

SPECIAL REPORT by Daniella Dos Santos, small animal vet and BVA President

VETS SAY 'RAW IS RISKY'

THE TREND FOR FEEDING PETS A RAW FOOD DIET HAS SKYROCKETED IN RECENT TIMES, BUT WHY ARE VETS SO CONCERNED?

PET diets often follow human food fads. Organic, grain-free, vegetarian and vegan are all concepts that have leapt from the two-legged to the four-legged world. Not surprisingly, the trend for raw foods has sniffed out the dinner bowls of our furry friends too.

A raw meat diet for pets involves feeding uncooked meats, sometimes with whole or ground bones and raw fruit and vegetables. It can be made at home or bought at supermarkets.

Those who champion a raw meat diet for dogs or cats see it as more natural and healthier than kibble. But while vets welcome pet owners taking an interest in where their pet's food comes from and how it's made, most are not in favour of a raw food diet.

WHY ARE VETS CONCERNED?



Pet owners who support raw meat diets believe they improve their pets' skin problems, give them a shinier coat, manage allergies, and help digestion. However, there is no scientific proof that holds up any of these health claims.

On the other hand, there is plenty of research carried out by scientists that shows that feeding a raw meat diet – whether homemade or shop-bought – carries health risks for pets as well as their humans.

Because the meat is uncooked, there are greater chances of contamination with dangerous bacteria and other nasty bugs if not stored properly. Pets who eat this infected meat can become ill themselves or shed the bugs into the environment, which could make humans sick too.

PET TROUBLES



Tiny bacteria like this (seen here under a microscope) can make you feel really ill

Bacteria such as *E coli*, *Listeria* and *Salmonella* can cause severe stomach infection in pets, with symptoms such as vomiting and diarrhoea. In dogs, eating bones can also lead to stomach blockages, which can require surgery to fix.

There is also a risk that your pet is not getting all the nutrients it needs in the quantities it needs them, especially when the raw meat diet is prepared at home. Dogs, for example, need 37 essential nutrients, including proteins, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals, for a healthy, balanced diet. In a homemade raw-meat meal, it's much easier to get the balance wrong than right. A deficiency in their nutrition can lead to serious health problems.

Raw diets for pets are becoming increasingly popular, but is it the best way to feed your pet?



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BUG ALERT FOR OWNERS

If not handled carefully, raw meat can contaminate kitchen surfaces, fridges and utensils in the house. Pets often carry bugs from contaminated raw meat without showing any signs of infection and shed these in their poo. One recent study found that dogs fed such a raw-meat meal shed the bacteria in their poo for up to 11 days, even though they didn't show any physical symptoms of illness. This can pose a real risk to public health.

Leftovers from a raw meal will also remain in the dog's mouth for many hours, so handling dogs, especially after feeding – for example, giving a cuddle or allowing them to lick the face or the mouth – can risk the spread of infection.



Hmm, not so sure...

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ADVICE FOR PET OWNERS

All these risks to our pets' and our own health, without any scientifically proven benefits, are the reason why we recommend against feeding a raw meat diet to our furry friends. After all, it's better to be safe than sorry!

Pet owners who choose to feed raw food diets must be aware of all the possible health risks associated with raw meat and take proper care while preparing and feeding it. The British Veterinary Association (BVA) advises pet owners to check with a veterinary surgeon trained as a nutritionist before feeding it to their animals – both for their own as well as their pet's health.

WHAT IS ZOOONOSIS?

'Zoo' is the Greek word for 'animal', and 'sis' means 'condition'. So zoonosis is any disease or infection that is passed from animals to humans. *Salmonella*, *Listeria* and *E coli* can all cause zoonotic diseases that can spread through feeding raw meat diets to pets.

Cats usually eat cooked meat or kibble



Getty

WHAT IS KIBBLE?

Kibble is ground up meat, grains and vegetables shaped into pellets. It is typically used as animal feed.



A typical bowl of kibble

GLOSSARY

organic — Food produced without the use of chemical fertilisers, pesticides or other artificial chemicals

deficiency — A lack or shortage

contaminate — To make something dirty, polluted or poisonous through contact with an infection, chemical or waste product

nutritionist — A person who is an expert on what you (or in this case your pet) should eat to remain healthy

Questions on – Special Report: ‘Vets say “Raw is risky”’



Part A: Find and explain the facts

- A1. What would a raw meat diet involve feeding your pet?
- A2. Why do some pet owners support raw meat diets for their pets?
- A3. How many essential nutrients do dogs need?
- A4. What are *E coli*, *Listeria* and *Salmonella*?
- A5. Define zoonosis.

