

Does Raw Food Help Dogs' Arthritis?

Supplements may be a better way help dogs' joints feel better.

By Jon Geller, DVM

Q. I wanted to know what you think about feeding my dog a raw diet? I have a Basset-Beagle mix who is 10 years old and has arthritis. She gets Adequin shots, and the vet has recommended that she be put on J/D prescription diet, but she does not like it.

I have been trying to find different solutions that I could either mix with it or another supplement that I could use that would give her some extra benefit for her joints. Right now, she loves the raw chicken that I have bought from Blue Ridge Beef, so I have mixed it with the J/D and she will eat it that way.

I just wanted to know what your thoughts were on feeding a raw diet to a dog her age.

A. Although there are some benefits to a raw diet, when it comes to a raw meat diet I would be very cautious. Although raw meat is what canines eat in the wild, there are serious health risks that can affect not only dogs, but their owners as well.

In multiple scientific studies, raw meat (beef or chicken) has been shown to contain high parasite counts and bacterial contamination. Salmonella, Shigella, Cryptosporidium, and other bacteria and parasites can be found in high numbers in raw meat. This is highly related to the confined environments in which cattle and poultry are raised. Many of these parasites and bacteria (especially Salmonella) pass through the dog with their feces into the environment, thereby creating a hazard to any human who may come into contact with it.

There are other strategies to supplement your dog's diet to improve her arthritis. Add some fish oil capsules, or add glucosamine-chondroitin capsules, or both. The J/D diet is effective, but it is relatively pricey and many dogs do not care for the taste.

Many owners offer their dogs raw food diets that don't include raw meat. You may want to explore this option because it has the benefit of providing the benefits of raw food without the risks of bacterial contamination and potential spread of disease in the environment.