



# HOW TO CHOOSE THE BEST RAW DOG FOOD





# TABLE OF CONTENTS



<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Types of Raw Dog Food .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Raw Diets for Puppies and Seniors .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Homemade Raw Dog Food .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>How to Get Started .....</b>	<b>12</b>



# INTRODUCTION

---



With an almost overwhelming number of raw feeding choices, it can seem daunting to find the diet that is right for your dog. There are many styles, formats, and flavours of raw food, each with their own pros and cons. Start by narrowing down your options.

- What are your pet's specific needs?
- What are you looking for in a dog food?

After you determine how to support your dog's health, consider things like

- Price
- Quantity
- Ease of preparation
- Lifestyle



Not all raw diets are complete and balanced. There is little regulation for raw food labelling in Canada, so it can be challenging to navigate. Make sure you talk to your local pet store or vet to ensure that the diet you choose is not missing any essential nutrients. Many brands, like Big Country Raw, have both options, so make sure you are grabbing the right raw dog food from the freezer at your local pet store.

While some diets are labelled as a Full Meal, Dinner, or Whole Prey, others may not specify. If you are not sure, ask. There is no harm in double-checking and lots of harm in unknowingly feeding your dog an incomplete diet.

Diets labelled MBO (meat and bone only), Bone-In, or Ground, are likely incomplete diets meant to be supplemented and customized. If you are unfamiliar with what's needed to customize a balanced raw diet for dogs, it's safer to stick to complete diets. A full meal will have fresh meat, bone, organ meats, and fresh produce to provide natural sources of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Products that are not full meals may be missing one or more of these components and must be supplemented with things like omega fatty acids, organ meats, kelp and/or other nutritional aids.

# TYPES OF RAW DOG FOOD



## 01 Frozen

Frozen raw foods are typically sold in large blocks, tubs, chubs, or pre-portioned patties. Each meal will need to be portioned out to meet your dog's feeding requirements. Choose the size and style that works best for you and your pet.

If you are looking for a complete meal that doesn't require extra supplements of vitamins and minerals, then choose a diet labelled as such. Some of the terms you may see are full meals, dinners, complete meals. These mean that the food contains all the essential nutrients needed in a standard complete diet.

Feeding a full raw diet doesn't mean that you can't add more nutrients to their meals to meet your dog's individual needs. Try including edible or recreational bones, fresh produce, omega fatty acids, or other supplements that can make the food better suited to your dog's needs.

Don't go overboard on the add-ins though. Additional calories from "extras" might mean you need to increase activity or reduce regular feedings for your dog.

If you choose to feed an incomplete diet so that you can customize it, be prepared to use supplements and other foods to balance the meals. Incomplete diets allow you to have more control over your pet's food so that you can accommodate specific dietary needs, such as allergies, but it is much more difficult to ensure an appropriate balance of nutrients.

Incomplete diets are not recommended for beginners, though. If you need to go this route for health reasons, then I strongly recommend doing a lot of research to ensure you are offering the right nutrients to your dog.





# TYPES OF RAW DOG FOOD

## 02 Freeze-dried, Dehydrated, and Air Dried

Those looking for an easier to store option, freeze-dried, dehydrated, and air-dried raw foods are good choices. You can find them in similar varieties to frozen raw diets but in more condensed and easier to prepare formats.

These are great for travelling, portioning smaller meals, and as a “whoops, I forgot to defrost some raw last night” emergency option. They are also popular among pet owners who don’t like handling the raw meat or just don’t have the freezer space to dedicate to their dog’s food.

Freeze-dried and many dehydrated diets require rehydration. These can be easily made to order, prepared in advance, frozen, or taken on the go. Once rehydrated, the food will have a texture similar to a canned diet.

If you are looking for raw nutrition in a kibble-like format, then try a dehydrated or air-dried food that is designed to be fed dry. These are a simple scoop and serve choice that offers similar nutrients and benefits of a frozen or fresh raw diet.

