

# Feeding Your Dog from a Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medical (TCVM) Perspective

This page is not meant to provide complete nutritional information but simply provide alternatives regarding feeding options for your pet and ways of integrating Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medical information. It has been compiled through personal observations and experiences, Daverick Leggett's book *Helping Ourselves*, Mary Strauss's article in the *Whole Dog Journal*, "Having Dinner In" and "Now We're Cooking" and the Chi Institute's Food Energetic guidelines.

Feeding a proper diet can help our pets in so many ways and provide an effective way of preventing disease or helping balance our pets when they are afflicted with disease. What we feed our pets can help their immune systems fight infections or immune-based diseases, help fight cancer and help the digestive tract, especially in those prone to vomiting and diarrhea. Diet affects our pets' health and it is the one thing you can change to positively influence your pets' well-being.

Dogs, like humans, are omnivores meaning they eat everything. In the wild, they would hunt and eat small mammals, ingesting the bones, meat, and internal organs, including the gut loaded with plant material. They also nibble on grass and other plants. This diversity of food sources makes modifying your pet's diet much easier as it provides many options to choose from based on your lifestyle and your pet's specific needs.

## Modifications to Your Pet's Diet

There are many ways to modify what we feed our pets and help them be more nutritionally balanced. Whatever diet change you opt to do for your pet needs to be easy for your lifestyle and not too complex; otherwise, you won't be able to do it on an ongoing basis. It should also be economically feasible, especially if you have a large dog. Any time a diet change is done, do so gradually by introducing the new food or diet with what is being currently feed, and then slowly decrease the previously fed food while feeding more of the new food. This allows the gastrointestinal tract a chance to acclimate to the change. This is especially true when something completely new is offered, especially if it is meat or an organ meat, when small amounts are usually recommended. One must be particularly careful of diet changes or introduction of new meats in dogs with a history of pancreatitis (inflamed pancreas) or certain breeds prone to pancreatitis (such as Schnauzers or Schipperkes) with particular attention to a gradual introduction, small amounts and only lean meats with no fat. The following are some changes you can consider making to your pet's diet:

- Decrease considerably or eliminate completely kibble and substitute home-made and/or canned food
- Change kibble to better quality- that is, less grains and more protein (see below for more information)
- Feed 100% canned food supplemented with small amounts of fresh vegetables and fruits
- Feed 50% canned food supplemented with 50% fresh meat, vegetables, grains and fruits
- Feed 100% homemade (see below for more information and a general recipe)
- Feed commercial dehydrated foods with fresh meat and vegetables added
- Feed raw food – either fed exclusively (note that feeding guidelines are provided on package or websites) or use raw food to supplement the currently fed (note that raw food should be fed separately from other food)

## Feeding Options

For guidelines to finding good quality dog foods, an excellent resource is the *Whole Dog Journal* ([www.whole-dog-journal.com](http://www.whole-dog-journal.com)).

## Kibble or Canned Food – How to Choose a High Quality Food

Choosing a high quality food can be easy once you know what to look for. Ideally, one or two animal proteins are the first few things listed, as all ingredients must be listed by weight. The animal protein should be named, not just listed as “meat” or “by-products”. You also want to look for whole grains such as oat or barley, and vegetables. Avoid processed grains such as corn meal and brewer’s rice, fillers such as corn and soy, artificial preservatives such as BHSA, BHT and ethoxyquin and artificial colors. Tocopherols (a type of vitamin E), vitamin C and rosemary extract are okay, but note that food with these natural preservatives won’t keep as long, so check the “best by” date.

Note that higher quality kibble or canned food may be more available in pet stores, rather than supermarkets. These kibbles tend to be higher in protein and use better quality meats and are lower in carbohydrates, grains and additives. Because kibble is highly processed and is inherently a “warming” food, it may not be the preferred base for a pet’s diet and if fed, should be fed in small quantities. Kibble also tends to be higher in calories and thus, it can contribute to an overweight pet.

## Raw Food

Many pet stores now carry raw foods that are already prepared as frozen nuggets or patties that just need to be thawed and contain not just flesh but ground up and easy to digest bone pieces and some vegetables; these are complete and wholesome diets and many pets thrive on such diets. However, some pets may not do well with raw foods, especially breeds or individuals prone to pancreatitis because of raw food’s fat content or because the pet is immunosuppressed for the treatment of cancer or an immune-mediated disease. Note that for raw foods, either home-made or commercial, there is a small but not negligible potential for food-borne contamination with Salmonella or E. coli to the pet. Very few pets fed raw food contract infections from these bacteria. Some simple guidelines can minimize risks. Raw foods should not be allowed to sit out at room temperature for prolonged periods of time, and foods that are not immediately ingested should be thrown out. Also, handling raw food must be done carefully with thorough hand washing, feeding from non-porous surfaces (ideally, stainless steel bowls), and avoiding contact with other food items in the kitchen. People who are immunosuppressed, on chemotherapy or afflicted with HIV should exercise extreme caution when handling raw foods.

