

---Excerpt of the Introduction and Chapter 1 of “Dog Meals”---

## Dog Meals: Home-Cooked Food for Dogs

### Introduction: Dogs Deserve Better

Next to your love, affection, and attention, the most pressing concern in your dog’s life is a primary and understandable one: food. It’s no wonder that your dog comes running the instant she hears you pour food in her bowl or open a package of treats. After all, it’s written into the genetics of every domesticated dog, your pup included.

Thousands of years ago, gray wolves and dogs split from an extinct wolf species, and the result was the first of a series of domestications that created one of the greatest relationships in the world: man and dog. Today, your dog may beg for treats, race to her bowl for food, or longingly watch you eat every bite of your dinner, just as her ancestors did millennia ago. Your dog is your companion during mealtimes because that is how humans first developed a friendship with canines, through the bond of food.

As a responsible and loving dog owner, you always want what is best for your pup, and that includes the food she eats. But how do you know what is the right food for your dog? Walk into any pet store, and you’ll be greeted with wall-to-wall aisles of every type of dog food imaginable. It can be a frustrating and overwhelming experience if you don’t know what kind of food to purchase. Throw in some less than truthful commercial packaging, and it can be downright impossible to tell if what you are feeding your dog is good for her.

Your dog is family, and she deserves better than cheap, processed food that lacks the nutritional value her body and mind needs. By learning about dog nutrition and how to make home cooked food for your pup, you can make sure that your dog gets what she deserves: all the necessary proteins, vitamins, and minerals to eat healthy food and live her best dog life.

### What’s the right food for your dog?

To find the best diet for your dog, just pick one bag out of the many sold in pet supply stores that sounds and looks good, right? Unfortunately, that’s not the best method to use to select the right food for your dog. Commercial food, both dry kibble and wet, can seem appealing with carefully crafted advertising that claims these foods are “grain-free,” “low-fat,” or “low-carb.” The food may even look attractive to the pet owner, and because you consider your dog family, you want to give them food that looks good to you, rather than thinking of food from the dog’s perspective. In truth, your dog could care less about what her food looks like! She just cares about the smell and the taste. That means that the nutritional content is up to you, her owner, friend, and protector.

Many commercial dog foods are packed with artificial ingredients, sweeteners, fillers, and by-products, which provide little to no nutritional value; some, in fact, may cause health problems later in life. These processed diets lack the optimum level of nutrients that canines need, primarily proteins, fats, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals. Although these foods may be convenient and cheap, the cost may be high in regards to your pup's current and future health.

The best solution to the doggie diet dilemma is a fresh food diet, either store-bought or homemade. Fresh food diets are formulated with the proper balance of nutrients that your dog needs to be as happy and healthy as possible. Although it is possible to find commercial fresh and raw foods, that still doesn't give you the peace of mind of knowing exactly what is in your dog's diet. By cooking homemade fresh meals for your dog, you can know precisely what goes into each bowl and every treat.

A fresh food diet will have real ingredients as opposed to processed fillers and sugars. Feeding fresh meals to your dog means that she will get the full benefit of nutrients, healthy fats, and antioxidants that her wolf and wild dog ancestors derived from their natural meals thousands of years ago. Commercially produced foods can't offer the same value or nutrition. Those nutritional components are often lost in the cooking process that occurs with dry kibble foods and have been altered from their original fresh state for the sake of lower costs and longer shelf life. You may pay less for the food, and it may last longer in your pantry, but you're robbing your dog of the proteins, carbohydrates, and fats that will make and keep her healthy.

## It's in your dog's best interest

You love your dog like you would your child, and that's why you're reading this book in the first place. As a responsible owner, if you want your dog to eat well and be healthy, consider a fresh, home cooked diet for her sake. Organic, wholesome ingredients and naturally based sweeteners make fresh food highly attractive to your dogs. Once your pup starts eating a homemade diet, you will notice her moving even faster to the kitchen when you are placing her food in her bowl. Not only is this kind of diet better for her, but it will be tastier, too.

