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What Should I Feed My Pet: Part II

Raw Food: Raw food is just that - uncooked- and comes with all the risks, including food-borne illness and parasites. In addition, many owners feed the raw meat portions only, forgetting about the vitamins and minerals needed. Bacteria may cause gastrointestinal illness, and can be shed in the feces for up to a week after the animal ingests contaminated meat. There is a risk of spreading bacteria to other animals and people. Bones can also damage teeth and perforate the lining of the digestive tract. If you choose to feed raw, don't go it alone! Consult a veterinary nutritionist and make sure to store the raw food properly. Regular fecal exams and parasite preventatives are strongly recommended.

Home-cooked: Many owners forgo manufactured pet foods completely by creating a home-prepared diet. However, most people incorrectly formulate and store the diet. This can have severe health consequences for the pet. If you would like to try home-prepared diets, **a consult with a boarded veterinary nutritionist is strongly recommended.** The nutritionist not only has highly specialized training in animal nutrition and biochemistry, but also has access to nutrient databases for humans and pets, as well as the computer software to calculate the total diet nutrient content.

Vegetarian/Vegan: Many people, including veterinarians, have chosen a vegetarian or vegan lifestyle and want to pass that on to their pets. The irony is that you may need to supplement with synthetic forms of animal protein nutrients such as vitamin B12. Cats should not be put on a vegetarian diet without close supervision of a nutritionist since they are what are known as obligate carnivores and can have severe nutritional deficiencies without animal protein.

The following questions, drafted by the American Animal Hospital Association Nutritional Assessment Guidelines, should be easily answered by your pet food manufacturer:

- 1. Do you have a veterinary nutritionist on staff and available for consultation?**
- 2. Who formulates your diets and what are their credentials?**
- 3. How are your diets tested (AAFCO trials, nutrient analysis)?**
- 4. What quality control methods do you use?**
- 5. Where are your diets manufactured? Can the public visit the plant?**
- 6. Will you provide a complete nutrient analysis and digestibility values for your food?**
- 7. What is the calorie amount in the food per can or per cup?**
- 8. What kinds of research has been conducted on your products and are any results published in a peer-reviewed journal?**

Hopefully, some of this information will help you decide what to feed your pet. However, the task can still be daunting. We are continually surprised and disappointed by misleading marketing information out there, even on seemingly high quality pet products. Do your research!

Please feel free to contact us at Redding Veterinary Hospital with any nutrition questions, or to schedule consult with one of our veterinarians. We are here to help!