



Food for Thought

Recently the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) passed a resolution that discourages pet owners and veterinarians from feeding pets raw protein in the form of unpasteurized meat eggs and milk. The resolution has produced a vociferous reaction amongst raw diet advocates accusing the veterinary industry of backing only established pet food makers.

The content of the resolution follows:

The AVMA discourages the feeding to cats and dogs of any animal-source protein that has not first been subjected to a process to eliminate pathogens because of the risk of illness to cats and dogs as well as humans. Cooking or pasteurization through the application of heat until the protein reaches an internal temperature adequate to destroy pathogenic organisms has been the traditional method used to eliminate pathogens in animal-source protein, although the AVMA recognizes that newer technologies and other methods such as irradiation are constantly being developed and implemented.

Animal-source proteins of concern include beef, pork, poultry, fish, and other meat from domesticated or wild animals as well as milk* and eggs. Several studies reported in peer reviewed scientific journals have demonstrated that raw or undercooked animal-source protein may be contaminated with a variety of pathogenic organisms, including *Salmonella* spp, *Campylobacter* spp, *Clostridium* spp, *Escherichia coli*, *Listeria monocytogenes*, and enterotoxigenic *Staphylococcus aureus*. Cats and dogs may develop foodborne illness after being fed animal-source protein contaminated with these organisms if adequate steps are not taken to eliminate pathogens; secondary transmission of these pathogens to humans has also been reported. Cats and dogs can develop subclinical infections with these organisms but still pose a risk to livestock, other nonhuman animals, and humans, especially children, older persons, and immunocompromised individuals.

To mitigate public health risks associated with feeding inadequately treated animal source protein to cats and dogs the AVMA recommend the following:

- Avoid feeding inadequately treated animal-source protein to cats and dogs
- Restrict cats' and dogs' access to carrion and animal carcasses (e.g., while hunting)
- Provide fresh, clean, nutritionally balanced and complete commercially prepared or home-cooked food to cats and dogs, and dispose of uneaten food at least daily

- Practice personal hygiene (e.g., hand washing) before and after feeding cats and dogs, providing treats, cleaning pet dishes, and disposing of uneaten food.

The recommendation not to feed unpasteurized milk to animals does not preclude the feeding of unpasteurized same-species milk to un-weaned juvenile animals.

This resolution has produced a firestorm of vehement reaction amongst raw food advocates accusing the veterinary profession of siding with the pet food industry. I have a hard time understanding that accusation because raw food diets are being marketed by the pet food industry as well. The raw food pet industry is growing quite rapidly and selling plenty of food to pet owners.

As a veterinarian reading this AVMA resolution it seems very similar to the warning we all read on the restaurant menus that make us aware eating undercooked meat or fish makes us more susceptible to uncomfortable gastrointestinal distress or, very rarely, severe illness and death. I usually read the warning and order the raw tuna anyway. I am willing to take that risk.

You may take the same risk with your pet; The AVMA just recommends that you don't. Many other people might not be willing to take that risk and cook the protein or feed formulated dog food. I have always fed raw meat with a baseline diet of high quality dog food with between 15-30% protein. A higher level of protein may cause kidney disease especially in the 25% of dogs that are genetically predisposed to develop kidney disease. I feed a small amount of raw beef/chicken that would amount to more than 30% of the total protein fed on a dry weight basis including the commercial dog food.

There is an agency called The Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) that sets regulations as to what has to be posted on the nutrition label of all pet foods and treats. The AAFCO.org website has detailed explanations on calculating minimum protein/carbohydrate/ fat levels in foods. AAFCO sets the regulations but does not enforce them. State feed inspection officials are responsible for inspecting/testing the food to make sure it is in compliance. All diets including commercially made raw diets and organic diets and treats must comply with these regulations.

I have some great homeopathic recipes for home made raw food diet for dogs and cats. They are very precise and require addition of appropriate amounts of calcium, magnesium and vitamins. They have no preservatives so they do not last longer than 1-3 days in the refrigerator. They are time consuming to prepare. Freezing the diet does not kill any bacteria if the raw meat is contaminated.

The homemade raw diet protein is pure, less processed and much more digestible than the protein meal which that is provided in some dog foods. I do not agree with feeding bones in the raw food. Dogs can have severe blockages with bones that result in emergency surgery or death. That being said, I have seen extremely vibrant pets with healthy coats that are on exclusively raw food diets.

Raw food advocates do have a point when they note that dry dog and cat foods are being recalled when they contain salmonella and E coli and wonder why the mainstream dog

foods are considered superior to raw food diets if they have these recall problems. The truth is that AAFCO asks companies to self-report to an agency called Reportable Food Registry under the FDA if they determine a food article has a reasonable probability of causing serious adverse health consequences to humans or animals. My question then: Is there a different degree of self-reporting between the raw food and traditional food industries? Are there enough inspectors to evaluate every small pet food producer?

So what to feed your dog or cat in these times of pet food recalls? It is ultimately up to you. Your veterinarian may be able to give you valuable input based on your pet's lifestyle, age and individual health. Your veterinarian may have very different opinions than mine on diet based on their study of nutrition, interest and knowledge of homeopathy and clinical experience with the effects of different types of dog food on their patients.

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