Above all, a diet that is full of fresh, wholesome, balanced nutrition will help your dog in terms of her current and future health. Commercialized foods are often full of artificial additives that are not natural to your dog's digestive system; sadly, some of these additives can lead to significant and life-threatening health problems. Fresh foods provide all the protein, fat, minerals, and vitamins that your pup needs for a stronger immune system. The right diet can improve your dog's health now and also help to prevent degenerative, debilitating, and deadly diseases in the future. That will save you money in veterinary bills, but more importantly, it will mean your dog is at your side for longer than she might otherwise be growing up on a commercialized dog food diet.

You might be wondering how you can find the time to cook separate meals for your dog. Doesn't homemade cooking take a long time? Isn't it more expensive than buying a bag of food at the grocery store? Won't it be a messy process? How will you know what to do? It's natural to have questions and concerns about learning how to home cook canine food and switching your dog to fresh food. With this helpful book as a guide, you will find preparing healthy food for your dog easier and less expensive than you think. Best of all, you will feel good knowing that your dog is eating the right food for her well-being and future health.

## Chapter 1: Why Dog Nutrition Matters

Dog nutrition is critically important for your dog's present happiness and comfort but also for the remaining years of her life. What you feed your dog now may impact her later on when age and illness start to affect her quality of life. You love your dog and want her with you as long as possible, and feeding her food that has the nutrients she needs to stay healthy and mobile can make that hope a reality.

How much of an impact can the right diet have on a dog's body? A tremendous one, it turns out. For your dog's cells to be healthy and perform their individual jobs well, they need to be exposed to healthy environmental stimuli, or wholesome, nutrient-dense foods. If your pup consumes a poor quality of food, especially for an extended period, those negative environmental stimuli are introduced to the body. How will your pup's body respond? Her body will try to fight these stimuli, resulting in inflammation and, eventually, disease.

However, if your dog is on a nutritionally appropriate diet, then the food she ingests will prevent inflammation in the body as well as diseases, giving her a better chance at living a long, healthy, happy life. Fresh food is full of functional superfoods that have a beneficial effect on your dog by promoting healing and reduce chronic inflammation, are powerfully antioxidant, and may even delay the effects of aging.

### The problems with commercial pet foods

For years, dog owners fed their canines dry food sold at grocery and corner stores. When the pet industry exploded in the last decade, there were more kibble options to choose from. Instead of that being a plus for pets and their owners, more processed dry and wet foods have added to a glut of meals that may look good in their fancy, marketed packaging, but that are not necessarily the best and healthiest option for every dog.

Unfortunately, just as humans have switched from healthy, natural, and traditional diets to quick, processed, and mass-produced foods, we have made the same choices on behalf of our dogs. In a high-pressure, fast-paced society where extra time is a rare commodity, many pet owners choose the convenience of dry kibble which is typically less expensive than high-end foods and available in bulk quantities that last for weeks.

Despite the ease with which kibble is available and its popularity amongst many pet owners, it is not the best option for your dog. There are reasons why the change in the human diet has caused higher rates of degenerative and chronic diseases; sadly, the shift from natural food to a processed one has caused the same results in our pets.

Think of your dog's dry kibble as a version of doggy "fast food." Would you want your dog eating fast food burgers and fries every day? Definitely not! A canine who eats this heavily processed food regularly for years on end is going to develop the same kinds of illnesses that a human being would if they ate burgers and fries daily. Also, feeding your dog the same food all the time limits her nutritional intake. Just as people need variety in their diet, so do dogs. After all, wouldn't you get tired of having spaghetti as your only meal for years on end? Why would you expect the feeling to be different for your dog? Yes, changing up your dog's diet too quickly can cause gastrointestinal upset, but feeding your dog the same thing over and over will lead to more serious digestive diseases in the future.

Another problem with the convenience of dry kibble is that the food quickly loses any nutritional value that it may contain. Kibble may contain the bare minimum of basic canine nutrition, but it doesn't stay that way for long. First, the process of creating kibble in a factory requires multiple rounds of cooking at extremely high temperatures. In that environment, much of the nutritional value of the food is lost. To replace lost nutrition, some food manufacturers spray a nutrient mix and a palatability enhancer to make the food appealing to dogs.

