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## PETS

# The Raw Truth

Research shows that giving your pets uncooked foods could put them at risk



But filling food dishes with raw meat, crushed bones, and unpasteurized milk could backfire. A 2018 study published in the journal *Vet Record* tested 35 commercial raw pet foods. Some 28 tested positive for antibiotic-resistant *E. coli* bacteria. Researchers also found listeria and salmonella in some samples. A second study found that dogs fed raw chicken were at increased risk of paralysis. The risks led the FDA Center for Veterinary Medicine to declare raw food diets “dangerous” for pets.

Beyond the harm to their pets’ health, pet owners might sacrifice good nutrition. Raw-food diets are often deficient in calcium and micronutrients like selenium, copper, and vitamin D. Adding bones to a pet’s meal to increase calcium could tear up the esophagus and intestines or fracture teeth.

Pet owners committed to feeding their cats and dogs raw food diets should look for commercial foods that are pasteurized under high pressure. The process kills bacteria, putting these foods on par with commercial dog and cat food for safety, according to Rollins. Look for “high-pressure pasteurized” on the label or check the brand’s website for details about how the food was processed. Or choose from among pet food brands made with cooked ingredients that have been formulated to meet the nutritional needs of your pet.

**RAW-FOOD DIETS AREN'T JUST FOR CELEBRITIES. A GROWING NUMBER OF PET OWNERS skip dry kibble in favor of feeding their pets raw diets, too.**

Sales of raw frozen and refrigerated pet foods for both dogs and cats in the U.S. increased from \$43.7 million in 2011 to \$158.7 million in 2017.

What’s behind this trend? Angela Witzel Rollins, DVM, PhD, clinical assistant professor and chief of clinical nutrition services at the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine, believes pet owners want to avoid processed foods. “Some people go raw because they feel like they’re going back to the ancestral diets of their pets,” she says.

## 4 Lessons

BEFORE FEEDING PETS A RAW FOOD DIET, UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE VETERINARY NUTRITIONIST **ANGELA WITZEL ROLLINS, DVM, PhD**, HAS A FEW TIPS.

### KEEP PORTIONS IN CHECK

Raw-food diets are more calorie-dense than conventional kibble. Monitor portions to ensure pets aren’t overeating.

### UNDERSTAND THE RISKS

Pets exposed to salmonella in their diet will shed it in their saliva and feces, making them “walking balls of pathogenic bacteria,” according to Rollins. The bacteria could be passed to owners.

### CONSIDER YOUR PET'S HEALTH

Pets that can’t have a lot of protein because of pancreatitis or kidney disease should not eat raw foods, which tend to be higher in protein than dry dog and cat food.

### BE PREPARED TO PAY

The American Veterinary Medical Association notes that commercial pet foods cost less than raw foods.