

The Truth About Pet Food

By Elizabeth Chandler

I have fed my pets a holistic diet for many years, long before I actually worked for Holisticforpets.com and our physical store, Holistic for Pets, in Sarasota, FL. Many people who come to us for guidance in finding the right food for their pets and I often hear common misconceptions about pet food. “They say dry food is good for my pet’s teeth.” “They say canned food makes my dog’s stools soft.” Who are these “they’s” and how do they manage to permeate the masses with “their” messages so effectively?

My advice with regard to the “they’s” is NEVER accept at face value any statement that is predicated with “they say.” That is a big clue that whatever follows is questionable, at best. Second, with regard to pet food, I suspect most of the “they say’s” were started by the commercial pet food industry, since it would certainly be in their best interest to convince the public to buy their nutritionally bereft food.

The they “say” that I hear most frequently is that dogs and cats should eat dry food (kibble) because it cleans their teeth. I don’t know about your dogs and cats, but my pets don’t chew their food; they slurp it right down. Actually, wild animals don’t chew their food; digestion starts in their stomachs, not in their mouths. Since our pets are ancestors of wild animals, it makes sense that their digestion process works in a similar way. Our pets clean their teeth with *sustained* chewing, not by slurping down their dinners. Options chewing that does clean our pets’ teeth are raw bones, cow ears, and other products designed specifically for that purpose.

Before commercial dry pet food was widely available, people fed their pets by tossing their dinner left-overs out on the back stoop. In other words, dogs and cats ate human-grade food. Somewhere along the way, commercial pet food was borne to make it more convenient for people to feed their pets. In order to also make it affordable, commercial dry food consisted (and still does) of fillers, preservatives, and food coloring while also consisting of very little meat. In addition, most commercial kibble contains lots of grains and our pets are not evolutionarily designed to effectively utilize grains in their diets.

Knowing this, then, what should you feed your pets? If, for economic reasons, you must feed your pets kibble, then feed them high-grade, holistic kibble. Read the label of holistic pet food and you’ll find meat and meat meal (meat meal is actually even better than meat) as all or most of the first 3 ingredients, followed by vegetables and fruits. Many holistic pet foods now contain no grain, because of recent findings that support the removal of grains from our pets’ diets.

Even a high-grade holistic kibble, though, is *processed* food, while it provides your pet with good nutrition, it requires many hours of digestion. That is why, when you change your pet’s dry food, you must make the transition slowly to avoid gastro-intestinal upset. Holistic canned food is digested much more rapidly than dry food and it is also a great way to provide additional hydration for your pet. There are a multitude of holistic canned options, everything from a product called “Grammie’s Pot Pie” to Dick Van Patten’s human-grade products, and you can feed your cat or dog a different canned food at each meal because of its high digestibility.

The most digestible food for your pet is raw food. In addition, raw food has live enzymes and is made of mostly meat, but also contains bone matter and fruits and vegetables. The best part is that dogs and cats LOVE it and, with today’s packaged raw food products, it’s a cinch to prepare.

Now, I realize that taking the leap into raw food may be more than many people who are used to giving their pets commercial kibble are ready to take. So I suggest you start with a holistic kibble or canned food and experiment with different supplements until you find the right combination for you and your pet. Holisticforpets.com also offers an excellent line of food for pets with allergies and supplements to help support the best health possible for your pet.

If you aren't yet feeding your pet holistic food, please take the time to read the label of your pet food. As educated consumers, we read the labels of our own food and more and more of us are refusing to eat food that contains carcinogens and the nutritional equivalents of Styrofoam; why would we want anything less for our beloved furry companions? I truly believe that feeding our pets diets that are in line with their evolutionary nutritional requirements pays off in the long run through lower veterinary bills and increased longevity. Take the plunge into holistic pet food and put your pet on the path to a healthier, happier life.