Finally, the concept of any kind of "complete and balanced" kibble is a myth. Once you open a bag of kibble, any nutrients inside of it start to degrade and go rancid. You may think that dry food with a long shelf life is ideal for your pocketbook and your dog's palate, but in fact, it's not. The nutrient mix sprayed on dry food contains sulfates and metal oxides that speed up the oxidation of fats in the kibble, causing them to go bad slowly. Kibble can also be a breeding ground for mycotoxins (toxic chemical substances) and bacteria. Additionally, storage mites, which originate in grain silos, can find their way into kibble food bags. Some dogs are hypersensitive toward these mites and can have allergic reactions to them that may take the form of recurrent ear infections, chronic itchy and inflamed skin, and hair loss.

What exactly are the products in commercial kibble that are potentially harmful to dogs? Here is a sampling of what might be inside of your dog's kibble.

- **Poor quality meat and feed-grade** ingredients that some pet food manufacturers use in kibble can include meat and bone meal from questionable sources that have been rejected by the human food industry. These sources can be parts of cows judged unfit for human consumption (including the brain, udders, bones, and skin), expired grocery store meat, and in some terrible cases, the carcasses of diseased animals.
- **Excessive starches** can often be found in kibble that claims to be "grain-free." These diets include too much starch like peas and potatoes which have a too high glycemic index for dogs. Carbohydrates break down sugars, and eventually, this process leads to degenerative conditions like obesity, diabetes, and cancer.

- **Low-grade proteins and fats** used in most kibble create cancerous by-products when processed at high temperatures. The meat and by-products in kibble are typically cooked through four high-temperature processes, and that affects the digestibility and nutrient value of the food.
- **Low-moisture content** is a given with any processed dry food. It's also a real problem as this diet fed over time can cause dogs to be excessively thirsty. The heavy carbohydrate load that takes the place of moisture in dry food is a leading cause of obesity in pets.
- **Artificial preservatives, flavors, and colors** are often found in lower-quality and low-cost kibble and are problematic ingredients for a variety of reasons. These components are used as pet food additives to preserve the fat in meat ingredients and to make the dog's food look appealing to potential customers. Aside from the fact that your dog's kibble should not be full of bright colors, these additives cause health problems. Here's a quick breakdown:

- ❑ **Butylated hydroxyanisole (BHA) and Butylated hydroxytoluene (BHT)** are both chemicals added to oil fats and designed to preserve odor, food color, and flavor. The ingestion of both BHA and BHT over long periods are linked to cancer.
- ❑ **Tert-butyl hydroquinone (TBHQ)** is a fat preservative used to increase kibble's shelf life. TBHQ has been shown to cause damage to cell DNA and to produce pre-cancerous stomach tumors. Prolonged ingestion of TBHQ may lead to the development of cancer.
- ❑ **Propyl gallate (also called gallic acid or propyl ester)** is a fat stabilizer often used in conjunction with BHA and BHT. This additive has been linked to liver and kidney problems, allergies, respiratory illnesses, and cancer.
- ❑ **Ethoxyquin** is a chemical pesticide (yes, you read that correctly) that is used in dog food to stabilize the fat in foods that contain fish. It also preserves the flavor and color of kibble. Dogs consuming high amounts of food with ethoxyquin are at a higher risk for hyperthyroidism, kidney and liver diseases, immune system problems, blindness, reproductive issues, and cancer.
- ❑ **Sorbitol** is a synthetic chemical sweetener used in kibble to keep the food's flavor appealing to dogs. This chemical is sweet enough that it can make dogs overeat, leading to obesity. It can also cause oral decay, hypoglycemia, gastrointestinal distress, and arthritis.  
(<https://blog.healthypets.com/informative/bad-dog-food-ingredients-are/>)

These additives are just the tip of the iceberg. How can this happen with dog food? Unfortunately, there is no governmental oversight of the pet food industry which means that

what is advertised about kibble may not be remotely true and you may not be purchasing the ideal food that you thought you had bought for your pup.

