

BVA Policy Brief

Raw Meaty Bones Lobby

An ongoing debate within the veterinary profession. A small lobby group proposes that pet dogs and cats should be fed a 'natural diet' of raw meat and bones rather than commercially prepared diets. The group is active in their criticism of the commercial manufacturers of pet foods. This criticism has recently been extended to the university veterinary schools, which have been accused of teaching undergraduate veterinary nutrition in a biased fashion in return for financial support for research and clinical work within the schools.

Key facts:

- Dogs are omnivorous animals whilst cats are obligate carnivores. Both species require a balance of essential dietary nutrients (e.g. vitamins, minerals and essential fatty acids) for optimal health and longevity.
- Commercially prepared pet foods have been scientifically formulated to contain the optimum balance of essential dietary nutrients for each species. Some commercial pet foods have been designed to satisfy the requirements of specific breeds or the specialised dietary needs of animals with a range of illnesses. The use of such diets over the past decades likely accounts for the increased health and longevity of companion animals.
- These commercial diets are based on extensive research, performed both 'in-house' and in collaboration with veterinary schools. Much of this research is published in the peer-reviewed scientific literature. By contrast, there is no scientific evidence base to support the benefits of feeding raw meat and bones.
- Dogs and cats may be fed with home-prepared 'natural diets', but it is difficult to achieve the optimum balance of requisite nutrients in this fashion.
- The feeding of raw meat and bones to companion animals carries particular risks, including infection with pathogenic bacteria associated with uncooked meats (e.g. Salmonella, Campylobacter) and injury (e.g. intestinal perforation) caused by bone fragments. The BSAVA (the BVA's relevant specialist division) advises against the feeding of raw meat or bones to companion animals for this reason.
- The RMB lobby proposes that the feeding of bones is beneficial to oral health (teeth and gums). Similar benefits may be achieved by feeding of purpose designed kibble food or dental chews, without the attendant risk of damage (e.g. fractures) of the teeth.

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Additional Resources

- Pet Food Manufacturers Association Information Paper on Raw Meat and Bones Discussions. PFMA, January 2005.