



# Natural Raw Food



AUTHOR: Pippa Mattinson URL: <https://www.thelabradorsite.com/raw-feeding-for-dogs/>

'Raw Feeding' is a complete guide to providing a natural diet or raw dog food to Labradors and other medium and large breed dogs.

Raw feeding for dogs is a big topic, and it is an important one too. To help you find your way around this guide to raw dog food and natural feeding I have divided the article into five key sections.

CONTENTS:

1. All about raw feeding
2. Is raw right for my dog?
3. Getting started with raw food
4. Day to day raw feeding
5. Getting help with raw feeding

The majority of Labradors are fed on a commercial processed food.

But there is a growing interest in feeding dogs BARF or a completely raw diet of meat and bones.

I have been feeding my own Labradors and Spaniels, all working gundogs, on a natural raw diet for over a decade.

However, I am not evangelical about raw feeding.

I don't believe that raw feeding is necessarily the best option for every family and every dog, and we'll look at why that is as we go.

What I will do, is answer your questions on raw feeding.

We'll look at the claims that are made both for and against raw feeding and at the evidence to support them.

And I'll help you decide whether or not raw feeding is a route you want to go down with your dog.

## **1. ALL ABOUT RAW FEEDING FOR DOGS**

The growth of interest in raw feeding for dogs has continued steadily over the last few years.

The decision to switch my dogs to a raw food diet was not one I took lightly. In fact it took me over a year to take the plunge, after doing my research and being fairly confident it was the right decision.

Unhappily, there is still some inaccurate and misleading information about raw feeding available online and elsewhere.

Both from those that feed their dogs on a raw diet, and from those that oppose raw feeding.

There are also 'experts' in canine health and welfare on both sides of the debate, including many veterinarians.

This makes life very difficult for puppy parents who are trying to find out whether or not raw feeding is a good thing.

They just want a straight answer, and they are not getting one.

One of the aims of this article is to to give you some straight answers. To clear up some of the misconceptions about raw feeding, about what it can and can't do for your dog, to establish how safe it really is, and how easy or difficult it is to put into practice.

Let's start with some general information about what feeding raw diet involves.

### **What is raw feeding?**

Wild dogs, and our dogs' common ancestor the grey wolf, are all predators. They are designed to chase, catch, kill and eat other animals.

Raw feeding is designed to replicate the kind of diet that wild dogs and wolves eat when they catch and consume their own prey, and to replace commercial dog food entirely, for the modern raw fed dog.

### **Why do some people feed dogs on raw?**

Considerable numbers of experienced dog owners have changed over to raw feeding in the last few years. They are still in a minority, but the minority is growing.

Motives for feeding raw vary, but for many people, it is because they believe raw feeding will confer some health benefits to their dog or puppy. We'll look at those benefits below

There is also a movement towards a more natural, less 'chemical dependent' way of living right now and raw feeding fits into that philosophy.

### **Why do some people object to raw feeding?**

Of course, modern dogs are not wolves. They no longer need to kill in order to survive, and most dogs get their daily rations in a bowl.

Some people feel that raw feeding is dangerous for dogs and those who live with them, and irrelevant in the modern world.

## Different types of raw feeding

Not everyone who feeds raw dog food, does so in the same way.

The two most popular types of raw feeding are the BARF diet (biologically appropriate raw food) and the RMB (raw meaty bones) diet, also known as the Prey Model.

But it is also possible to buy commercially prepared raw food, in a neat packaged form for those that don't want to handle and prepare their own raw meat.

A large part of the diet of most modern dogs consists of carbohydrates usually in the form of grains and/or vegetables. Natural raw diets are based on protein and fat, and are low in carbohydrates or virtually devoid of them.

### What is BARF?

The main difference between the BARF and RMB diets is that the BARF diet contains vegetables.

BARF advocates believe these are essential to replace the stomach/gut contents a wild dog would get from access to the prey animal.

'Barfers' grind or puree these vegetables, as dogs are not able to digest certain vegetable constituents in their natural form.

### What is the prey model?

Those feeding RMB diet are mimicking more closely the diet of the predator.

They ensure that the dog has access to carcasses in the kind of natural proportions that would occur in the wild, including a certain amount of 'green tripe' (stomach that has not been completely cleaned of its contents).

I feed my own dogs the prey model diet and do not feed vegetables other than for the occasional treat.

Most of this article is about feeding raw from scratch, using meat, fish, and eggs. But I also want to take a quick look at our third option, which is to purchase raw food, ready prepared.

### Nature's menu and other commercial raw foods

A range of frozen raw foods is available from commercial pet food suppliers, they come with appetising names like 'venison and blueberry nuggets' from Nature's Menu in the UK and Europe.

There are a number of similar companies in the USA, You can find them by searching online for raw pet food.

The nuggets take a couple of hours to defrost so they are not quite as convenient as kibble, and they don't have all the benefits of a more natural raw diet (we'll look at that in a moment too).

But for some people they are a helpful compromise or a 'half way house' to the real thing.

### **Is raw feeding safe?**

The issue of safety is paramount when we are choosing food for our dogs.

One of the problems when it comes to raw feeding is that while there are plenty of opinions, evidence is sadly lacking.

At the time of writing, and despite the growing interest in BARF and other raw diets for dogs, there are still no decent long term studies which compare the health and/or longevity of raw fed dogs, with that of dogs fed on a modern diet of kibble

Much information is therefore anecdotal. And though many people try, neither I nor anyone else can tell you *for sure* that one method of feeding is safer, in the long term, than the other.