Dehydrated and freeze-dried diets may be appealing for some, but they do have some downsides. For one, they are often more expensive than feeding frozen raw, so they are not ideal for those with a strict budget.

Raw diets that don’t require rehydration are also missing the benefit of moisture. Much like kibble diets, additional moisture should be offered throughout the day to compensate.

### CUSTOMIZED DEHYDRATED DOG FOOD

The last style of dehydrated or freeze-dried raw diet you’ll find at your local pet store is a premix diet. These diets are designed to take the guesswork out of a customized diet.

The diets contain everything but meat. You can rehydrate the premix and add meat of your own choosing. Then just supplement the diet with omega fatty acids, or kelp to provide a balanced diet for your dog.

#### Do Dogs Need Carbs?

While this question is hotly debated, our opinion is that they kind of do. Plant ingredients, like fruits and vegetables, offer natural sources of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and fibre that support balance of healthy bacteria in your dog’s gut and digestion.



# RAW DIETS FOR PUPPIES AND SENIORS



During developmental stages, both puppies and senior dogs have an increased requirement for certain nutrients. Their bodies are growing and changing rapidly, so their diets need to supply the right types and quantities of the nutrients required to support this growth. These three factors need to be considered when feeding a raw diet to dogs of different life stages:



## Omega Fatty Acids

Puppies and senior dogs have some similarities. Both need nutrients to support cognitive function, skeletal structure, and muscle mass. Therefore, their diets may need to be supplemented to ensure they are getting the nutrients needed to stay healthy as their bodies adapt to changes.

Omega fatty acids are essential for dogs of all life stages, but certain fatty acids are more important to support cognitive function while the brain is developing and to prevent cognitive decline. DHA is the fatty acid required to provide this support.

DHA is best sourced from animal fats and oils, as very few plant sources have an abundant concentration of this fatty acid. Supplementing your young and old dogs with fish oil supplements or offering fresh raw fish as part of their diet is the best way to supply appropriate levels of DHA.

While salmon oil is the most popular fish oil supplement, it's certainly not the only option. Herring, sardine, cod liver, Alaskan pollock, calamari, and seal oils all offer generous amounts of essential omega fatty acids.





# RAW DIETS FOR PUPPIES AND SENIORS

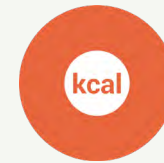


## Calcium and Phosphorous

Puppies go through several growth spurts in their first 12-18 months, so it's important to make sure that you're supplying the nutrients they need to help support their growing bones. Bones rely on calcium and phosphorus, which are sourced from bones and muscle meat, respectively.

Puppies do need a little extra calcium during their developmental stages. Offering raw edible bones or whole eggs as treats or meal toppers is a great way to offer a natural calcium boost.

Just remember that this should be done in moderation. Too much calcium can be harmful. During their first six months, puppies absorb up to 70% of their dietary calcium, which is stored in the body. Overfeeding calcium can cause growth abnormalities during developmental stages.



## Calories

Puppies, even lazy ones, need more calories to support their constant growth. During times of high energy, they will need calories to support endurance, but even during downtime, your puppies' body is still hard at work.

Seniors, on the other hand, are slowing down. You will need to adjust their calorie intake as they slow down. Old doggos also don't need as much fat. Healthy fat is still good, so don't skimp on the omegas, but limiting dietary fat and feeding leaner proteins can help your old doggo stay fit. Proteins like goat, kangaroo, lamb, and rabbit are all lean protein choices.

Most raw diets are considered all life stages, which means you may need to adjust feeding guidelines to accommodate different life stages.

# HOMEMADE RAW DOG FOOD

Raw diets have become increasingly popular over the past decade. There are tons of commercially made raw food diets available, but even with the variety of choices out there, you may need or want more control over what you feed your pet.

The practice of making your own pet food has grown with the rise in allergies, digestive issues, diabetes, food recalls, and the recent FDA statements regarding heart disease. Pet parents are more concerned than ever about what is in their pet's food, so they are looking to homemade foods for a better diet solution.