Part B: Deduce and infer information

- B1. How can a raw meat diet make pets ill?
- B2. Why does the British Veterinary Association advise pet owners to check with a veterinary surgeon trained as a nutritionist before feeding raw meat to their pets?
- B3. How can feeding your pet a raw food diet pose a risk to human health?
- B4. What do you understand the phrase “food fads” to mean?
- B5. Suggest why pet diets often follow human food fads.

Part C: Analyse the writing and presentation

C1. Look at the following sentence: “...the trend for raw foods has sniffed out the dinner bowls of our furry friends too.” Analyse the use of the following phrases:

“sniffed out”	
“furry friends”	

C2. Why are vets referred to in the headline?

Part D: Writing task

Produce a brief fact sheet, to be displayed at your local veterinary surgery, about the dangers of feeding pets a raw meat diet. Try to persuade pet owners not to adopt such a diet for their pets. Include a heading, five clear bullet points and a concluding line.

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Teacher Answers

AIM OF THE NEWS COMPREHENSIONS: News reports are unique non-fiction texts. Being real, they naturally engage students, and with the range of topics that are covered, help to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of the wider world outside the classroom. The reports are ideal for short, focused comprehension or discussion activities. Along with the opportunity to find fascinating facts and appreciate the opinions of those involved, there is plenty to be inferred and deduced to understand in more depth what is being reported. Like authors, journalists play with language, so news 'stories' are rich nuggets of text to investigate and provide the opportunity for literacy programmes.

TEACHER ANSWER GUIDE: The teacher answers are intended to provide a guide to the reading skill each question is practising. Suggestions are given for a starting point for responses that students would be expected to give at the start of KS3. Further suggestions then give fuller, more developed responses that students will work towards by the end of KS3, in preparation for the non-fiction elements of GCSE English language.

PART A – FIND AND EXPLAIN THE FACTS

A1. What would a raw meat diet involve feeding your pet?

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

Possible answer

Starting point

- A raw meat diet for pets involves feeding uncooked meats, sometimes with whole or ground bones, and raw fruit and vegetables.

Development

- It can be made at home or bought at supermarkets.

A2. Why do some pet owners support raw meat diets for their pets?

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

Possible answer

Starting point

- Those who champion a raw meat diet for dogs or cats see it as more natural and healthier than kibble.

Development

- They believe that a raw meat diet improves their pets' skin problems, gives them a shinier coat, manages allergies and helps digestion.

A3. How many essential nutrients do dogs need?

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

Possible answer

Starting point

- Dogs need 37 essential nutrients.

Development

- These include proteins, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals for a healthy, balanced diet.

A4. What are *E coli*, *Listeria* and *Salmonella*?

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

Possible answer

Starting point

- *E coli*, *Listeria* and *Salmonella* are bacteria.

Development

- They can cause severe infection in pets and humans, with symptoms such as vomiting and diarrhoea.

A5. Define zoonosis.

READING SKILL — Find and explain information

Possible answer

Starting point

- Zoonosis is any disease or infection that is passed from animals to humans.

Development

- *E coli*, *Listeria* and *Salmonella* can all cause zoonotic diseases that can spread through feeding raw meat diets to pets.

PART B – DEDUCE AND INFER INFORMATION**B1. How can a raw meat diet make pets ill?**

READING SKILL — Infer information and justify with evidence from the text

Possible answer**Starting point**

- Raw meat can make pets ill because it is more likely to be contaminated with dangerous bacteria that would usually be killed during the cooking process. Pets who eat infected meat can get severe stomach infections.

Development

- Furthermore, raw meat diets often include whole or ground bones. In dogs, eating bones can lead to stomach blockages, which can require surgery to fix.

B2. Why does the British Veterinary Association advise pet owners to check with a veterinary surgeon trained as a nutritionist before feeding raw meat to their pets?

READING SKILL — Infer information and justify with evidence from the text

Possible answer**Starting point**

- The British Veterinary Association advises pet owners to check with a veterinary nutritionist before feeding raw meat to their pets to ensure that their pets are getting the necessary nutrients in the appropriate quantities.

Development

- It is difficult to get the nutrients right in a homemade raw meat meal and a deficiency in their nutrition can lead to serious health problems for pets.