What we can do, is look at the advantages and disadvantages of raw feeding and at the risks and benefits, and then try to compare those with the risks and benefits of feeding dogs on kibble.

Before we do that, let's just look put your mind at rest on one common concern

### **Will raw feeding make my dog aggressive?**

Some people worry that if a dog is allowed to tear and consume the flesh of other animals, he will revert to his wild instincts and become a dangerous killer. Happily, this is not the case.

Raw fed dogs do not experience any changes in temperament or personality as a result of raw feeding.

There are however, precautions you need to take around dogs that are eating raw meat because it is so valuable to dogs, we'll look at that below.

Right now, let's help you get closer to making that decision.

## **2. IS RAW FOOD RIGHT FOR ME & MY DOG**

There are several distinct aspects of raw feeding to consider when you are looking into switching your dog over to a raw diet. These include

- Health and safety for your dog

- Health, and safety for your family
- Convenience and practicality

Many people have concerns about the safety of a raw diet for their dogs, and worry about their dogs choking or dying from a bone penetrating their stomach or gut.

And these risks need to be addressed. There are also risks to those living with the dog, we'll look at those too.



But a part of your decision should also be based around the practicalities of raw feeding.

For many modern people, used to processed and convenience food, handling raw carcasses is a big deal. So before we go any further let's take a look at what raw fed dogs actually eat, and how that affects you, as the provider.

### **What do raw fed dogs eat?**

Raw fed dogs eat meat and bone. More precisely, they eat meat on the bone. It isn't a question of dicing up some nice stewing steak and dropping it into your dog's bowl.

In fact, your bowl will probably be redundant as anything you put in there will be lifted out so that your dog can get to work on it with his jaws.

Actually, crunching and swallowing bones is a crucial part of the process because bone contains minerals that the dog needs, and because the abrasive action of the bone in the dog's mouth, contributes to his dental health.

You need to be comfortable with this aspect of raw feeding, and it can take a bit of getting used to.

## Are you comfortable with handling raw meat?

If you want to feed a natural raw diet, you are going to be handling raw animal body parts *not* pre-packed steak or ground mince, and you need to be comfortable with that too. It isn't for everyone.

If you are going to feed BARF you will also need a food processor and be prepared to spend some time liquidizing vegetables for your dog.

But, if you are going to feed the Prey Model, you will need to include 'green tripe' in your dog's diet to supply the same nutrients.

I can tell you that green tripe smells pretty awful so you probably won't want to defrost it in the fridge where you keep your own food. Which brings us to storage and preparation

If you feed green tripe (which contains semi-digested vegetable matter) a couple of times a week, you don't need to worry about liquidising vegetables for your dog.

## Storing raw food for dogs

Feeding raw requires a generous amount of storage space. Buying in bulk can save you money and many suppliers will only deliver to each area once every few weeks, so you will need a big freezer.

You'll also need a safe place to store the day's food while it defrosts. Preferably in a separate fridge or at least on a dedicated shelf of your main refrigerator

## Preparing raw food for your dog

If you are used to preparing raw meat for your family you'll know what is involved, but if you are not, you need to learn the rules that are involved in safe meat preparation

This includes separate defrosting areas in the fridge, separate chopping boards, separate meat knives and somewhere to wash everything in very hot soapy water or sufficient space for those utensils in the dishwasher.

You'll also need somewhere safe for the dog to eat his food, but we'll look more closely at that in a moment

Now you have some idea of what is involved in feeding raw meat to your dog, let's get down to the risks and benefits of raw feeding

## The results people *claim* for raw feeding

You will hear a lot of claims made for the benefits of raw feeding. You'll hear people say dogs have shinier coats, or are calmer, or happier, or that their immunity is better.

Let's be clear, the evidence for these kinds of claims is sadly lacking. And many if not most kibble fed dogs are happy and healthy with shiny coats too.

If your kibble fed dog is not one of those, then he may need a check up from your vet to begin with, rather than a change in diet.

### **The known benefits of raw feeding**

There are some benefits to raw feeding which are widely acknowledged and for which in some cases there is good evidence. Let's have a look at those. There are some for the dog, and some for you

#### **Less dog poop / nicer poop**

Dog fed on a completely raw diet poop less. By less, I mean smaller poops, not less often, though this can happen.

Dogs fed on a completely raw diet also produce poop that doesn't smell very much at all.

This is a particular advantage to those who have to pick it up!

In fact, it is easy to underestimate just how this can improve life at home if your dog poops in your yard or garden.

Raw fed dog faeces are firm and within a few hours of being passed, if broken open, will crumble into a pale dry powder.

This is simply because almost all the food is tailor made to suit the dog and fully digested. What is passed is mostly powdered bone.

#### **Healthy anal glands for your dog**

Every dog has some glands next to his anus which nature designed to be emptied regularly by the pressure of his poop as it travels on its journey to the outside world!

Kibble fed dogs tend to produce large quantities of rather foul smelling soft faeces, which do not always have an effective emptying action on the dog's anal glands.

Anal glands that are not emptied can become very smelly, and irritating to your dog, who may then scoot around on his bottom in an attempt to relieve the irritation.

This tends not to happen in raw fed dogs, which are less likely to need their anal glands emptying artificially by hand (usually your vet's hand).

#### **Good dental health for your dog**

Removal of plaque build up in some kibble fed dogs may be necessary on a regular basis from quite a young age.

