

# Making a Meal of it

tips to make kibble more like real food



By Jodie Gruenstern DVM CVA

Is your dog refusing to eat fresh foods? Are you a foster family and you're required to feed kibble? Are you just not yet ready to move away from kibble? Here are some tips to make the best of a bad situation.

There are a lot of very good reasons to take the time or to spend the money to provide your best friend with a species appropriate, raw diet. There's little question that fresh, whole foods offer a superior level of nutrition that kibble can never match.

But there are some situations where dogs just have to eat kibble. Many older or rescued dogs who have eaten kibble all their lives can repeatedly refuse your efforts at providing them a better, fresher diet. If your dog is stuck in a kibble rut, either permanently or temporarily, here are some tips to make it safer and more nutritious.

## Choose a variety of diets

Rotating and feeding a variety of diets will help to minimize the negative impact of any unknown excesses or deficiencies in the kibbles. Rotating foods doesn't mean just choosing different foods from the same kibble manufacturer; most manufacturers just use the same vitamin premix in every brand or line of food. So rotating not only meat sources within the same brand but also rotating actual brands of diets is good advice.

The concept of rotating foods is quite the opposite of conventional veterinary recommendations. But by providing variety from the beginning, you will create a stronger gut, although changes should be made gradually.

It's important that each food you choose is free of artificial preservatives, corn, wheat, soy or dyes. Read your ingredient labels. An artificial preservative would be listed as BHA, BHT or ethoxyquin. There are reports that BHA and BHT are carcinogenic (*Cancer Lett 1987 Fukushima et al*), while ethoxyquin, a preservative and pesticide, is reported to damage kidney tissue in rats (*Arch Toxicol. 1992 Manson et al*). Corn and soy, unless stated, are of genetically modified origin, while wheat is high in gluten. These undesirable ingredients can contribute to allergies, inflammatory bowel disease or even cancer.

## Add probiotics

One of the main nutrient categories missing from processed foods is probiotics, or good bacteria. One of the problems with kibble is that the heating and processing destroys bacteria, both good and the bad. This can lead to health issues because a balanced gastrointestinal flora is vitally important for effective digestion and immune system balance. There are many examples which prove this to be true. When *Helicobacter* bacteria flourish, stomach ulcers can result. When *Clostridium* bacteria overgrow, painful bloating and severe diarrhea can occur. So long as bacteria like these are kept in balance, the gut can function normally.

The good bacteria residing in the intestinal tract operate as a part of the immune system by contributing to a healthy intestinal mucosal lining. When this lining is inadequate, it's called leaky gut syndrome. Leaks or holes in the mucosal lining allow large bits of undigested proteins to enter the blood stream, where they travel to the liver for proper processing. Because these proteins aren't presented in their proper amino acid

format, the liver says, "Eek, get out!" The body will then respond with inflammation. Inflammation is the body's mechanism to stop or remove unrecognizable invaders. The body then attempts to expel the foreign invaders through the circulatory system and, ultimately, through the skin (resulting in allergy symptoms) or via the intestinal tract (diarrhea). So gut health is essential for liver and skin health.

Since kibble is lacking in good bacteria, you need to look for probiotics on the kibble ingredient label. Look for long words with two names like *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, *Lactobacillus rhamnosus*, *Bifidobacterium longum* or *Enterococcus faecium*. *Saccharomyces boulardii* are probiotic yeast.

Studies that show which probiotics specifically survive the dog's stomach acidic environment, and actually colonize the gut, are rare so it's difficult to know just how well your dog can use dietary probiotics. So feeding and supporting your dog's existing intestinal flora is another good way to support digestion and immune health. Prebiotics are a type of soluble fiber or resistant starch that feed only the good bacteria in the gut, allowing desirable bacteria to colonize the gut. You can recognize prebiotics on an ingredient label by looking for fructooligosaccharides (FOS), chickory root, inulin, guar gum or beet pulp.

