



Brogholme

Bernese Mountain Dogs



Feeding

"Why not feed a complete dog-food? That's what you feed dogs, isn't it?"

In the last number of years there has been a gradual shift towards feeding dogs (and other animals) a more natural diet. Why is this? Well, people are seeing more and more diseases in their dogs that were practically unheard of 30 years ago. This has led many to question everything they do with regards to their dogs; what they put in them (food, vaccines, wormers, etc), what they put on them (flea/tick preventative, shampoos, etc) and what other things they are around (lawn chemicals, scent sprays, etc). Many have found their dogs' health improves when they make changes towards a more natural way of doing things.

Most, if not all, commercial dog-foods (kibble) contain inappropriate ingredients. This includes all grains, which carnivores cannot properly digest. If you look at the label of any brand of kibble, it is likely that the first (primary) ingredient is a grain. It may be wheat or corn, it may even be rice but whatever grain it is passes through your dog adding nothing nutritionally to his body. In fact it can be quite harmful, upsetting the natural balance of the digestive system and so on. Many experts are now beginning to realize that grains are not a natural food for dogs. Grains are full of carbohydrates and dogs do not need vast quantities of carbohydrates. Carbohydrates are easily converted into sugars which feed cancer. Cancer is a worry in many breeds, including Bernese Mountain Dogs, but if the carbohydrates are removed then cancer has less to feed on. Besides, grains are one of the major causes of allergies in dogs, and can also cause flatulence which many owners would rather do without!

Dogs are carnivores and as such need to eat meat. This is called a Species Appropriate Raw Food diet (SARF); we look at what animal we are feeding, asking "What would they eat in the wild?" and do our best to mimic that diet. The dog's closest wild relative is the wolf and much of our knowledge of dog nutrition comes from studying their habits.

Here at Brogholme, we feed our dogs according to the "prey model". We think what animals would likely be "prey" if in the wild. The answer is most herbivores and some omnivores would be prey for carnivorous canines. This means our dogs diet consists of raw beef, pork, lamb, turkey, duck, chicken, fish and green tripe. Rabbit, venison

and other game could also be included in the diet. Our dogs also have whole raw eggs on occasion. Where the prey is small enough (e.g. rabbit, chicken, duck), they will have it whole. On the other days, we try to reconstruct a typical meal so they will have some RMBs (Raw Meaty Bones), some muscle meat and some offal (usually liver) from the same animal source.

Have you noticed a trend lately with regards to dog food labels saying "No additives, No preservatives" or calling itself a "holistic" food? This is because up until recently many dog foods contained "EU permitted additives", namely Ethoxyquin, BHA and BHT which are suspected of being cancer-causing. The cancer then feeds itself from the sugars the dog's body makes from the other ingredients. Some dog foods still contain these additives. Do people who put ingredients like this in to dog-food really have your dog's interest at heart?

Why feed raw?

So what are the pros of feeding a raw diet? There are many but I will list some to help you see the many benefits of feeding your dog the foods he was built to eat. (For more pros and FAQ please see Jane Anderson's article)

Less poop

The dog's body is able to utilize more of the food that is consumed, therefore less comes back out. What does come out is firm (easier to pick up) and decomposes much quicker than kibble-fed dogs' poo. The dog's anal glands are cleaned out naturally as they excrete a much firmer stool.

Less smell from poop and less flatulence

Because the dog's digestive system is built to eat raw meat, there is less smell. We are no longer feeding the dog "junk food" and therefore the dog's digestive tract is in balance and not upset. After the initial changeover period, episodes of diarrhea should be non-existent. We go to dog shows and can always tell the kibble poo from the raw-fed dogs' poo. You can smell kibble poo a mile away!

Clean teeth

Teeth are naturally cleaned when the dog rips the meat and crunches on the raw bones. In my experience, dogs find chewing on a meaty bone much more enjoyable than having a toothbrush shoved in their mouth! And bones are much cheaper than having to bring your pooch to the doggy dentist too.

Less "doggy" odour

Raw-fed dogs generally don't smell "doggy" like many kibble-fed dogs. They don't have "doggy breath", partly because of their clean teeth and gums. Their coat condition improves oftentimes too.

Is it very expensive to feed meat to your dogs?

No, its not. If you feed a good quality raw diet to your dog, it will work out roughly the same as feeding them "high-quality dog-food". We find we spend about €1- €1.50 per lb overall. Some items like chicken and fish are cheaper. Other items like beef and lamb cost more but it all evens out. Buy as large a freezer as you can afford and then you can save by buying in bulk. Perhaps a neighbour or a friend would like to feed their dog a raw diet too. That way you can share the cost a little.

Many people who feed a good quality raw diet find they bring their dogs to the vet less often. This is another advantage to feeding a raw diet. By feeding the dog what he is meant to eat, we provide the best platform for health that we can. Thus, even *if* the dog becomes unwell, he has a good chance of overcoming it as his body has the reserves it needs to fight the problem.

Are all raw diets the same?

No, they are not. Some people use far too much chicken in their dogs' diet because it is cheap and easily available. Others add in grains, dairy and inappropriate vegetables to the diet. This makes the diet inferior. A high quality raw diet consists of a good variety of meats that are grass-fed, free range or organic wherever possible. All meat should be human grade, save green tripe.

Is it complicated to feed a raw diet?

In short, no its not. Initially it will take some work on your part to find local sources of suitable meat. It will mean ringing around meat-/fish-processing plants. It may mean visiting your butcher and explaining what you are looking for. If he can't help you himself, he'll likely know of people who can. Befriend local farmers - they may be able to provide you with certain useful items.

After you have sources for various different types of meat set up, it's very easy. Buy as large a freezer as you can afford and load it full of all the different meats you can lay your hands on. Then start feeding it! If you feel you need some help and support there are several yahoo groups that specifically deal with the issue of feeding a raw diet to pets (see below). Not every meal needs to contain 100% of the required nutrients - it's all about balance over time.

Treat the raw meat you feed your dogs as you would any raw meat. Wash your hands and keep surfaces clean - just as you would when handling your own food.

Do I need to add supplements to my dog's raw diet?

The answer to that is probably not. We add pure fish body oils to our dogs' diet for the Omega 3's that it contains. Fish liver oil is not suitable as the levels of Vitamin A and D are too high. If your dog has a particular health problem, other supplements may be necessary but this is rarely the case. Never use calcium supplements. Be very careful if you choose to add kelp or alfalfa to the dogs' diet as these can affect thyroid function.

The information provided on this page is by no means exhaustive. I highly recommend that you join one of the yahoo groups mentioned below to gain additional knowledge and support as you switch your dog over to a natural diet.

groups.yahoo.com/group/rawfeeding
groups.yahoo.com/group/NaturalRawDog
groups.yahoo.com/group/rawfeedireland

The "big" list – ask them any question!
A smaller list but equally informative
A local list which aims to help people find useful sources of raw meat etc