In just the above examples alone, it's clear that dry kibble food is not in your dog's best interest. What diet is the most nutritionally appropriate for a dog? Dogs need a diet that includes high-quality animal protein, healthy fats and fiber, vitamins and minerals, moisture, and low to no starch content. Although there are some worthy examples of pre-balanced, portioned, commercially available fresh and raw diets, they tend to get pricey fast. With the right knowledge and the dedication to the purpose, you can home cook your dog's food, save yourself some money, and give your dog food that is appropriate for her happiness and health.

### So what are homemade diets?

A home cooked diet is simply a healthy and manageable way to create meals for your dog that are suited to her needs. Ideally, you want to provide as complete and balanced a meal as possible. Check out the general overview for home cooked meal rules here:

- Feed your dog a variety of foods from different nutritional groups.
- Supplement your dog's home cooked diet with calcium if you do not include raw meaty bones in the meal.
- Always stick to lean meats, and remove any skin from chicken to exclude unnecessary fats.
- Review your plan with your veterinarian before you switch your dog onto it.

The preparation of homemade dog food can seem daunting to an owner who has always relied on someone else to make his dog's food, but with careful planning, it's an easier process than you think. In general, here is what you want to have in your variety of home cooked dog meals:

- **Meat and other animal products**
- **Boneless meat**
- **Organs**
- **Fish**
- **Eggs**
- **Dairy**
- **Vegetables**
- **Fruits**
- **Leafy greens**
- **Grains (within reason; see Chapter 2: Nutrition in a Dog's Diet)**

With practice and a set of researched and calculated recipes, you can create your dog's food just as you would when cooking a meal for the rest of your family at dinner. Knowledge and planning are key and make the home cooked process much more manageable.

## What are the Benefits of Homemade Diets?

A home cooked diet can benefit your dog right now and in the future. Instead of eating biologically inappropriate foods full of questionable meat sources and additives that can cause health problems, your pup can enjoy a freshly cooked meal full of foods that taste better to her than kibble, ingredients that cost less in the long haul, and nutrition that meets your dog's needs. When you consider it from that perspective, wouldn't you want to make the switch for your best four-legged friend? If you're still considering, take a look at these proven benefits to a homemade dog diet.

- **More energy** will have your dog doing zoomies around the backyard no matter her age. Fresh foods are easily digestible, so your dog's body can break down and absorb nutrients faster from that food. Your pup will have more readily available energy to use for walks, hikes, and play at the dog park. Better get those sneakers ready to go!
- **A shiny coat** will make your dog stand out like those fancy pups at dog shows. Homemade diets have healthy essential fats that quickly impact your dog's coat. Within a short week or two, your dog will look ready to strut her stuff at Westminster.
- **Healthy skin** means few to no allergic reactions, itchiness, lesions, or other painful and uncomfortable skin conditions. Fresh food has fatty acids, B-complex vitamins, and zinc which are strong anti-inflammatories working to keep your dog's skin clear and healthy.
- **Bright, healthy eyes** look sparkly on the outside and are well-supported from the inside thanks to a home cooked dog diet. Eye health is one of the first areas of health to suffer as a dog grows older, and feeding a fresh food diet with lots of Vitamin A can help prevent eye health problems from occurring.
- **A longer, better quality of life** for your pup is something that any good dog owner would sign up for, right? Well, fresh food can offer that chance. So many pet owners have lost their pets to illnesses that may have been instigated by a poor diet. By feeding your dog right, you are buying her extra years at your side.
- **Less waste and firmer poops**...wait, shouldn't every dog owner be lining up for this one? No one is thrilled at having to pick up dog waste off their lawn, and you won't have to do it as often with a dog on a fresh food dog diet. Additionally, the fiber your dog eats is the right kind at an appropriate level. Too much fiber may eventually lead to colon cancer, but on a homemade diet, your dog will eat only the fiber necessary for her health.
- **A stronger immune system** is developed in dogs who eat healthy, home cooked meals. A wholesome, balanced diet leads to a healthier dog in the present as well as the future as key antioxidants in fresh foods can prevent some diseases and illnesses. The result is that you will have more time with your best friend.
- **The quality of life** that your dog has is ultimately what it's all about. You love your dog and want her to be the happiest and most content dog in the world. Well, that also includes giving her food that will supply her with all the nutrition she needs to feel good and live her best dog life.
- **You will save money**, full stop. Anyone who owns a pet understands how much their care costs, and trips to the veterinarian's office are typically expensive. Feeding your dog