This usually involves subjecting the dog (and your wallet) to a general anesthetic, not just once but possibly on an annual basis for the rest of his or her life.



This can be countered to some extent by cleaning your dog's teeth twice a day as you would your own teeth, but it is unclear how effective this is at reducing the risk of dental disease

The process of crushing and grinding bones has an abrasive action on a dog's teeth. So raw fed dogs do not usually suffer from dental caries.

This is a more significant benefit than it might at first seem. It means freedom from dental surgery and the associated risks of repeated general anaesthetics.

### **Pleasure and relief from boredom for your dog**

Raw fed dogs take a lot longer to eat their food than kibble fed dogs, and gain a great deal of pleasure from their meals.

The powerful chewing action required to break up bones is beneficial to the dog's mouth generally.

Chewing is also a pleasurable activity for many dogs and alleviates boredom.

### **A reduced risk of bloat**

Another condition that has been linked to some types of kibble (those high in fat) in some studies is bloat.

An extremely painful and frequently fatal condition, 'bloat' is distension and (usually) twisting of the stomach.

It is usually found in the larger deep-chested dogs such as Weimaraners and sometimes in Labradors. It is less common in little dogs and in dogs fed wet or raw food.

### **A low or no carbohydrate diet and freedom from grains**

This is particularly helpful for dogs with grain allergies, but may benefit other dogs too.

Dogs have adapted to the consumption of grains but their short carnivorous digestive tract is not ideally suited to digesting them and there is still much we do not know about the long term effects of feeding dogs with on carbohydrates derived from grain.

The jury is still out on this one, but in recent years, studies on carbohydrate intake in humans have thrown up a lot of surprises. It is possible we will hear more about their effects on our carnivorous pets in the not too distant future.

### **What are the risks of raw feeding for dogs?**

Okay, so we have looked at the upside, now let's look at the risks of raw feeding. Because like most things in life, there are some.

### **Damage to your dog from sharp bones**

Perhaps the most worrying for the 'would be raw feeder' is that of intestinal perforation.

This was my chief concern about switching to raw food. It is claimed by opponents of raw feeding that sharp pieces of ingested bone may penetrate the dog's digestive tract during or after ingestion, causing serious injury and even death.

But here's the thing. The rising mountain of anecdotal evidence suggests that the risk of intestinal perforation from bones is very small.

I for example have been feeding four or more dogs raw bones every day for over a decade – that's at least 14,600 meals. And I am one of thousands of people in the UK feeding their dogs raw. I have friends, dog breeders and trainers, with a dozen or more dogs, that have been fed raw for far longer, twenty years or more, that's 87,600 meals per friend.

We have never seen a raw fed dog with a perforated gut.

Let's be clear, that *does not mean* there is not risk. I am just trying to put the risk into perspective.

### **Intestinal impaction in your dog**

Another concern for the prospective raw feeder is intestinal impaction – blockage of the gut – by semi-digested bone.

Intestinal impaction can sometimes require surgery, so it isn't something you want to happen to your dog.

Fortunately, it is likely that the risk of impaction can be greatly reduced by feeding bone wrapped in meat as part of a meal, rather than as a recreational treat for the dog to consume on its own.

### **The risk of your dog getting infected by raw meat**

Another claimed risk from raw feeding is that of gastrointestinal infection from the bacteria, which we know are commonly found on raw meat.

This is a particular worry with raw poultry. We all know how dangerous raw chicken can be and how it can carry nasty pathogens like Salmonella and Campylobacter. Surely a dog could die from eating those?

Again it comes back to the weight of anecdotal evidence. And the thousands of meals of raw chicken that have been safely consumed by dogs in recent years.



The reality is that dogs seem to be very resistant to pathogens in raw chicken that would make you or I extremely ill. Nor is kibble guaranteed free from contamination, with [regular recalls of accidentally contaminated food announced](#) almost every month.

Gastro-intestinal infections are a risk a dog runs whenever it eats anything rotting or disgusting found lying on the ground. And the fact is, most dogs eat foul rubbish including the faeces of other animals on a regular basis without any ill effects at all.

Again, it is likely that the risk from consuming fresh good quality meat, fish and poultry, is simply far lower than was once thought

### **The risk of your dog getting parasites**

Parasitic infections are another concern, a raw fed dog may consume the eggs of a parasite such as a tapeworm from a raw rabbit for example and become infected himself.

These risks need to be countered on a case by case basis. If you are feeding your dogs on raw rabbit regularly then they need to be treated for tapeworm regularly.

If you are feeding meat that potentially contains dangerous parasites, then in many cases freezing the meat for a period will kill off any problems. If in doubt, with an unusual meat source for example, you need to do your research and take the necessary precautions

### **Choking**

I can remember the heart pounding fear in my early raw feeding days as I retrieved a chicken wing from my puppy's throat just before it disappeared out of sight. She had tried to swallow it whole and it was much too big for her to do so.

This was not because I did not cut the food up small enough, but quite the reverse. I have given her too small a section of wing, and also I had made her fearful of losing it by standing over her.

The risk of choking can be almost entirely removed by using safe feeding practices, and we'll look at those later.

### **The risk of your family getting infected by raw meat**

There is another risk from having raw meat stored and prepared in your home, and also a risk that many people don't consider, and that is the risk of raw meat pathogens to themselves.