Homemade raw dog food offers you the peace of mind that you are feeding exactly the ingredients that your dog will thrive on and gives you total control of the sourcing and preparation of them.

When it comes to making your own raw dog food, there are two types of diets to follow:

- **BARF DIET**
- **WHOLE PREY MODEL**

**WHOLE  
PREY  
MODEL**

**BARF  
DIET**





# HOMEMADE RAW DOG FOOD

## BARF DIET

The BARF diet is the foundation of raw dog food diets as we know them.

It's an acronym. BARF originally stood for **B**ones **A**nd **R**aw **F**ood but has been modified to **B**ologically **A**ppropriate **R**aw **F**ood. Its core principle is to feed as nature intended, just like their wild canine ancestors.

The BARF diet isn't a recipe per se. Instead, it's a guideline that can be modified to accommodate your pet's needs, your preferences, and the availability of ingredients. It heavily promotes rotational feeding to provide the best variety and sources of each of their essential nutrients.

The ratio is simple, and the ingredients are generally interchangeable. If you are switching from a kibble, cooked, or heavily processed diet, the BARF diet will be the best way to test out your canine culinary skills and see how your dog adjusts.

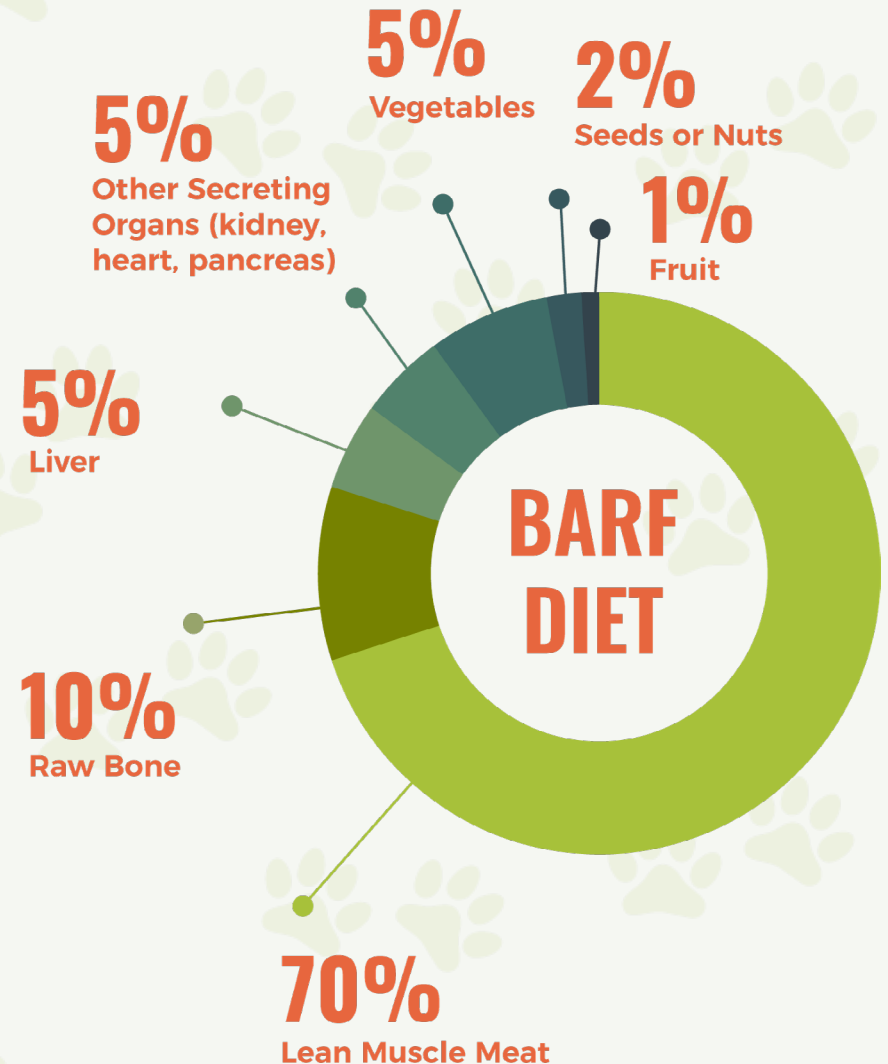
Here are the basics of a BARF meal plan:

