

BASIC INFORMATION

Description

Homemade diets are diets made for individual pets by pet owners. Recipes for these diets can be found in textbooks, in magazine articles, and on the Internet, or they can be acquired from a veterinary nutritionist (a specialist certified by the American College of Veterinary Nutrition). Most published recipes are unbalanced and/or incomplete, and consultation with a veterinary nutritionist is encouraged to evaluate the recipe or to formulate a homemade diet based on your and the pet's preferences.

Types of Diets

Homemade diets fall into two basic categories:

- Homemade diet combined with commercially available pet food
- Complete homemade diet, which can be further divided into diets made with raw ingredients, cooked ingredients, or a combination of the two

Rationale for Homemade Diets

There are several reasons to consider feeding a homemade diet:

- Food trial or long-term management of potential adverse food reactions
- Requirement for a special food to manage a disease or combination of diseases that cannot be achieved with commercially available therapeutic diets
- Personal preference by an owner because of negative information about commercial pet foods (erroneous information in most cases); the belief that home cooked foods are better (more natural) than commercial foods; the feeling of a stronger bond between the owner and pet by cooking for the pet; or the belief that home cooking is cheaper (not true in most cases).

Creating Homemade Diets

Several services are available to help owners with formulating and balancing a homemade diet. These resources include the following:

- Angell Memorial Animal Hospital, Boston MA: telephone consultations through (617) 588-7282
- BalanceIt.com
- Petdiets.com
- University of California Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, Nutrition Support Service: telephone consultations through (530) 752-1393
- University of Missouri College of Veterinary Medicine, Small Animal Nutrition: email consultations through datzc@missouri.edu
- University of Tennessee Veterinary Nutrition Service: email consultations through utvns@utk.edu
- Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine, Small Animal Nutrition Service: referrals made through (540) 231-7666

When making a homemade diet, do not deviate from the recipe provided to you, because this could make the diet unbalanced or incomplete. Veterinary nutritionists can formulate several versions of a homemade diet to provide variety for the pet. Personal hygiene is important when mixing or feeding these diets, especially when feeding raw ingredients. A separate set of food preparation equipment (bowls, mixing spoons, measuring cups, knives) should be used for preparing homemade diets for pets. Prepare the diet in a special area, away from where human food is prepared.

TREATMENT AND FOLLOW-UP

Follow-up Care

Dogs and cats that are fed a homemade diet are evaluated periodically by a physical examination and laboratory tests. Bowel movements should be reasonably formed, and animals should maintain body weight and body condition while on the diet. If any problems or abnormalities develop, consultation with a veterinary nutritionist is worthwhile to evaluate or re-evaluate a homemade diet. If necessary, a sample of the homemade diet can be sent to a food analysis laboratory to determine amounts of nutrients in the diet.