Obviously, if you handle raw meat in your kitchen and you do not follow good food hygiene practices, you or a family member could get a serious infection. The same is true when handling raw meat for your own consumption.

There is also a risk in handling your dog's faeces because they are likely to contain pathogens too. However, I have to say I think this risk has been very overstated by the anti-raw brigade. The truth is, all dog poop and all dog's bottoms are dirty. You need to use disposable gloves and a dedicated poop scooper to dispose of the poops and to dispose of them carefully – this applies to kibble fed dogs too.

The risk that concerns me is a different one, and it is the risk to small children who may be in close contact with a dog or puppy immediately after that dog has eaten raw meat.

When your dog eats a piece of raw chicken he gets raw chicken juices on his face and his paws. Wiping them off with a cloth is not going to kill all the pathogens in his fur. Small children are very bad at following good hygiene practices and in my view are at risk when playing with a dog that has eaten raw food, especially raw poultry, recently.

### **Nutritional deficiencies in raw fed dogs**

Many of us have become quite dependent on processing and packets to keep our dogs nutritionally balanced in a way that we would find ridiculous if applied to our children who are surely even more important to us.

If you don't need to feed the same pre-packed, processed kibble from a packet every day to make sure your kids grow up big, strong and healthy, you certainly don't need to for your dogs.

A balanced diet isn't created in a single day, what matters is what your dog gets to eat over the course of several days. And if you feed enough variety, the balance will come naturally, just as it does with your children.

### **Nutritional deficiencies in puppies**

With small puppies, the rapid growth rate of a puppy can make getting the right nutritional balance a little more demanding and critical.

After all, it takes a child sixteen or more years to reach full size, whereas a puppy does so in a matter of months. This means there is a greater risk of nutrient deficiencies when feeding a puppy

So this is something you need to consider if you want to raw feed your new friend.

### **Which way to turn?**

There is a lot to consider isn't there? And all this information can be very bewildering.

Will my dog die of bloat if I feed kibble?

Will his stomach be ruptured by a shard of bone if I feed raw?

When faced with possible death and disease on both sides of the feeding debate which way is a dog owner to turn? Thankfully, the facts are less scary than the 'possibilities' and the chances are your dog will be absolutely fine whichever feeding method you choose.

There are however, some important factors that you need to focus on when making your final decision. Let's drill down to those

### **Making a decision about raw feeding**

The facts are these: Most labradors and other dogs thrive and are well on both systems of feeding.

Many thousands of dogs live full, long, and healthy lives on kibble alone. Thousands of dogs are now fed on raw meat and bones without ill effects. What you chose to do should reflect your current circumstances and they way you feel about raw feeding.

Here are some important things to consider.

Are you happy to handle and preparing raw meat? Do you have plenty of storage space in your freezer and fridge? These are basic conditions that need to be in place before you begin.

Do you travel a lot with your dog? If you do, feeding him from convenient and readily available kibble may make more sense for you.

Is your dog's immunity compromised in some way? If so you might not want to risk exposing him to the pathogens found in raw meat.

Has your dog ever had bloat? Or have any of his close relatives ever had bloat? If so, this is a reason to seriously consider switching to raw.

Similarly if you are worried about your dog's dental health and find it difficult to clean his teeth effectively.

Is your dog an adult or older puppy, or if he is a younger pup, are you confident of getting the nutrient balance right for him? It is important that you are prepared to invest some time in getting the information you need to make sure your puppy is fed appropriately to meet his growth needs. If you are not sure, it may be better to feed kibble

Remember, you can always switch to raw dog food later when he is bigger and stronger.

Likewise if you have small children, you might want to delay raw feeding until they are better at washing their hands thoroughly after playing with the dog.

Are you happy that the risks of raw feeding are countered by the benefits? And do you have a supportive vet?

Although you are unlikely to be able to eliminate all doubt before you begin, it can be tough ploughing your own furrow without confidence or a good support network.

There is no point in doing this if you are going to live in fear for the next ten years, or are afraid to tell your vet that you are going against his own views

### Coping with conflicting advice

As you can see there are reasons for and against switching and only you can know which apply to you

Focus on the points that are relevant to you and that affect your family. Each family is different and what is appropriate for one family may not be appropriate for another.

Be skeptical with anyone that predicts a horrible death for your dog should you dare to allow him to chomp and swallow raw bones. In the same way be wary of anyone who tells you that raw feeding is 100% safe. Neither of these claims is true.

Be wary too, of claims that kibble is akin to poison, and those who predict dire consequences should you be so lazy and selfish as to feed convenience food to your pet.

There is little evidence to support the view that kibble is dangerous to most dogs, or that it will make your pet sick.

If you have no compelling reasons to feed kibble and raw feeding appeals to you, take the plunge and try not to worry. If you don't fancy it, give the whole thing a miss.

I did a lot of research before I changed to raw feeding and initially was particularly concerned about the risks of intestinal perforation. As the weeks of raw feeding turned to months, and the months to years I began to relax.

If this doesn't happen to you, I recommend you switch back to a kibble feeding system. Life is too short to spend it agonizing over how to feed your dog.

## **3. GETTING STARTED WITH RAW FEEDING**

Once you have made your decision, and cleared some space in your freezer, you'll want to get started. This is the part where we look at

- What raw foods you should feed your dog
- How to feed raw safely
- The importance of bone and how to include it
- How much raw meat to feed your dog
- Where to feed your dog
- How to begin raw feeding

We'll look at the kinds of meat you can give your raw fed dog first, but don't be tempted to start him off with everything on the list!