## Homemade Diets

Homemade diets are great if you want to have more control over what your pet eats or if you want to supplement their kibble or canned food. It is important to note that meat alone is high in phosphorus but contains no calcium, so if you are feeding 100% homemade you will need to include a good source of calcium. There are multiple options for supplementing calcium: ground eggshells (you can make your own but it must be ground to a powder to be absorbed), seaweed (available as Animal Essential’s Natural Calcium [www.animalesentials.com](http://www.animalesentials.com)) or bone meal. It is ideal to have double the amount of calcium to the amount of phosphorus, so keep that in mind when choosing a calcium supplement. This calcium supplement should be given in addition to a general vitamin supplement. There are supplements designed specifically to balance homemade diets such as Wysong’s Call of the Wild (sold at pet supply stores or [www.wysong.net](http://www.wysong.net)) or Balance IT (sold by DVM Consulting [www.balanceit.com](http://www.balanceit.com)). You can also use a human multi-vitamin such as Centrum.

A balanced homemade diet should be made up of 70% meat (such as chicken breast, ground turkey, lean, ground beef (not steak or fatty meats), white fish, salmon, or lean, ground lamb) and 30% grains, vegetables, and fruits. The type of meat, vegetables, and grains will vary according to the condition being treated. Here is a good general recipe to follow when creating your pet’s food:

- 20 oz. of meat (10% can be organ meat)
- 10 oz. of vegetables and grains (more vegetables than grains)
- 2 tsp. of fish oil (Omega 3 fatty acids, anchovy, and sardine based are best)
- 1 tsp. of calcium supplement (Animal Essentials, powdered egg shell or bone meal)
- ½ tsp. of potassium chloride (Lite Salt)
- Vitamin supplement (Wysong’s Call of the Wild or Balance IT per label instructions or 1 tablet of a human multi-vitamin such as Centrum)

This recipe makes enough food for one 50 pound dog for one day. Most owners find it easier to make a large batch of food one to two times a week. This can be frozen into meal size portions and unthawed as needed.

As an alternative to feeding a 100% homemade diet, you could add meats, grains, vegetables and some fruits to supplement your pet's base diet of canned food (preferably) or kibble (if fed, it should be of good quality). Proteins should comprise the majority of the homemade diet in the form of muscle meat, organ meats (in smaller amounts), eggs and dairy. Lean meats are best, especially when using beef. Duck and venison, since they are rich meats, are often difficult to use in their whole form. The rest of the diet should be a combination of vegetables and grains. Leafy greens are the healthiest but other vegetables, depending on your pet's condition, are appropriate. Small amounts of raw vegetables are fine, but if larger amounts are fed, steamed are best. Depending on your pet's condition grains, including rice, oatmeal, barley, can be fed but these should be fed in small quantities as grains contribute to weight gain and certain health problems. Fruits can also be fed in small amounts.

## How Much to Feed

An average dog's needs will vary according to the pet's size, activity level and condition and if the pet is already at an ideal weight or is under or overweight. Note that most pet foods guidelines for quantities to be fed on the package are far and above what most pets actually need, and feeding excessive amounts will lead to obesity. You can start by mixing in a small amount of the new food with the prior food and gradually increase the amount of the new food, while decreasing the amount of the prior food. You may find that you need to feed more of the new food; if it is homemade this is due to higher digestibility and less fillers and if it is canned this is due to the higher moisture content. On the other hand, if you have changed to a higher quality kibble, you may need to feed less since these foods may contain more calories so that a lesser amount may have the same calorie content as a larger amount of the prior food. You can always bring your dog in to the clinic at no charge for a weight check as you are determining the amounts to be fed.

## The Use of Food in the Prevention of Disease and/or Treating Conditions

Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine (TCVM) describes food as possessing certain qualities such as warming or cooling (its inherent temperature) or having specific flavors that can act on the body in certain ways. The temperature of a food will influence the body by warming it up or cooling it down and the method by which food is cooked will influence its temperature. This information is useful when treating or managing certain conditions of imbalance of Heat or Cold in the body and so they can be used to help treat diseases. You will need to check with your TCVM-trained veterinarian for guidance on which may be better choices for your pet based on their condition. Note that fruits, while helping to balance a dog's diet, are high in water and sugar content and thus, should be fed sparingly. Organ meats tend to be rich and should also be fed sparingly.

Fresh meats, grains, vegetables and fruits can be incorporated into home-made diets if you wish to prepare your pet's food (see recipes) or simply used to supplement and add to canned food or dehydrated foods. Note that any kibble tends to be highly processed, higher in carbohydrate content and harder to digest, especially for older pets. Kibble tends to be warming, and so it is not good for pets with "warm conditions" such as inflamed skin and/or ears or inflammatory bowel disease. If kibble is fed, it should be given in small quantities and should be of high quality. There are also guidelines when choosing a meat for feeding homemade or raw foods. Raw foods are cooling in nature and may be appropriate for some but not all pets. In general, warm conditions are treated with cooling foods and cool conditions are treated with warming foods. For a list of foods and their uses, please see our handout on [Food Energy](#) and [Food Actions](#).