

Feeding B.A.R.F. (Bones And Raw Food)

Everyone has heard of the old saying 'you are what you eat' and this is so very true for our dogs. Myself and my husband Steve were lucky enough to adopt our dog Newton from Guide Dogs, he did not make it as a guide so we were asked if we would like to adopt him, of course we jumped at the chance and he quickly became the love of our lives and we immediately wanted to do the very best for him in every way possible. When Newton arrived he came with a bag of 'kibble' diet which all guide dogs are fed. The particular brand Newton was on at that time was Eukanuba (I wanted him off this due to it being part of Iams and with their record of horrific animal testing I was not happy with it). The one thing I noticed about this food was that it had no smell as such, to be honest it just smelt like dust. I noticed Newton had a lot of flaky white skin on his fur and started to wonder could this be his food? I did some research on different dry foods and decided to switch him to James Wellbeloved. I gradually switched him over to this and his fur started to look glossy and shiny which was great.

Although I was happy with the new food I couldn't help but wonder is this what our dogs should really be eating? Newton would quite happily devour a dead rabbit or various other dead animals that he'd come across without any ill effect and this got me wondering. Our dogs are all descendents of wolves after all and I can't see a wolf being over the moon about tucking into a bowl of dehydrated lamb and rice! What else could I feed Newton...?

A friend of mine has always fed her dogs with raw meat and raw bones, I picked her brains for quite some time and saw how amazing her dog's were on this diet, glossy coats and white shiny teeth. I decided to do some research. I went online and got myself on some forums where I learnt all about B A R F - 'Biologically Appropriate Raw Food'. This is exactly as it says on the tin, or in this case the carcass! I read a fantastic book by Dr Ian Billingshurst called 'The BARF diet' (which soon became my bible!), I was blown away with all the info and after the last bag of James Wellbeloved had caused Newton an upset stomach and anal gland problems I decided to go for it!

Now I do not profess to be an expert on this subject at all and there are people out there who have been feeding BARF for many more years than me but here's my experience and how I made the switch, I hope it helps.

Now there are two ways to go about changing your dog to a raw diet, these are the rapid switch and the slow switch. Which one you decide to do is really going to depend on your dog and how well their tummies cope with changing foods, no one knows your dog better than you so this is your call.

The rapid switch is literally changing from whatever you currently feed to raw meat and bones, overnight. This switch is usually the preferred option for any young, healthy dog that has no gastro intestinal issues. Newton fell under that category so I bought some raw chicken wings and with the vet's number on speed dial and phone pressed to my ear I gave one to him.... I was honestly terrified. First of all he looked at it and looked at me as

if to say 'er what is this?' but once he put it in his mouth a few times and crunched he was hooked! Newton had no ill effects or upset tummy from the switch so in the bin went the kibble and that was it I never looked back.

The slow switch is preferred if you have an older dog who has eaten nothing but kibble for years or a dog which you know has a rather sensitive tummy. Like any food change just gradually add the raw food into their current diet little by little and over time start to add more raw until the complete switch is made. Please be aware that often the tummy cannot cope with both the raw and kibble food (as they digest at different rates) so you may find that you'll just need to switch to raw. Stick to bland food such as raw chicken and turkey at first too. If you feel you want to feed kibble also then feed this seperately from the raw and be aware that by feeding this you may be 'overloading' your dog with protein which is harmful in the long term. Again, do your research.

Ok so how much to feed? If like me you had been used to scooping up a tin and a half of kibble and knowing that was how much to feed then this BARF feeding became a battle field....especially difficult for someone like me who has dyscalculia which is number dyslexia!! I was met with percentages and weights.... all my worst nightmare!! Luckily I have a husband who is a maths whizz (bit of luck eh??) so he sat down and did the workings out. I will try my best to explain it to you.... Basically you want to be feeding 2-3% of your dog's body weight daily. Newton is 70lbs so he has roughly 2lbs of meat/raw bone a day. Puppies should be fed 10% of their body weight split into a few meals during the day. It is recommended that you fast your dog for a couple of days before switching to rid the body of all toxins ready for the new food but if your dog is anything like Newton, they'll leave home in disgust if their not fed for two days!!