We start raw feeding by introducing on meat at a time. You'll find instructions for that lower down.

### What should I feed my raw fed dog

Many people that feed raw rely heavily on chicken backs and wings. And on ground or minced chicken sold in freezer packs in pet stores.

This is understandable as chicken is readily available to all of us.

But it really is important, especially with a still growing pup, to give as much variety of different meats and different 'body parts' as you can.



Provided he has no known allergies, you can feed the following to your dog

- Chicken
- Rabbit
- Turkey
- Beef ribs
- Lamb ribs
- Pork trotters
- Venison ribs
- Heart
- Lungs
- Beef tripe
- Lamb tripe
- White fish
- Oily fish
- Eggs

Buying chickens whole is very cost effective when you have a raw fed dog.

When we have chicken portions for supper, we buy a whole chicken, cut off the legs and breasts and give the rest to the dogs. It is a cheaper way to buy chicken portions too.

It may look fiddly, but once you have done it two or three times, it takes less than two minutes to quarter a chicken with a sharp knife.

Rabbit is a great alternative to chicken if you can get it because the bones are all edible. Including the skull. When my dogs eat a rabbit they consume the entire thing, nothing is left over. This provides a great mix of nutrients

Bones and joints of meat from larger animals can be too big, we'll look at that below

Fresh fish are excellent. And because you can feed the whole animal, including skin, eyes etc your dog gets to eat a wide range of nutrients.

Tripe is another popular staple, though it should not be relied upon entirely as it lacks bone.

Raw fed dogs need a good quantity of bone to be healthy, muscle meat should be fed 'on the bone' wherever possible, and not ground.

Some cooked household scraps can be added provided these don't amount to more than 20% or so of the dog's total food intake, and [provided nothing 'toxic to dogs' is included](#).

### **The importance of bones for your raw fed dog**

Bones are essential for raw feeding. You cannot raw feed successfully if you avoid bone.

However scary it may be, if you want to feed your dogs an RMB or BARF diet, you must give them sufficient bone and it must be raw, and meaty.

Never feed cooked bones, they are considered to be brittle and dangerous.

Feeding your dog a huge chunk of meat (muscle) for his dinner, and then giving him a huge bone to chew on three hours later, is not doing him any favors.

The clue lies in that phrase "Raw Meaty Bones"

The proportion of bone in this diet is likely to be far higher than you might imagine, and this bone must be fed as a part of a meal. In other words, wrapped up in muscle and connective tissue "on the hoof".

### **So what quantity of bone should I feed?**

A good guide to bone quantity is to think about the proportions of bone, in the carcass of the kind of animal a medium sized predator and scavenger (like our dogs) might eat.

A rabbit is an ideal example. And this is the kind of natural proportion of bone you should be aiming for in a dog's diet. It probably accounts for at least 10% of the animal.

### **How to feed bones more safely to your dog**

The objective here is to take any small risk there may be in feeding bones to your dog and reduce it even further

Focus on the “raw meaty bones” package

### **Avoid weight bearing bones**

Don't feed your dog big 'weight bearing' bones from large animals. Sheep, cattle, deer and goats for example.



weight bearing bones like this one can break your dog's teeth

The leg bones of these animals are extremely hard and dogs can break their teeth trying to eat them.

### **Avoid recreational bones**

Don't feed recreational bones to your dog, always feed bones as a part of a meal with plenty of meat and connective tissue attached.

This will help reduce the risk of intestinal perforation and impaction.

A recreational bone certainly gives dogs a lot of pleasure but over time he will probably chip off lots of fragments and swallow them. A stomach full of bone chips and nothing else is not ideal. What you want in your dog's stomach is a bone and meat parcel

### **The raw meaty bones parcel**

Once your dog becomes experienced at eating raw, you will notice that he gives several firm chomps with his large back teeth to shatter the bones within the meat, before swallowing his now floppy bone and muscle parcel.

This seems to be an instinctive and natural process.

### **Feed large portions rather than small**

Don't cut raw meaty portions up too small. If the meal you give your dog is cut up too small he won't chomp and break up the bones and may swallow them whole.

These can then cause a problem as they pass through his digestive system.

### **How to feed fish to your dog**

Most dogs instinctively know to swallow a fish so that the spines point backwards.

They may chomp the fish a bit before switching it around to swallow it head first.

Despite this, I still cut sharp fins and spines off any fish I feed to my dogs and I find small fish are more digestible than large.

Although the bones of larger fish do not seem to do dogs any harm, they can irritate the stomach. Many dogs will vomit an hour or so after eating fish and this can be pretty unpleasant.

If this happens to your dog, you may want to stick to feeding him fillets of fish or very small whole fish

### **Where to feed your dog**

Raw feeding is messy. I feed my dogs outside all year around, and it doesn't worry me if a bit of grass or dirt gets swallowed in the process

If you live in the arctic circle or the desert, this may not be practical. In which case, place the dog's food on a washable surface indoors. Bear in mind they will carry it around so don't allow access to your carpets!

Some people think you should supervise your raw fed dog while he eats to make sure he doesn't choke.

My view is my dog is much more likely to choke if I am standing over him, than if he is left to relax in peace with his meal. So I leave my raw fed dogs alone while they are eating.

Don't allow children or visitors near dogs when they are eating raw meat as it is so valuable to many dogs that they may be tempted to guard it or gulp it. Neither of these is a habit you want to initiate.