B3. How can feeding your pet a raw food diet pose a risk to human health?

READING SKILL — Infer information and justify with evidence from the text

Possible answer**Starting point**

- Feeding your pet raw meat can pose a risk to human health because pets who eat infected meat can shed the bugs into the environment. These bugs could then make humans ill, too.

Development

- For example, one recent study found that dogs fed a raw meat meal shed bacteria in their poo for up to 11 days, without showing any signs of illness themselves. Leftovers from a raw meal will also remain in a dog's mouth for many hours, so they could easily spread infection to humans when being cuddled or through licking their owners.
- There is also risk of infection when the raw meat is being prepared for pet consumption. Unless it is handled very carefully, it can contaminate kitchen surfaces and pet feeding areas.

B4. What do you understand the phrase “food fads” to mean?

READING SKILL — Understand vocabulary in context

Possible answer**Starting point**

- Food fads are diets that suddenly become popular for a short period of time. They come into existence when a certain way of eating gains attention through means such as celebrity endorsement or the internet.

Development

- Recent concepts include only eating organic food and going grain-free. Often, there is no scientific evidence to support the health benefits of food fads.

B5. Suggest why pet diets often follow human food fads.

READING SKILL — Infer information and justify with evidence from the text

Possible answer**Starting point**

- Pet diets often follow human food fads because people consider their pets to be part of their family. Therefore, they are concerned for their well-being and want the best for them.

Development

- If someone has been convinced of the benefits of a particular diet for their own health then it stands to reason that they may also want to try it for their pet. However, vets do not welcome the transference of all human food fads and most are not in favour of a raw food diet.

PART C – ANALYSE THE WRITING AND PRESENTATION

C1. Look at the following sentence: “...the trend for raw foods has sniffed out the dinner bowls of our furry friends too.”

Analyse the use of the following phrases:

READING SKILL — Recognise effect of language choices

Possible answer

Starting point — simple comments on the writer’s choices

Development — some detailed explanation of how language is used. Appropriate terminology employed.

<p>“sniffed out”</p>	<p>This use of personification is appropriate because it is in keeping with the pet theme of the report. Our pets have a much stronger sense of smell than us, so the comment about the trend for raw foods having “sniffed out” our pets’ food bowls is a reference to that. The interesting image is likely to appeal to First News readers.</p>
<p>“furry friends”</p>	<p>This phrase is alliterative and highlights the strong bond between humans and their pets. It makes pets sound cute and loveable. This helps readers to understand the concern over pet food, which is outlined in detail in this report.</p>

C2. Why are vets referred to in the headline?

READING SKILL — Explain methods used by the writer with appropriate use of terminology

Possible answer

Starting point

- Vets are referred to in the headline in order to give authority to the report.

Development

- Vets are experts in pet health so having a quotation attributed to vets in the headline makes readers pay attention. It makes the report seem trustworthy and worth reading for advice.

PART D – WRITING TASK

Produce a brief fact sheet, to be displayed at your local veterinary surgery, about the dangers of feeding pets a raw meat diet. Try to persuade pet owners not to adopt such a diet for their pets. Include a heading, five clear bullet points and a concluding line.

READING SKILL — Develop personal ideas from reading news stories

Possible answer

No more raw! Important information from your vet.

- You may have read recent reports about the benefits of a raw meat diet for your pet and how it can improve their skin, give them a shiny coat and help their digestion. However, there is absolutely no scientific evidence to support these claims.
- Science suggests that a raw meat diet is actually very risky for your pet. Uncooked meat is more likely to be contaminated with harmful bacteria, and if your pet eats infected meat then they could become very ill.
- A raw meat diet also puts your pet at risk of not getting enough nutrients. It is very difficult to get the balance right in a homemade raw meat meal, and if you get it wrong, then you’ll have a poorly pet on your hands.
- Serving raw meat meals to your pet can also lead to very unhealthy humans! Raw meat can contaminate your kitchen and pet feeding area. Also, your pet can easily shed bugs into your home environment, as bacteria can be found in their poo and saliva for a long period of time after they’ve eaten infected meat.
- You may not even know that your pet is carrying dangerous bacteria because they may not show symptoms. It is easy for the bugs to transfer to you and your family when you handle your pet and you won’t suspect a thing until it is too late.

So don’t fall foul of a food fad! Speak to your vet if you’d like more information about a healthy, balanced diet for your pet.