

Give a dog a bone??

There is always a lot of discussion regarding the best diet to feed a dog. Do you go for one of the dry 'complete' dog foods, or a canned food, or should you prepare your own diet for your dog? There are a huge range of dry foods which vary considerably in price. A survey by the 'Consumers Association', Which?, a few years ago concluded that the more expensive foods had the best ingredients which is no great surprise. You get what you pay for!

However there has been a lot of talk in the last few years of feeding your dog on a 'natural' diet. So should you feed your dog on a commercially prepared pet food or a 'natural diet' such as a 'Raw Meaty Bones' (RMB) diet. Those in favour of such a diet argue that the dog's wild ancestor (the wolf) ate a diet that consisted of whole animal carcasses including skin and bone. Wolves always look pretty healthy; therefore you should feed your dog on a 'natural diet' of raw meaty bones.

However, the RMB argument does not stand up to careful scrutiny:

- ┌ Wolves in the wild always look healthy because any sick wolves die, often at a young age, and so are not seen.
- ┌ Your dog is not a wolf. Dogs were domesticated at least 10,000 years ago. Their ability to chew / digest such 'natural' foods has been significantly altered by many years of pedigree breeding. Many modern dog breeds simply cannot cope with a RMB diet. Their jaws, teeth and digestive system cannot cope.
- ┌ A RMB diet is NOT a complete diet. In the wild, dogs would eat the WHOLE carcass, including skin, liver, kidneys, intestinal contents etc. to achieve a balanced diet. Just feeding the meat and bone is a diet very high in protein and calcium but short in essential vitamins and minerals, and so represents a very poorly-balanced diet.
- ┌ The RMB diet that owners can feed their dog usually consists of material from the butcher. This is material that has often been intensively-reared and passed through a slaughterhouse. Intensive-rearing and the potential for contamination in the slaughterhouse means that the material can be a source of serious infections such as *Salmonella* and *E. coli*. These infections can be passed on to people who handle the dog.
- ┌ The RMB diet can be very laborious to source and feed.
- ┌ Bones can occasionally damage your dog by scratching or perforating its digestive tract or causing obstructions within it.

Much of the RMB diet publicity is based on scare stories related to supposed links between modern complete diets with obesity, skin problems, dental disease and even cancer. This does seem at odds with the fact that since feeding dogs on commercially prepared complete foods became widespread, the average dog lifespan has increased considerably and continues to do so.

So it would seem safer and better for your dog to stick to one of the many excellent, balanced dog foods now available. If in doubt, talk to your Veterinary Surgeon, or Veterinary Nurse, about this. They have been trained in animal nutrition and can give you proper advice and recommendations!

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