Instant swallowing is a natural fear response to most dogs that feel their food is threatened. After all, you can't steal his dinner if it is in his stomach!

### **How to begin raw feeding**

It is important that you introduce one meat at a time, and in small quantities.

### Why small quantities?

If you give your dog a lot of meat that he isn't used to he will probably get diarrhea.

### Why one at a time

If you give him several different kinds of meat and one of them disagrees with him, you won't know which meat was the problem. So one at a time is the way to go.

### The first three days of raw feeding

Let's give you an example. You might start on day one of raw feeding by offering your dog a teaspoon of minced chicken or a chicken wing tip in the morning, and the same again at noon and in the evening.

If there are no ill effects you could feed twice that quantity the next day, and double again the next.

If you think that your dog is going to be pretty hungry on such a light diet, you are probably right.

So can you mix his normal kibble in with these little portions? Let's have a look

### Can I mix raw food with kibble

Many new puppy owners or those researching raw food have heard that they must never, but NEVER feed kibble and raw in the same meal.

These two foodstuffs they will tell you, are digested in different ways, and feeding the two together spells disaster.



I have read a vast amount of literature on this topic, and the evidence I have come up with to support this theory amounts to zero.

There is no research, no proper evidence, that I can find which explains this belief that kibble and raw together will harm your dog.

And I frequently come across people who are mixing the two types of food together with no apparent ill effects.

By mixing kibble and raw dog food, arguably you lose the benefits of both and gain the disadvantages of both. So it probably isn't a good idea in the long term. In the short term however, when switching your dog from one regime to another, it may be a helpful strategy

### **The second three days of raw feeding**

Now it is time to introduce a different food. If you started with chicken, you might now want to try adding green tripe.

Again, start with a tiny amount, you can chop some one inch square pieces and give him one of those morning, noon and night (together with his chicken)

Double the quantity the next day and the next

### **But he isn't getting enough bone!**

You are right, I have been telling you your dog needs plenty of bone with his meat, but when you are feeding tiny quantities, you won't be able to include much bone.

It's ok, this is just the transitional stage, he'll soon be eating all the bones that he needs

### **Making progress**

Every three days introduce a different food, and provided your dog remains free from tummy troubles you can start to increase quantities until he is eating enough of each kind of food for you to feed different foods on different days, and to introduce meaty bones for him to enjoy

Remember, you don't have to feed a perfectly balanced diet in every 24 hour period. What he has over the space of several days is what counts.

The next thing you need to know is what quantity of raw food your dog needs to thrive on his new diet

### **How much should I feed my raw fed dog**

People worry a great deal about whether they are feeding their dog sufficient quantity of raw meat.

They start weighing everything they feed, and weighing the dog every five minutes.

I think that their concerns, whilst understandable, are unfounded. If you think about it, you didn't weigh your children's food (or them) every day did you? And there is no need to do so with your puppy.

I will give you some guidelines but don't be a slave to them. It is not possible to be specific about quantities by the average dog because every dog or puppy is different and the very best guide to whether your dog is getting enough calories, is the way he looks and feels.

Remember that your kibble fed neighbour's dog may eat a lot more than yours.

### **Raw food quantities**

Raw food is completely utilised by the dog and a dog fed on kibble has to eat a lot more because so some of it is made from ingredients which are not fully digested.

A very rough guide for quantities of food is 2-3% of your dog's body weight a day for an adult Labrador.

And 2-3% of your dog's expected weight as an adult will be right for a puppy. Again this is just a very rough guide.

But really try not to worry about quantity. Give plenty, and if the dog looks a little tubby, cut back.

### **Raw feeding small puppies**

Tiny puppies grow very rapidly and have specific nutritional needs that cannot be met with a few spoonfuls of minced meat.

You can feed the same food that you would give to an adult, though your puppy needs far more food relative to his body weight than an adult does, and a wide variety of foods is crucial if you are to meet his nutritional needs.

Introducing the meat in small quantities is also crucial. Forget including half of the botanical encyclopedia into your puppy's dinner bowl. Just pick a meat, chicken is ideal, and give him a tiny bit.

You can introduce raw to puppies using mince but you need to be confident in progressing puppies quickly onto meat on the bone. Minced meat on its own is not sufficient.

Puppies have surprisingly powerful jaws. An eight week old labrador puppy can crush the bone in a chicken wing with a little practice, but you may need to give the first few wings a knock with a hammer to make that meaty parcel for him.

The support of your vet will be important if you are to succeed in raw feeding your puppy, particularly if you run into any problems. And the most likely problem you will come across is diarrhoea

Remember, introduce your puppy to one, just ONE new food at a time. Watch carefully to observe it's effects as it passes through. One softish stool is not too much of a worry. Two in a row, or liquid diarrhoea are bad signs.

Back off for a few days then try again if you want to. It is possible he just had a bug. It is not necessarily your food that is causing the problem.

### **Diarrhoea in a raw fed puppy**

If you give your puppy too much meat too soon, he *will* get diarrhoea. And if the diarrhoea persists for more than a few hours you will need to get help.

Your vet may well give you a lecture about feeding raw. Take it on the chin, put the puppy back on kibble if necessary, and get his tummy settled. The priority is to stop the diarrhea and prevent dehydration which is potentially very dangerous in small puppies

With an older pup (five months plus) you may be able to starve him for 24 hours instead. Check with your vet.