a nutritious and appropriately balanced home cooked diet will prevent future illnesses and save you money you would spend on veterinary bills in the next decade.

- **Special dietary needs** are easily addressed with fresh food diets. You can create and cook a specialty diet if your dog has food intolerances or sensitivities to certain ingredients. Flexibility is a huge benefit when you are making your own dog food because you can substitute other healthy ingredients for the ones your dog cannot digest.
- **You have complete control over the ingredients** in your dog's food. Unlike any commercial foods which can still leave you wondering what is actually in them, a fresh food, home cooked diet is one that you can serve to your dog with peace of mind because you know every single ingredient in that bowl.

After reading and reviewing these benefits, you might be eager to jump into the world of home cooked canine meals. However, before you make that switch in your dog's diet, there are a few steps to take to make sure you are on the right path.

### Before You Make the Switch to Fresh Food...

Transitioning your dog from one food to another is something that shouldn't be done without a conversation with your veterinarian. Make an appointment and talk with the doctor about the dietary change you would like to make and your reasons behind it. Using your dog's current health status and weight along with past veterinary records, your veterinarian can help you devise a home cooked diet with complete meals that covers all the bases of the nutritional levels for your dog.

If your veterinarian is uncertain about fresh food contents and levels, ask for a referral to a board-certified veterinary nutritionist who can develop a diet that is best for your pup. The doctor can tell you what your dog needs nutritionally in terms of age, weight, and breed. Remember that you always have this book as a guide, but it's not a substitute for your veterinarian's medical knowledge of your dog. Don't leave the appointment without having all your questions to the veterinarian answered clearly and thoroughly.

When you are given the go-ahead by your veterinarian, and after you have purchased your ingredients, flip to Chapter 6: Meals to begin reading and trying some of the recipes printed here. All of the meals in this book are designed to be easy to make, highly nutritious, and low-fat. When it's time to consider the process of switching your dog from her old food to the new fresh diet, change your dog's food gradually. Too abrupt a change can cause some unpleasant stomach upset for your pup, including vomiting, diarrhea, and gas.

When making the change, follow these steps to switch your dog over to the home cooked diet slowly:

- **Gradually mix the food** by adding a small amount of the new food while slightly reducing the old food; use a 25% new / 75% old ratio to start. Over the next 7 - 10 days,

slowly alter the food proportions to a 50% / 50% ratio, then 75% / 25%, and finally, switch your pup over to her new diet entirely.

- **Keep an eye out for stomach upset** which can happen during this process even if you are placing your dog on a higher-quality diet. Your dog should be drinking her usual amount of water, she shouldn't have too much gas, and her poop should be firm not runny. Remember to be patient with your dog if she has accidents as her body is adjusting to the new food.
- **Slow things down even further** if you see any uncharacteristic behavior from your dog such as lethargy or depression. Contact your veterinarian as well for their input on your dog's health status.
- **Don't get discouraged** if your dog doesn't take to the new food right away. Although it's rare, as most dogs will quickly be swayed by the natural smells of fresh dog food, some dogs might turn up their noses at first. They are so used to the kibble they've eaten for so many years that alternatives seem scary. With time, your dog will happily make the leap to fresh, natural food.

If you're thinking that a fresh, homemade food is the right move for your dog, then it's time to go to doggie school to learn some biology in terms of what your dog's body needs to be at her best.