for years and years.

A lot of you may also be aware that if you look at the ingredients list on these diets, oftentimes they're a little bit concerning. It's not necessarily that the nutrient profile is a problem. In fact, the nutrient profiles tend to be very, very good for animals with those specific medical conditions. It's just that the ingredients that the company has

chosen to put, to achieve that nutrient profile... In my opinion, and in the opinion of many integrative and holistic veterinarians... are really sort of suboptimal ingredients.

For example, if you have a cat that has kidney disease, and you don't want to feed it a prescription dry or canned food, honestly, really your only option is going to be to make food at home, using a properly balanced recipe, specifically made for cats with kidney disease. And those things do exist. I have recipes like that in my book, *The Ultimate Pet Health Guide*, but you can also consult with a veterinary nutritionist, and they can kind of point you in the right direction, and give you some guidance in that regards as well. So, that is kind of one particular instance that may push you a little bit more towards the make food, rather than buy it.

The other thing that people very commonly ask me is, "How much should I feed my pet?" You know, generally speaking, what I'll tell people... From the standpoint if you're buying food, then usually what I'll tell people is, start with the recommendation on the package. You know what? The amount of calories that your dog needs or your cat needs on any given basis is going to have a lot to do with their age, their breed, their personality, their activity level. There's a lot of various factors that go into it. But if you start with the amount that's recommended on the package, you can just kind of go from there.

Usually what I'll tell people is if you start with that amount, and a few weeks later you think they're losing weight, then feed them a little more. If you think they're gaining weight, then feed them a little less. You know, I mean nothing is written in stone as far as how much you should feed. It's just whatever is right for that individual animal.

Now, when it comes to making food, obviously there's no package for you to refer to, so there's a couple of ways that you can do this. You certainly can do the math, so to speak. You can do the mathematical calculations, to calculate exactly how many calories your dog should be eating in any given day. The calculation is what's called DER, or Daily Energy Requirement. And that, you know, it's not super complex math, to calculate your dog's daily energy requirement. But to be honest with you, in rare occasions, that's really something that a veterinary nutritionist would do, but it's not something that you, as a pet owner, would frequently really need to do, unless you just really like math.

My recommendation would be if you're working off of a balanced recipe, then very likely, that recipe is going to give you some guidance, as far as how much you should feed. And then, just like I said with the commercially prepared foods, work that

amount one way or the other. If they're losing weight, feed them more. If they're gaining weight, feed them less. I think I mentioned in a previous lesson that frequently, if you're going to switch your dog or your cat from dry food, particularly, on to a fresh, whole food diet, don't be surprised if they lose some weight. That's actually a very common thing, and the reason for that is because you're taking the carbohydrates out of their diet.

Just like with a person, if your dog or your cat has weight to lose, and you take their carbohydrates away, they're going to drop a little weight. That's actually a healthy thing. That's good. I mean, obviously we don't want them to get thin, but if they lose a pound or two... Or if you have a much larger dog, if they lose maybe even five or six or seven pounds, depending on how much weight they had to lose... that can be fine. And you can kind of refer back to the lesson where we talked about how to determine whether your dog or your cat is over or underweight, because that is going to be a good way for you to kind of figure out sort of where you are with that.

Again, just getting back to how much to feed, in all honesty, use your common sense. Start with something that seems right, and see how they respond to it. And just one last thing about food: Any time you make a diet change, regardless of whether you're switching from dry food to fresh food, or even just from one fresh food to another fresh food, it's always a good idea to do that gradually. The reason why we do that is to avoid any kind of tummy upset that might occur from an abrupt diet change.

When I say gradually, what I mean really is take away about 25% of the food that they're currently eating, and replace it with the same amount of the new food. And over the next, say, week or week and a half, slowly add in more new food, slowly take away the old food, until you've slowly transitioned over to the new food. And just keep an eye out while you're doing that for any signs of tummy upset. So, vomiting, diarrhea, gurgly tummies, these sorts of things. And if you're finding that that is a problem, like they have a tummy upset, it may be that you're transitioning too fast. It may also be that there's something in the new food that's not agreeing with them, so that's something that we'll have to... You know, you'll just have to kind of take it day by day. And certainly, if you have any questions or concerns, that's a good time to pick up the phone and give your veterinarian a call, and ask them what they recommend on how to proceed from here.

So really, that is kind of the long and the short of should you buy it or make it. Kind of the basics of how to make food, and really just kind of a guideline on how much food you should feed. So, congratulations. We're finished with Lesson Ten. It's been

so great to have you for this course, and I really look forward to you joining me with all the information and courses that are to come. Thanks so much, and thanks for taking such great care of your pets.