

Home Cooking for Dogs

Tips on how to responsibly prepare homemade food for your dog.

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With the ongoing investigation of the Menu Foods pet foods recall, the ASPCA and numerous other organizations have received inquiries from concerned pet owners regarding the safety of homemade diets for their pets.

While these questions are natural, toxicologists and veterinarians urge pet owners to fully research homemade diets for pets before putting on the chef's hat.

The ASPCA still generally recommends high-quality commercial diets for pets since such foods are highly researched and are formulated with nutrients, said ASPCA Senior Vice President Steven Hansen, a board-certified veterinary toxicologist.

"Homemade diets can certainly provide pets with an adequate diet, but they do require a substantial amount of work and guidance by your veterinary team to ensure that the final product includes a complete nutritional balance," said Hansen, who manages the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center, said.

"This is especially important if you plan to give your pet vegetarian or vegan food — some fruits and vegetables, in certain doses and circumstances, can be extremely harmful to pets," he said.

For example, onions, garlic, chives, avocado, grapes, raisins, and macadamia nuts can all cause illness when eaten by pets. And raw foods may lead to Salmonella poisoning.

"Ask your veterinarian to refer you to a specialist with an advanced degree in animal nutrition. These certified veterinary nutritionists will be able to formulate a balanced recipe for your pet, which will give you peace of mind as well," suggests Louise Murray, director of medicine at the ASPCA's Bergh Memorial Animal Hospital.

If a homemade pet food recipe is used, it's important to remember the following: Follow recipe directions exactly, without substitutions or omitting of ingredients. This includes processing and cooking instructions since some processing steps can destroy or damage the nutrients in the ingredients. Have your pet examined by a veterinarian at least twice a year, so that their health can be evaluated. Supplementing your pet's diet with healthy treats is fine, but treats, even healthy ones, should not make up more than five to 10 percent of a pet's daily caloric intake. Too many treats can throw off the balance of nutrients a pet is receiving from their diet.

Some appropriate healthy snacks for dogs include: carrot sticks, apple slices (without seeds), green beans, and cantaloupe. However, vets recommend that pets who don't tolerate dietary changes well or have specific health conditions be given these types of extras unless approved by a veterinarian.