- **70% lean muscle meat**
- **10% raw bone**
- **5% liver**
- **5% other secreting organs (kidney, heart, pancreas)**
- **7% vegetables**
- **2% seeds or nuts**
- **1% fruit**

Rotating proteins is the most important part of feeding raw diets, as each animal protein has a different make-up of amino acids, minerals, and fatty acids. When creating a meal plan, we recommend feeding a different protein each week or two.

Raw diets can be relatively forgiving, in that you don't necessarily need to perfectly balance every meal, as long as you are balancing nutrition throughout the week.

It also allows you to feed certain parts of the diet separately from the meals too. Bone, for example, can be fed as a treat instead of grinding it or feeding bone at each sitting. Make sure that you are feeding only edible raw bones if you choose to feed them whole.



# HOMEMADE RAW DOG FOOD



## THE WHOLE PREY MODEL

The second iteration of the raw diet is called the Whole Prey Model. The idea is to mimic the ratios that your pet would eat if it were hunting its own food. It's an off-shoot of the original BARF diet, with some minor adjustments.

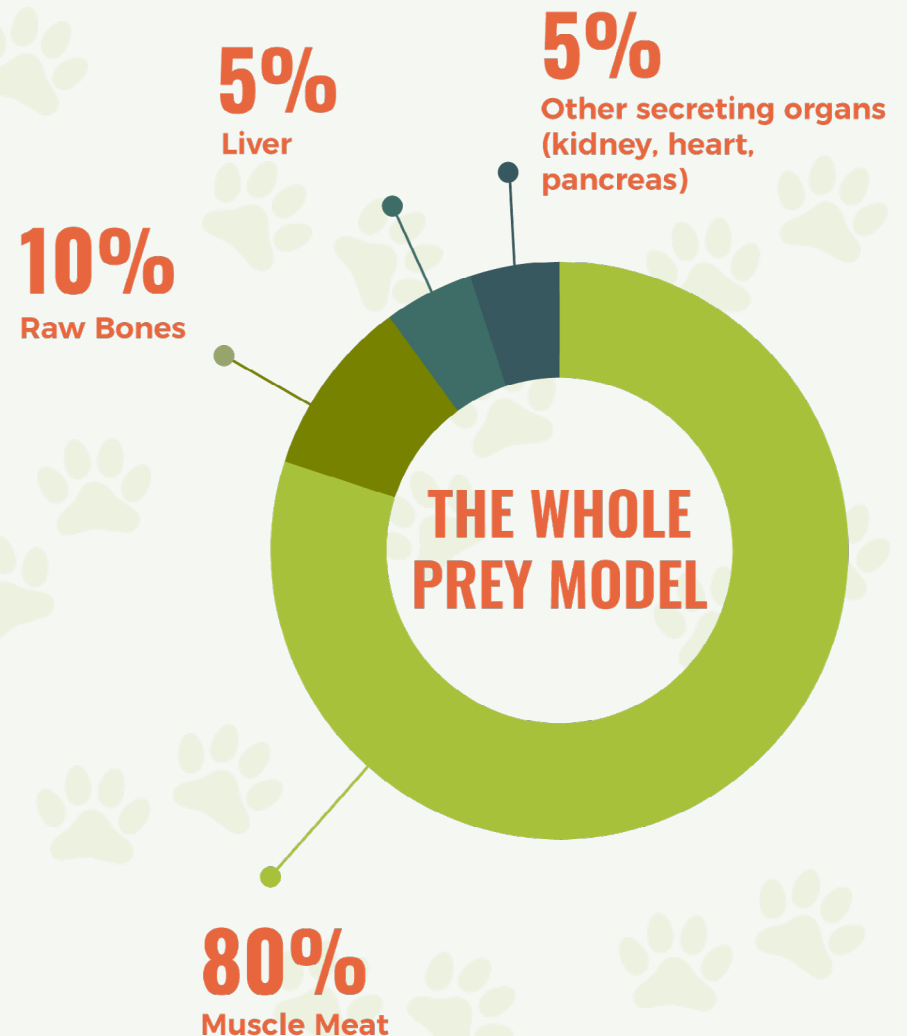
The ratio for this is pretty simple:

