

The interest in home making pet foods is still strong more than a year after the pet food scare of 2007. Maybe recent news reports of tainted milk overseas has reminded pet owners of the worrisome crisis we all faced last year regarding the safety of our pets' food. Because of this I have decided to re-run a column I wrote last year about this time. Hopefully, it will provide guidance to pet owners who remain concerned about this issue.

I was riding in an elevator last week and happened to be wearing a sweatshirt with my alma mater, UC Davis, blazoned across the front. It wasn't 10 seconds before a complete stranger riding the elevator with me ascertained I was a veterinarian and offered up: "I've got a dog question for you..." I find these encounters fun, if not a little flattering. The questions I get are usually specific about a pet's health problem and I sometimes find myself searching for diplomatic words to remind the questioner that the diagnosis and treatment for their pet's problem may be beyond the scope of a brief elevator ride. Nonetheless I try to help when I can and folks seem appreciative. This time an older gentleman asked me "what ingredients should I use to make a good home-made food for my dog."

The interest in home-making pet foods is nothing new. Some pet owners feel their pets eat better if the food is home made, others just like to cook or have a lot of time on their hands, or maybe both. But recent concerns about the safety of commercial pet food products have motivated many more to consider home-making their pet's food for safety reasons. The premise being that if they can make the diet "from scratch" it will be healthier and safer for their pet.

Before you run to the supermarket and stock up on all the ingredients that you think would make for a healthy pet food, let's review some important information the Veterinary School at UC Davis.

To quote the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine's Nutritional Support Service: "Most nutritionists agree that it is in the animal's best interest to eat a commercially available food. The use of home-prepared diets is an alternative to feeding commercial food, but is not risk free".

The risk of feeding home prepared foods arises on many levels. Many published or otherwise circulated pet food recipes are from unknown or possibly under qualified sources. The diets often lack the feeding trials or lab analyses that assure that the diet meets all the nutritional needs of a pet at given stage in life, or with a given health condition. Additionally, some ingredients for a home-prepared diet can be expensive or hard to find so pet owners will substitute with other ingredients. This can adversely change the diet's make up and in the end defeat the original purpose for home making the diet. If the pet has one or more medical problems the make up of the diet can be a major help or hindrance to successful management of those problems. For example pets with serious problems such as diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease or obesity have very specific dietary requirements. The wrong dietary choices for these pets could complicate their problems.

So, if home preparing your pet's food is still something you want to do, nutritionists at UC Davis recommend the following.

- 1) Animals being fed a home-prepared diet should be evaluated at least every six months by their veterinarian and the diet, and adherence to the diet, discussed. A complete health evaluation should be done including a physical exam and weigh in. This often includes blood and urine tests as well.
- 2) Any recipe for a home-prepared diet should be evaluated and/or developed by a board certified veterinary nutritionist. Such diets will address your pet's specific dietary needs.
- 3) Talk with your regular veterinarian about getting a diet formulated by a board certified veterinary nutritionist. A nutritionist will likely charge a fee for this service but it's well worth it to assure an appropriate diet. On-line you can check out the following organizations for more information: American College of Veterinary Nutrition ([www.acvn.org](http://www.acvn.org)), The California Veterinary Medical Association ([www.cvma.net](http://www.cvma.net)), and the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine ([www.vmeth.ucdavis.edu/vmeth/services/nutrition/nutrition.html](http://www.vmeth.ucdavis.edu/vmeth/services/nutrition/nutrition.html)).

Remember most nutritionists agree that commercially prepared diets are the best bet for most pets. For what it's worth, a brief survey of the 6 doctors in our practice reveals that they all feed their pets commercially prepared diets. If home making your pet's food is something you need or want to pursue, work with a board certified veterinary nutritionist to assure your pet gets the nutrition he/she needs.

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