Once the pup's tum has been settled for three or four days, you can start again with raw. But this time build up quantities more slowly! And if possible find a vet who knows about raw feeding to support you.

### **Example of a raw food menu for a puppy**

Here is a couple of day's diet for my four and a half month old Labrador puppy to give you an idea of what a raw puppy might eat after transition.

This is a puppy that has been on raw food since she was eight weeks old.

Monday

- Breakfast a large whole mackerel
- Lunch two eggs
- Supper one large chicken back

Tuesday

- Breakfast large chicken back
- Lunch small pollock
- Supper half a rabbit

Some days she had lunch, other days she didn't. A kibble fed pup this age would need three meals a day, but on raw, the food is more concentrated so a couple of meals may be sufficient.

I gave my puppy a lunch of egg, fish or appropriate scraps maybe three times a week.

She ate a lot of fish and she also had tripe, deer's lungs, ribs and heart, and some meat and veg scraps.

### **Feeding a dog raw during pregnancy**

If you want to keep your raw fed bitch on her raw diet throughout pregnancy, and intend to raise her puppies the same way, you will need a good supply of a wide variety of foods to ensure that the puppies grow up strong and healthy.

You will need raw eggs and fish, lots of chicken wings, rabbit's legs, chickens feet, green tripe and so on.

Unless you are very experienced you'll also need the support of a raw friendly vet.

It can be done and many others have done it successfully, but you will need to arm yourself with information well in advance of mating your bitch.

As you can see, raw feeding does not require a significantly different approach when feeding an adult dog or a puppy. What is significant is the importance of variety.

An adult dog might cope well with eating a lot of one kind of meat for a week and then a lot of a different kind of meat the next week. Whereas a puppy would need much more variety in a shorter time span to fuel his growth.

## 4. DAY TO DAY RAW FEEDING

Once your dog is settled and happy on his raw diet, you'll want to make sure he stays that way.

Here are some of the common questions or problems that people ask me about day to day raw feeding and raw fed dogs

### How often should I feed my raw fed dog

If you want to feed your adult once a day that is fine. You can split his daily food ration into two so that he has a meal in the morning and another in the evening if you want to, but this makes more work for you chopping up carcasses, and I don't really think it is necessary.

### Are chicken carcasses really safe for dogs

We've tackled the subject of pathogens in chicken, but some people tell me their friends are very disapproving of them feeding raw chicken carcasses because chicken bones are so dangerous?

Is this true or isn't it.

Well, cooked chicken bones are indeed believed to be dangerous, but happily raw chicken bones, which are the staple diet of many raw fed dogs, seem to be munched up and digested with no trouble at all

### My vet doesn't approve of raw feeding

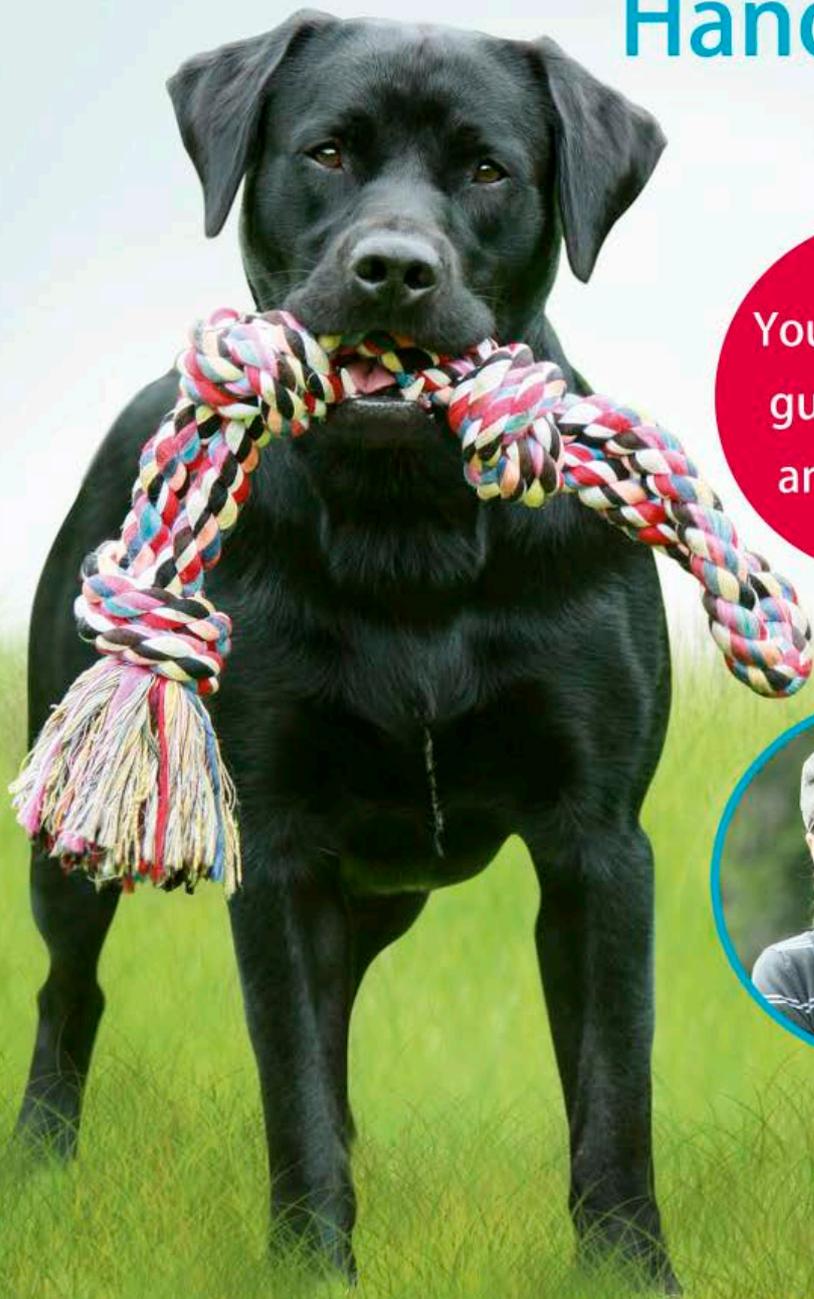
This is a common problem, and it is partly due to the lack of evidence in support of raw feeding.