Your dog's BARF diet should consist mainly of bones, all raw of course, chicken wings are probably the best to start off with. Never ever cook these as it is when the are cooked that bones become dangerous as they can splinter and perforate your dog's stomach. Raw bones are pliable and easily digested by dogs. Speak to your butcher and see if he is willing to let you have some beef bones or chicken carcasses, if they are anything like my butcher they are happy to be able to empty their fridge and give you as many as you like! Bones are fantastic for your dogs health, full of protein, anti oxidants and the marrow is full of iron and they will also keep your dog's teeth super clean and sparkly white as this picture shows.....



You also need to feed raw meat such as chicken, lean beef, lean lamb, rabbit, turkey and offal needs to be part of the diet too. You do not need to feed a massive amount of offal, Newton probably has a couple of pound of tripe a week and although things like liver, kidneys and tripe are gross to handle and smell, the health benefits for your dog far out way the 'ick' factor. I find gloves and a nose peg works for me!! I also feed Newton tinned sardines/Mackerel to ensure he gets all his omega oils, they are his absolute favourite! Don't panic if a certain meat does not 'agree' with your dog, simply just do not feed it.

For the first couple of weeks my scales were my best friend as I weighed chicken wings and meat so that I knew my boy was getting enough food. That did not last long and I can honestly say I go by how much to feed Newton just by looking at him, if he's looking too lean I feed more, a bit bigger he gets less. I really do feel that is the best way to judge if you are feeding the right amount.

For the week or so after the switch I noticed that Newton lost weight and looked pretty scruffy and to be honest he smelled quite bad too!! Now I was told to expect this as it is simply the body getting rid of all the toxins that had built up from the processed food. After about a month his appearance and smell improved dramatically and he was looking amazing. He had such good muscle tone and his stamina when out running had improved so much. He always had lots of energy but this was different, I could tell he was as fit as a butchers dog as my dear old Nan used to say! Any smelly, itchy ear problems went away, his anal glands improved (although I am told by the vet that he has a lopsided left gland that never empties properly so he'll always have a issue there!) and the thing I was most pleasantly surprised about were his stools. These were no longer massive, soft and foul smelling. They were quite small, hard and had no foul smell. Sometimes I would go to pick up in the garden and some has already disintegrated into the ground, having turned white (due to the bone). He went from about five stinky horrible stools a day when he ate kibble, to two maybe three non smelling, hard stools on BARF. It was this that really made me realise just how great this diet was as if as much as he was being fed was coming out of him how could he possibly be keeping any nutrients inside him? Now I know his body is soaking up every bit of goodness. He's five in March but everyone I come across whilst out with him thinks he's a puppy and are amazed when I say he's not. They ask how on earth I keep a Labrador so lean and how are his teeth so white.... I'm

sure they wish they'd never asked as you would have noticed once I get going on BARF I don't stop!! I will also say that switching to this diet has saved me a fortune!

Ok so I bet by now you have a few questions like 'I thought dog's couldn't eat bones' or 'what about bacteria in raw meat'? Firstly as mentioned dog's should NEVER eat cooked bones, these are very dangerous and need to be avoided at all costs. Raw bones can easily be digested by your dog, their stomach's have an amazing digestive system which can break down bone as if it were baby food! If you have a dog that bolts it's food then do exercise caution when feeding bones as like any food they can choke, perhaps for the first few weeks try smashing up the chicken wings just so you know that if they do swallow them that the bone has been broken down. I have been told that the bones most likely to cause your dog to choke are turkey necks but if you are cautious then your dog will be fine. Statistics show that more dog's choke eating kibble than raw bones so I would not worry too much. Most of the meat you can buy for dog's (I use a company called Prize Choice) has bone ground into it so if you are really worried about feeding bones then perhaps just stick to that meat so you know your dog is still getting the raw bone in their diet. Don't feel pressurised into feeding whole, raw bones. You know your dog best and if you feel they will gulp them then just make sure you buy meat with added bone so that they are still getting all the amazing goodness from the bones. There are some people that advise against feeding raw pork due to trichonosis but I am sure that UK pork is free of this, to be honest I have never fed Newton raw pork but again if your wish to just research.

As for bacteria in the raw meat affecting your dog, this is not a problem in dogs as their stomach acid is far stronger than ours and their stomach's are built for eating raw foods. Of course always refrigerate the meat and make sure it's consumed within two to three days of defrosting and any food left over, dispose of. I am sure that you have seen your dog eat some horrific things yet they are absolutely fine and not an upset stomach in sight!

