

Whole Pet Provisions

Veterinary Nutrition Consulting
whole foods, whole pets, whole lives

Are you interested in home cooking for your pets? Are you already preparing lots of home cooked foods for your dog or cat? What can I do if my dog or cat prefers to eat fresh foods and not commercial pet foods?

A general rule of thumb is that dogs and cats should be fed 90% of their daily calories from a complete and balanced food, while 10% can come from treats or snacks. Some pets are picky eaters, or become accustomed to table foods and reject commercial diets. Others have complex medical conditions that require control of multiple nutrients to manage their health optimally. Some pet parents want to have more control over the ingredients or wish to add more rotation/variety into their pet's meals. These may all be good reasons to choose making home prepared diets.

What are the “PROs” and “CONs” of feeding a homemade diet?

PROS of homemade diet	CONS of homemade diets
Can control source and type of all ingredients choosing organic, local, non-GMO, etc.	Natural variability in ingredients will cause inevitable fluctuations in nutrients present in a homemade diet
May have more flexibility in recipes depending on ingredients used or medical needs of pet	May not have flexibility in recipes depending on medical conditions managed
Can design a custom recipe to manage multiple concerns or medical conditions	Cost for high quality ingredients may exceed commercial diets
Ingredients are generally of high quality and human grade	Quality of ingredients will vary depending on sourcing and freshness
Recipes are whole fresh foods and less processed	It is more labor intensive to prepare homemade food compared to a commercial diet
Homemade diets are exceptionally digestible	Some pets rarely may reject addition of the supplement that is required to balance a homemade diet
Palatability is excellent	There is a tendency for pet parents to adjust and change a recipe over time resulting in a very different nutrient profile or unbalanced diet that may result in deficiencies

PROS of commercial diets	CONS of commercial diets
Packaged commercial diets are generally more convenient, ready to eat, and generally less costly than homemade diets (especially for large dogs)	Packaged commercial foods are potentially highly processed food products and many prefer to feed fresher, whole foods to their pets.
Nutrients present in the end commercial product of processed pet foods are consistent and undergo testing for palatability, digestibility, bioavailability, and stool character.	Processing foods causes loss of naturally present vitamins, phytochemicals, and antioxidants requiring supplementation, and undesirable compounds may be created in the foods such as advanced glycation end products, etc.
Ingredients utilized may create sustainable markets for food products that would otherwise be discarded or wasted	Some pet parents may object to use of non-human grade ingredients due to concerns for repeated processing or inferior quality

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How do I begin making a homemade diet?

If you have decided that you would like to home prepare your pet's food, then the first step is to request a consultation from Whole Pet Provisions, and ask your veterinarian to send medical records for review. This will allow us to review your pet's medical status, current body weight and body condition score, and identify what are the key nutrients of concern that may help us manage any medical concerns. A dietary history form will be emailed to you to complete on which you can list all diets currently being fed, along with supplements, and then what homemade foods you believe your pet likes (proteins, carbohydrates, etc.). After sending back this form, we will contact you to review your pet's medical history, preferences, and we can discuss generally what recipes we might want to formulate. This is our opportunity to talk through our plan and address any concerns or questions you might have. After our phone consultation, recipes are designed to meet our target levels for all nutrients of concern using a computer software formulation program. Exact nutrient levels are calculated to meet target levels. A supplement (usually in powder form, although tablets may also be utilized) will be added to make the recipe complete and balanced on a daily basis. Completed formulations will then be emailed to you with a discussion of nutrients of concern, and you will be billed at completion. Whole Pet Provisions prides itself on follow up and complete care for your special family member – we will check on your progress making the recipe(s) at one week from completion, as well at one month later. Any questions, however, will be addressed as they arise.

Why do I need a formulated recipe? Why can't I just feed a recipe from a book or one I found online?

A formulated recipe is made for each individual pet to ensure their unique needs are met and supplementation is appropriate. Since vitamin and mineral needs are not linear, you cannot double or triple a recipe exactly for body weight and specific adjustments for each pet must be made. Many recipes found online do not account for very small or large dogs, but are designed for an average, medium sized dog. Many generic recipes are also vague as to the type of vitamin/mineral supplement is recommended leaving great room for error. In addition, independent review of published home cooked recipes for dogs and cats have shown the most all recipes are deficient in one or more essential nutrients (Lauten, SD, et al. ACVIM Proceedings, 2005; Larsen, JA, et al. JAVMA.240.5.532, 2012; Stockman, J, et al. JAVMA.242.11.1500, 2013).

Why do I need a special supplement? Why can't I use my pet's vitamins?

A supplement is necessary to meet the daily requirement for vitamins and minerals. While whole foods are great sources of individual nutrients, it is not generally possible to make a complete and balanced recipe for daily consumption without the addition of supplement. A combination of human supplements or a specifically designed supplement for homemade pet diets must be used, as pet vitamins sold commercially otherwise are made to be given on top of a complete commercial pet food. These vitamins generally contain lower levels of vitamin and minerals to avoid oversupplementation in combination with their daily pet food.

My pet needs weight loss – how do I proceed with a homemade diet?

A homemade diet can also be an exceptional way to feed during weight loss. With consultation of your veterinarian, the initial feeding plan will be set to facilitate weight reduction slowly and safely over time. Continued contact with your veterinarian will be needed to determine if additional adjustments in the feeding amount are needed, and these can be done at no charge with request from your veterinarian.