

Bones v. Bone Meal

One of the biggest considerations when preparing a homemade diet for your pet is how best to provide the proper ratio of calcium to phosphorous. Calcium deficiency is all too common, since many people are not aware of the importance of this vital mineral in their pets' diets. It is not simply a matter of feeding enough calcium; it is also important to balance the amount of calcium fed with the amount of phosphorous fed. There are certain "duos" of minerals that work in tandem in the body, performing regulatory functions that keep us alive and healthy. (Another example is sodium and potassium.) Equally important to the balance is the "bioavailability" factor, or how well your pet is able to absorb and utilize the different nutrients in his/her food.

So how can we avoid problems in this area when we are preparing a homemade diet for our pets? Most recipes for homemade pet foods call for the addition of bone meal. Bone meal is a dried, processed powder made from ground up bones. In my opinion, bone meal is not the best way to provide your pet with minerals, such as calcium. The reason is this: it is a cooked, processed product. In order to produce this product, the bones are heated to extremely high temperatures, thereby killing off many of the useful nutrients they contain when raw. High heat processing renders foods far less digestible, which means less bioavailability for your pet. There are also cautions about the questionable source and purity of some "bone meal" products, suggesting that they may contain high levels of lead, an undesirable mineral.

My recommendation for providing your pet with the very best, most natural and bioavailable source of calcium and other minerals, is to feed your pet real, raw bones. This is a "radical" statement to some, but is actually quite logical when we think about it in depth. Our pet dogs, cats, and ferrets are carnivores, or meat eaters. Wild carnivores consume prey animals, including not just the prime cuts of meat, but also the intestines, organs, skin, and bones. And how do they eat their prey? Raw, of course! Raw bones are actually quite soft, flexible, and easily digested by the strong stomach acid of the carnivore. I think of bones as Nature's powerhouse store of vitamins and minerals in the perfect ratio. Crunching up bones also provides excellent jaw exercise and tooth cleaning action for your pet. When we feed our pets the meat and bones of animals such as lamb, veal, and chicken, there is far less chance of lead accumulation in the bones of these young animals. Feeding bones is a natural part of a natural diet, which includes all items raw, for prime bioavailability.

Many pet owners are convinced that feeding a raw diet is best, yet they are still concerned about feeding bones to their pets. One way to solve this problem is to grind up the bones before feeding them. Your pet will lose the "fun" of chewing, and the benefits of jaw exercise and tooth cleaning. But s/he will still be able to benefit from the superior nutrition provided by raw bones. Meat grinders can be found at reasonable prices, and will allow you to grind the meat and bones together at the same time. Alternatively, you can search for all-natural pet foods that contain ground bones rather than bone meal or synthetic minerals. And maybe one day you will feel brave enough to actually Give Your Dog A Bone!

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