

RAW MEAT DIETS

The potential risks and benefits of feeding a raw diet to your pet should be weighed carefully on an individual basis. While a decrease in intestinal, skin, ear, and urinary tract problems have been reported in pets fed a raw diet, no studies have revealed a clear benefit. In fact, studies have shown that pets fed a raw diet are at much higher risk for shedding harmful bacteria, including *Salmonella* and *E.coli*. While most pets fed a raw diet do not show clinical signs of illness if infected with these bacteria, contamination of the environment remains a risk.

Because of this potential hazard, pets that have contact with young children, elderly individuals, or people with compromised immune systems should not be fed a raw diet. Additionally, pets that are immune compromised due to illness or pregnancy, and puppies and kittens whose immune systems are not yet mature are not good candidates for a raw diet.

If a raw diet is recommended by your veterinarian, the guidelines outlined below can help reduce the potential for environmental contamination while optimizing your pet's response to the raw diet.

- Make sure the diet is well balanced. Pets require essential amino acids, vitamins, and minerals that cannot be found in raw meat alone. We recommend two websites (www.balanceit.com or www.petdiets.com), which are helpful resources when formulating well-rounded, balanced diets to maximize your pet's health. The information, recipes, and products on these sites are provided by board certified veterinary nutritionists.
- Only use meat that is suitable for human consumption. Meat that is adulterated or labeled unfit for human consumption may not have been handled appropriately and may increase the risk of contamination.
- Keep raw meat frozen until you need it. Only thaw the portion needed for the next feeding. Thaw meat in a sealed container on the bottom shelf of a refrigerator. Many types of bacteria grow well at room temperature, so thawing meat on a counter top may increase bacterial numbers.

- Handle raw meat with care. Don't allow it to contaminate kitchen surfaces or items that may come into contact with other food. Designate a single cutting board and knife for raw meat to avoid contamination of other food stuffs. Clean and disinfect anything that comes into contact with raw meat.
- Wash your hands thoroughly after handling raw meat or anything that has touched the raw meat, including your pet's food and water bowls. Water bowls are an often overlooked source of contamination. After eating, pets often drink water, leaving bacteria from the mouth and sometimes food particles in the water bowl.
- Discard uneaten raw meat promptly. Do not let it sit at room temperature.
- Clean and disinfect your pet's food and water bowls after each meal. While this may not completely eliminate all the bacteria from the bowls, it may significantly help lower the bacterial numbers.