

## TECHNICAL INFORMATION

### FEEDING BONES TO DOGS

Dogs have evolved to eat bones but many conventional health professionals will discourage their use. This is a perfectly reasonable recommendation if their clinical experience includes removal of bone splinters from dog's digestive tracts, or seen other problems with the gut, when things have gone wrong.

Feeding raw bones is certainly a contentious issue but their safe use revolves around sensible precautions. The health benefits of feeding them are many, and the risks involved can be negligible.

#### **The benefits of feeding raw bones are;**

- They provide calcium in the proper form for bone development and maintenance. This is important for all dogs but especially for puppies and throughout the growing period. Cooked bone is not as good in this respect, neither is calcium in other forms which is often added to diets or provided in supplements. Cooked bones are more likely to splinter into sharp pieces and may also become impacted in the digestive tract.
- They help the teeth and gums stay healthy. When the dog chews on bones, the chewing action scrapes away plaque, controls tartar build-up, and helps stimulate gums. This diminishes bad breath, keeps teeth whiter, and reduces the risk of potentially serious dental problems.
- They help to keep the anal glands working properly. When the correct amount is fed, the calcium will slightly stiffen the stool, which naturally expresses the gland. In the majority of cases, if the dog is being fed an ordinary commercial diet, the stools are too soft to achieve this properly which may lead to blockages and inflammation of the gland.
- Raw bones will introduce natural beneficial bacteria into the gut to keep the general digestive flora healthy to aid proper digestion of food. One of the reasons dogs forage for rotting carcasses and animal droppings is that they are probably trying to achieve this, because most commercial dog food is necessarily almost sterile. Extras, such as bones, as well as table scraps, should form part of the diet of dogs. If the manufacturer of the food you are using does not recommend this – change to Natural Feeding products, which will allow you to introduce these things.

- Dogs enjoy bones enormously and they satisfy the innate urge to chew. They also help to relieve teething pain in puppies. If you encourage your dog to chew on bones from puppy hood, he will probably be less likely to chew things around the house which he is not supposed to.

### **The risks of feeding bones are;**

- They may splinter, which can damage the gut, also undigested bone can block the digestive system.
- They may introduce unwanted, as well as beneficial bacteria into the dog's digestive system, which could cause digestive upsets, but the risks should be extremely small, especially if the dog is on a Natural Feeding regime. The dog's digestive system can normally cope with this type of thing easily; in the wild the dog will often bury meat and eat it long after it has been killed. Bearing in mind that modern dogs not being fed according to Natural Feeding principles will have a slightly more 'precious' digestive system, it is sensible to make sure the bones are from a good source and fresh or freshly frozen and introduce them slowly if the dog has not had bones before.

In general the risks of problems occurring with digestive upsets are associated with the general fitness of the digestive system – if it is in good shape there is usually no problem and it is rare to find a problem if the dog is healthy and being provided with a diet based on Natural Feeding principles. There are increased risks in dogs with an impaired immune system, such as those on a sub-optimal diet, or those with an illness of some kind. Bones for puppies should always be ground up finely and introduced slowly, so that their digestion 'learns' how to cope with them.

### **The rules of feeding bones;**

- Coked bones should not be given under any circumstances – many bones from pet shops are cooked.
- Pork bones should be avoided as they don't seem to be digested optimally.
- Bones should not be overfed or the dog may become constipated – keep an eye on the stools.
- Small amounts of ground bone should be introduced initially and the stools monitored for abnormality.
- The diet should be optimal – the use of Natural Feeding principles is the best way to achieve this
- The dog should not be allowed to bolt the bone. Providing large knuckle bones will prevent this.

- The bones should be fresh or fresh/frozen

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