- **80% muscle meat**
- **10% raw bone**
- **5% liver**
- **5% other secreting organs (kidney, heart, pancreas)**

You may have noticed that this model doesn't include fruits, veggies, nuts or seeds. While these ingredients are beneficial, they are not strictly required so long as you are rotating animal proteins frequently and supplementing with omega fatty acids and kelp.

This diet format is often preferred for pets with allergies, digestive issues, or illnesses that require carbohydrate or sugar restrictions.

It's also great for pet owners who want total control over their pet's diet. Supplements, produce, and other ingredients can be added or adjusted to best suit your pet's needs, or they can be fed intermittently.





# COMPLETE AND BALANCED

Each pet has different nutritional requirements, and although a basic raw diet will provide everything they need under normal circumstances, it's still a good idea to add certain nutritional aids to prevent deficiencies.

01

## Omega Fatty Acids

Omega fatty acids support a number of vital systems in the body. Both Omega 3 and 6 fatty acids will support skin and coat health, regulate inflammation, and support cognitive function. Animal fat does contain a healthy source of these fatty acids but adding a little extra can help to reduce common skin and digestion problems.

Adding fish and fish oils into your dog's raw diet a couple of times per week can greatly impact their overall health. Sardines packed in water, or wild-caught salmon oil can be added to their food to provide a natural source of these essential fatty acids.

Rotate different types of omega fatty acids regularly. Plant-based fatty acids like flaxseed or sunflower oils can support skin and coat, but don't contain the same types of fatty acids as animal-based oils, so switch between a few types to get a good variety.

02

## Kelp

Kelp is nature's multi-vitamin, which is why it's one of the best ways to supplement a raw diet. It contains small amounts of all essential vitamins and minerals. It also contains some types of omega fatty acids and amino acids.

Kelp will not replace ingredients, nor will it balance an unbalanced or poorly formulated diet, but it will act as a buffer. When fed a nutritionally balanced diet like the BARF or Whole Prey model, kelp is the perfect way to round out the food and ensure that it's meeting your dog's unique needs.



03

## Raw Bones

For dogs that love to chew, you can feed raw bones. It will not only be a treat that will keep them occupied and healthy, but will increase their calcium intake, and care for their dental health.

Avoid bones that are too hard, like weight-bearing bones. These are considered recreational bones, designed for chewing but not consuming.

Instead go for softer, edible bones that don't splinter, like poultry necks, backs, feet, and wingtips. Poultry bones are higher in calcium than red meat bones, so you won't need to feed as much. They can be part of the meal or fed as treats.

Always monitor your dog with any type of raw bone. Even the edible ones can be a choking hazard if your dog tries to swallow larger pieces. Read more in our Guide to [\*\*Feeding Raw Bones for Dogs.\*\*](#)



# HOW TO GET STARTED

Connect with a holistic or integrative vet to help you formulate a meal plan if you are concerned that your dog has unique needs. It's always better to be safe than sorry. Getting some expert advice will ensure that you are providing your pup with everything they need to thrive.

Homemade diets can be a bit of trial and error. Don't be afraid to try new ingredients (dog safe, of course) and keep track of what works and what doesn't. Keeping a journal of your homemade recipes, your dog's bowel movement, and even their taste preferences will help you narrow down your recipes to the ones that you know work well.

Just like switching to any other diet format, a gradual transition is always recommended. Going from a processed diet like kibble to a raw diet can be difficult on your dog's system, so take the appropriate steps to introduce the new food.



[homesalive.ca](http://homesalive.ca)