Another part of Newton's diet is fruit and vegetables and the odd supplement. He often enjoys apple, broccoli, carrots, spinach, celery and also raw eggs. He doesn't have fruit and veg every day, probably only about once or twice a week and sometimes once or twice a month. All of these have the same health benefits for dog's as they do for humans. I whizz all of my fruit and veg up in a food processor, usually the peelings etc from when I am chopping up for my dinner. So it's really no extra work at all. The reason I whizz up all Newton's vegetables and fruit is to mimic how it would be if he ate the contents of the stomach of an animal killed in the wild. There is conflicting evidence to say that wolves do not eat the stomach contents of the carrion but I am led to believe that if they are lacking in a certain nutrient they may well eat the stomach contents which would be grass etc. I have found if I feed a whole carrot, most of it 'comes out' the way it went in which really means he has not retained the goodness. Raw eggs are full of vitamins and essential fatty acids and Newton loves them!! Newton also has the occasional garlic tablet (despite what some say, garlic is safe for dog's to eat just

follow guidelines on how much to feed going by your dog's weight etc), cod liver oil and I give him a supplement called Keeper's Mix which I get from a UK based company called Dorwest Herbs that sell veterinary approved natural herbal remedies for dogs and cats. Keeper's Mix is full to the brim of all natural herbs such as kelp, alfalfa, celery seeds and seaweed. All of which are essential in a dog's diet. Keeper's Mix will help with skin problems as it is a skin conditioner. Dorwest have a helpline which is great and they are advocates of raw feeding so can help you if you need advice, especially if your dog has a specific health problem.



You may find that your vet will not know and indeed may not approve of you feeding your dog the BARF diet, there is simply one reason for this - Vet's know little or nothing about it! Sadly while students are studying and training to become vet's all they learn about are the big brand processed foods, mainly because those companies such as Hills, Royal Canin etc sponsor the Royal Veterinary College and also offer the veterinary surgeries great discounts or commission for promoting and selling their foods. Some vets are almost brainwashed into believing that highly expensive prescription diets are the way to go for your poorly dog when actually a lot of the time it can be the processed diets that are causing the issue! I am lucky with my vet as she has never been negative about the raw diet, she always says that she wants to use Newton as the 'poster boy' to prove that it truly is a myth that 'all Labs get fat', so I think she can see just how good the diet is even if she may be does not know much about it. If you have trouble with your vet and they try to tell you that every little problem your dog has is down to the BARF diet, I suggest you find yourself a new vet, preferably a holistic vet or just one that knows about the BARF diet!

I do believe that there are some great processed dry and wet foods on the market these days, just make sure you read the ingredients. The first ingredient should be meat and the percentage should be relatively high. Good processed foods will also contain essential oils and fatty acids. If the first ingredient listed is cereals then run for your life! Dog's do not need cereal at all in their diet. The next one is meat/animal/vegetable derivatives... steer well clear!! Derivatives can mean absolutely any part of that animal so basically you could just be feeding you dog chicken feet, beaks and skin. Any additives or colouring's are a massive no as they have no part in your dog's diet. Brands such as Bakers and Pedigree are full of all of the above and as a result will cause many problems with your dog such as itchy skin and ears, bad body odour, smelly runny stools, behavioural problems...I could go on and on. Avoid these cheap supermarket foods at all

costs. They are cheap for a reason and it's your dog's health that will suffer in the long run. Your dog may enjoy eating these foods, of course they will, just like a child would enjoy eating McDonalds and KFC every day but is it really the best option for their health?



I hope that you have found this insight into the BARF diet interesting and most of all I hope that it has got you thinking about what goes into your dog's body and how you can ensure that your best friend is truly getting the diet that they need. If BARF is something you are thinking about then I would recommend that you do your research, find out as much as you can before making the switch and if your dog has specific health problems then you really must research and get advice on switching diets, BARF forums are a fantastic source of advice for all aspects of raw feeding. As I said I am no expert on the subject, I just love Newton more than anything and to the best of my ability want to ensure he has a healthy, happy and long life. I hope my experience has inspired you to think about raw feeding and if it has....Welcome to the wonderful world of BARF!

Karen Read
For the Love of Dog

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www.dorwest.com
www.naturalinstinct.com
www.ukbarfclub.co.uk
www.barfworld.com
www.njboxers.com/faqs.htm
www.landywoods.co.uk/barf_diets.html