There is also a tendency for those who feed raw to avoid telling their vet for fear of disapproval, so some vets are unaware of the many healthy raw fed dogs that rarely come into the surgery.

My own dogs for example don't visit the vet apart from for vaccinations as they are rarely ill.

You can read more about this topic in my article "Are vets driving raw feeders away" where a number of vets and vet students have commented.

# The Labrador Handbook



Your definitive  
guide to care  
and training



Pippa Mattinson

There *are* vets who support raw feeding and vets who have written books about raw feeding and produced videos about raw feeding – I'll put a list at the end of this article. So it is worth shopping around for a sympathetic vet if you decide to go ahead and raw feed.

### **Do raw fed dogs need worming**

There is an interesting theory circulating around some raw feeding help groups that says raw fed puppies don't need worming

People may state that their puppy has never been wormed and has never had worms.

Sadly, there is nothing about raw feeding that can protect your puppy from parasites of any kind, so this belief is just a myth.

And many pups with worms have no symptoms so unless you send off your puppy's faeces to a laboratory for testing you won't know whether or not he has worms.

If you are not prepared to do this, you really do need to worm him regularly

### **Do raw fed dogs need vaccination**

There is a similar kind of myth floating about that raw fed puppies don't need vaccinating. That one isn't true either.

Eating a raw diet will not protect your puppy from terrible diseases like parvovirus or any of the other diseases which regular vaccines prevent.

Only the vaccine itself can do that

### **Will raw food cure my dog's allergies**

Whether or not vaccination can protect your puppy against allergies will depend on what the allergen is.

According to the Merck Vet Manual, when it comes to food allergies, the most common allergens in dogs are beef, chicken, eggs, corn, wheat, soy and milk. So switching to a varied raw diet won't necessarily bring relief to allergies.

Of course if your puppy is allergic to wheat then switching to raw may well cure him, but so would switching to a wheat free kibble.

## **5. GETTING HELP WITH RAW FEEDING**

There are plenty of online support groups for those who want to feed their dogs on a raw diet. A search of Facebook will give you a range of choices.

It can be great to have the support of like minded people though, as in most support groups, you will find your fair share of extremists

### **Raw feeding forum**

We have a [raw feeding board on my forum](#) where you can get help and support, both from me personally and more importantly from the great team of supportive members who post there each day.

### **Books on raw feeding**

The classic raw feeding book is Tom Lonsdale's Raw Meaty Bones. It is getting on in years but the information in it is as relevant today as it was when it was written.

Tom Lonsdale is an Australian Veterinary Surgeon and raw feeding enthusiast.

### **Is raw feeding the best way to feed a dog?**

There s no simple answer to this question. We know that dogs have evolved over thousands of years to eat a predominantly carnivorous diet.

That includes raw meat and bone. And it is becoming clear that many dogs do very well on this diet today.

Kibble feeding is a relatively new phenomenon. We know that kibble is very different from the fat and protein based diet dogs were evolved to digest.

We also know that current research in humans is throwing up concerns about the modern consumption of high levels of carbohydrate and its influence on metabolic disorders like obesity and diabetes and even cancer.

Dogs are increasingly prone to these modern diseases too but we don't really know why.

Some people are convinced that kibble is the cause of all kinds of dog health issues, but we don't really know if kibble is implicated in modern diseases, or just happened to emerge at the same time. And we don't know if, and how, human studies might relate to dogs.

There is a lot we don't yet know!

I can't say for sure that raw feeding is best for your dog, or for my dogs, I can only tell you what I know, and what science knows, which isn't as helpful as we would like.

### **Raw feeding is your choice not your responsibility**

Watching my dogs take a carcass apart and break up the bones, I am in awe.

Whole rabbits crushed, and consumed in minutes, chicken carcasses, venison backbones, whole fish and so on.

I cannot state specifically how it is, that dogs are able to swallow terrifyingly sharp crushed and cracked raw bone splinters. Without any harm to themselves whatsoever. All that I can tell you is that I watch my dogs do it every day.

Raw feeding feels right for me and for my dogs, but it isn't the only way to give your dog an appropriate diet. So don't feel bad if after reading this, you are not ready or willing to feed your dog a raw diet.

Dogs don't exist in a vacuum, they are part of a family. And there may be reasons why raw food is a good or a bad idea for your family, at this time.

If you decide to go ahead and switch to raw dog food, try to find a vet who will at least acknowledge that raw feeding is a rational choice for some people. And don't forget to join our forum for help, advice and moral support

We'd also love to know how you got into raw feeding, how long you have been doing it or when you plan to give it a try! Drop your thoughts, plans or tips into the comments box below.