



**Bellevue**  
**Animal Clinic**  
*Holistic Healing for Pets*



## **Proper nutrition for training**

Proper nutrition is a very important factor in how your dog behaves and in its ability to learn and perform. Think about it – do you feel differently after you have eaten certain foods? Do you feel better when you eat a 'healthy' diet as opposed to a 'junk food' diet? Your dog will also behave differently when it eats certain foods. How does diet affect behavior? Grains will cause wide swings in your dog's blood glucose level. Do you ever get grumpy when you get hungry and your blood sugar drops? Your dog will too. Neurotransmitters are essential for proper brain function and proper mood and attitude. These are formed from essential amino acids that are present in meat. A grain-based diet may be low in certain amino acids unless they are added back in with a supplement containing them. In addition, many neurotransmitters are actually produced in the intestines. Inflamed intestines will interfere with this process, and in my experience, I see a great deal of intestinal disease related to corn and wheat in the diet.

Now the question – what is the best diet to feed your dog? Unfortunately, a large portion of the pet food industry is more interested in selling food than providing optimal nutrition for your pet. Through creative advertising, they try to convince you that diets that are inappropriate for dogs are the best you can do for your furry friend. This is far from the truth – you can provide your dog with much better nutrition than the average grocery store food will offer.

What makes certain commercial diets unhealthy for dogs?

Many commercial pet foods are grain-based, not meat-based. Why is this a problem? Dogs are carnivores and need to eat a meat based diet to maintain optimal health, both physically and mentally. Go to the pet store and read some labels – do you find ingredients such as corn meal, wheat, gluten, and soy? Do these sound appropriate for a carnivore? They most definitely are not. This even holds true for many of the 'prescription' diets that you will get from your veterinarian. Wheat and corn are inexpensive substitutions for meat that allow the protein content in the food to remain at an acceptable level. I see so many dogs that have adverse reactions to corn and wheat that these are the two ingredients that I always recommend avoiding. A diet with fresh meat and bones, including organ meats is the healthiest choice for your dog.

Processing always destroys the nutritional value in foods. This is the case in our foods as well as our pets' foods. The typical dry food is processed at very high temperatures to create kibble and many of the nutrients are destroyed in the process. Most companies simply spray the vitamins and minerals back onto the kibble after processing, along with some meat flavoring to tempt dogs to eat the food. Canned food is still highly processed, but at a lesser temperature than dry food.

The best ingredients for your dog are fresh, whole foods – it is no different than what is best in your diet. So, how to do this without spending lot of time or money that you don't have to spare? It is not difficult and does not need to be expensive or time consuming. If you are interested in cooking for your dog or preparing a raw diet, that is certainly doable. There are many alternatives that will give your dog the benefit of fresh food in the diet without spending a great deal of time or money. Here are some simple suggestions:

1. Start by feeding a quality commercial diet that does not contain corn or wheat and ideally is grain-free. You can use a combination of dry, canned, dehydrated raw, or commercially prepared raw diets. See the handout on pet food resources for suggestions on brands. If you feed at least 70% of your pet's diet as a commercial food that is complete and balanced, you will not need to add additional supplements.
2. If you eat meat, simply feed your pet some of your leftovers. Yes, people food is not only safe, but is actually quite healthy for your dog. You can feed up to 30% of the diet as cooked meat, vegetables, eggs, or fish without upsetting the nutritional balance of the commercial food you are feeding. Your dog will still get all the basic vitamins and minerals it needs without additional supplementation.
3. Home-prepared food supplements. This is basically creating a 'stew' cooked at low temperatures either on the stovetop or in a crock pot. It should be about 2/3 meat, and if possible include some organ meats such as liver, kidney, or heart. You can add in any mixture of fruits and vegetables that your dog enjoys. Avoid feeding onions, grapes or raisins.

This mixture can be a complete diet with some additional supplementation, or you can feed it up to 30% of the diet without shorting any vital nutrients.

These are some simple ways to add more fresh food into your pet's diet. It is also possible to exclusively home-prepare diets for your pet, but that requires more discussion about balancing and supplementation. The most important thing to remember is that any amount of fresh food in the diet will improve the health of your pet.

What about cost? Depending on what you are currently feeding, the above recommendations may cost you a bit more to feed your pet. I can assure you, from my own experience, that your pet's better health will save you much more in veterinary bills than you are spending in food.

Here is my final recommendation: Don't believe anything I have just said without trying it yourself. I challenge you to try the above suggestions for 30 days and see if you notice a difference in your pet.

If you would like more information or would like to schedule an appointment to specifically address the needs of your pet, please contact me directly.

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Best of health to you and your pet,  
Judy Jasek, DVM