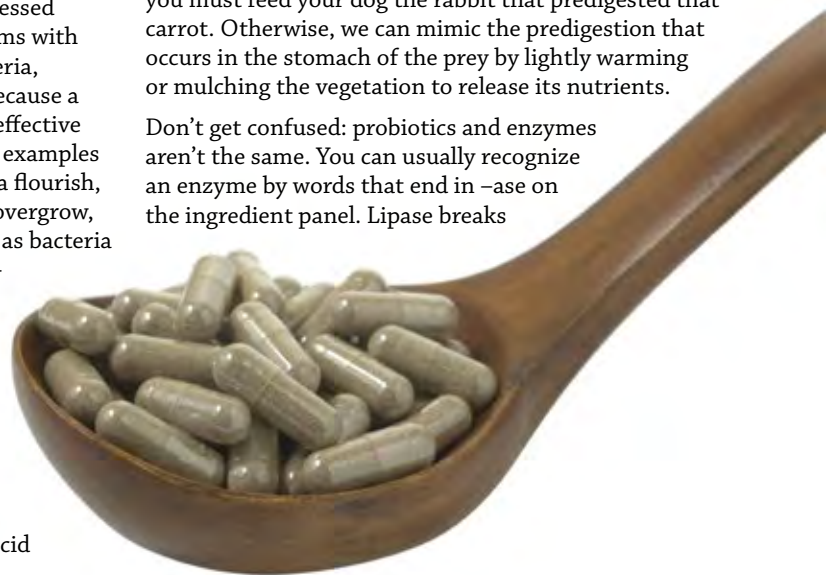
## Add enzymes

Have you ever put pineapple juice on meat and noticed the bubbling? The principle behind marinating is that certain foods can digest (or break down) other fresh foods. The enzymes present in fresh foods can promote the digestive process, before the body's salivary and pancreatic enzymes further facilitate digestion. Enzymes can be added to processed kibble in the form of powders, which are sprinkled onto the food before serving, or in the form of blended, fresh vegetation.

Carnivores lack the digestive enzyme called cellulase that herbivores possess. Cellulase allows a plant eater to break down cellulose, a component of plant cell walls. The cell walls must first be broken down to allow the release of other nutrients from the plant material. The lack of cellulase explains why a chunk of carrot passes right through your dog intact.

If you want your dog to assimilate vitamin A from a carrot, then you must feed your dog the rabbit that predigested that carrot. Otherwise, we can mimic the predigestion that occurs in the stomach of the prey by lightly warming or mulching the vegetation to release its nutrients.

Don't get confused: probiotics and enzymes aren't the same. You can usually recognize an enzyme by words that end in -ase on the ingredient panel. Lipase breaks



down lipids or fats. Amylase breaks down starches. Protease breaks down proteins into smaller amino acids. These are only a few of many enzymes.

## Add whole food vitamins

Many kibble manufacturers state that you shouldn't add vitamins or supplements to their food, claiming that their food is complete and balanced. In reality, the laboratory derived, synthetic vitamins present in the food don't meet adequate standards. Over time, cell receptors can become clogged with these fake vitamins and begin to perform improperly. In fact, toxicity can occur if synthetic vitamins are excessive in the food. Fresh, whole food sourced vitamins are complex and better used by the body's cells and the assimilation of these healthful vitamins can actually be decreased when in the presence of synthetic vitamins.

Minimizing synthetic vitamins and adding whole food vitamins will give the body the opportunity to pick and choose what it needs. So the addition of blended fruits and vegetables can fulfill two needs: the need for enzymes and the need for whole food vitamins.

There are also many manufacturers of healthy whole food vitamin/mineral supplements and superfoods that fulfill this category. Standard Process Catalyn is an excellent, economical whole food vitamin source for humans and large dogs. The Standard Process Canine Whole Body Support is also great for puppies, small or large dogs.

Many knowledgeable pet guardians also add kelp, spirulina, herbal blends, mushroom combinations, wheat grass or sprouted grain products to their dog's food. These functional foods can provide prebiotics, enzymes, whole food vitamins and minerals, and even fatty acids.

## Add omega-3 fatty acids

Most kibble diets are devoid of healthful fats, which are lost with heating and processing. In fact, processing can produce hydrogenated or trans fats, which can be very dangerous. Most plant-derived fats provide omega-6 and 9 fatty acids, which in general are pro-inflammatory, whereas omega-3 fatty acids are anti-inflammatory. Kibble fed dogs need to consume more healthy anti-inflammatory foods. While flax is high in omega-3

fatty acids, it's poorly assimilated by dogs and other carnivores. In particular, cats don't possess the enzyme needed to convert flax oil into useable DHA and EPA, which are vital to joint, heart, skin and brain health. Not unexpectedly, a carnivore best utilizes the fatty acids found in fish oils.

Fish oil is very unstable and its quality varies tremendously. It's important to note that rancid fish oil is worse to eat than no fish oil at all. If you open a new bottle of fish oil and it smells strongly fishy, it's quite likely poorly distilled and already rancid.

It's best to add fresh fish oil to kibble immediately before serving. Don't believe that fish oil contained in kibble can be fresh; it's best to add it in. But if the kibble is left out all day long, the oil will go rancid. Besides, "grazing" is neither a natural nor healthful way for a carnivore to eat. Not only does this practice allow additional spoilage of nutrients, it will negatively impact urinary tract health.

Pet labeled fish oil products will have guidelines as to the recommended amount. This is a guideline. Start gradually and monitor stool production. If the stool loosens, back off and make the addition more slowly. Most pet guardians remark that there is a decrease in shedding and a more luxuriant coat in as little as two weeks after the addition of fish oil to dry kibble.

There are still thousands of pet guardians who believe the myth that the kibble diet they are feeding their pet companions is complete and balanced. The simple addition of these four nutrient categories can vastly improve the quality of life for so many pets! And when guardians observe the improvements in energy, attitude and coat quality, they'll realize kibble isn't so complete after all.

Help dispel the myth and give this article to a kibble-feeding friend. It's an important first step toward a fresh food diet! 🌍



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