

**REAL
FOOD
FOR DOGS AND CATS**

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REAL FOOD

FOR DOGS AND CATS

DR CLARE MIDDLE



FREMANTLE PRESS



Dr Clare Middle has been a veterinarian for over forty years. She owned and worked at East Fremantle Vet Clinic, developing it over twelve years into Perth's first vet clinic to integrate conventional and natural therapies, and now practises in Balingup, in the south-west of WA. Clare has postgraduate certificates in veterinary acupuncture, homeopathy, veterinary Chinese herbal medicine and veterinary Chinese food therapy. She is also the author of the books *Natural Prescription Diets for Dogs and Cats*, featuring real food recipes to heal disease, and *Real Cat Food*, which contains more detail on balanced natural diets for healthy and unwell cats. Clare has a husband (Garry), two grown-up children (Katey and Isaac), a labrador-like dog (Juno) and one too many cats (Woj, Harry and Dax), as Dax was supposed to die many years ago of kidney failure and is still doing fine.

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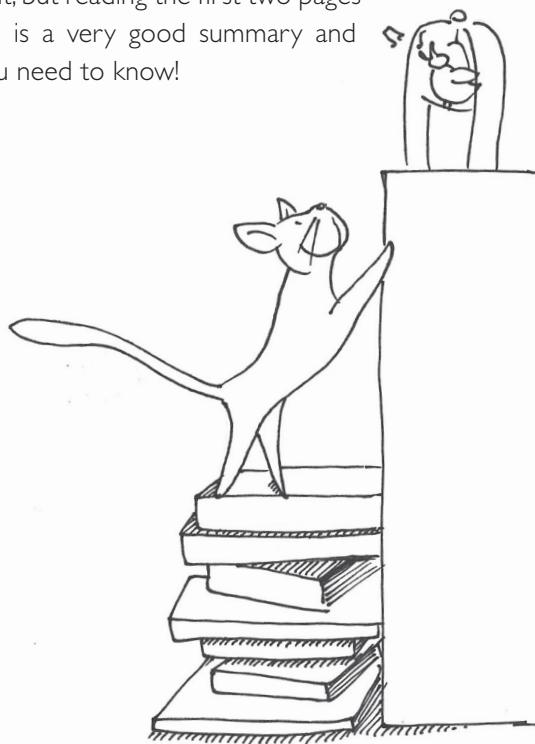
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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Chapters 1–3 are for dog owners and chapters 4–6 are for cat owners, but it would be beneficial for cat owners to also read chapter 3 on the components of a natural diet for dogs, which has much more detailed information relevant to both dogs and cats.

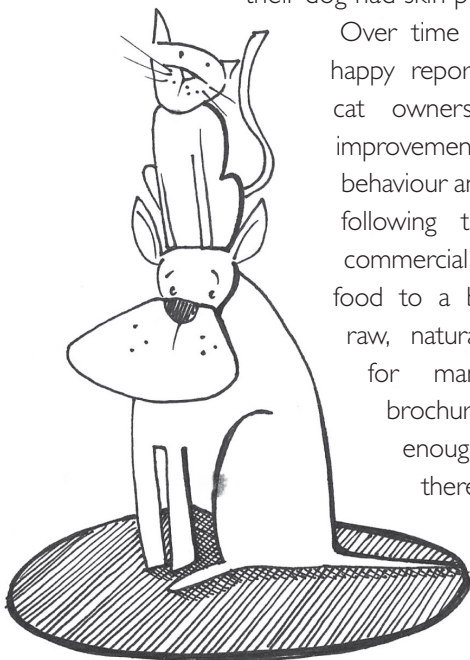
There is a lot of information in this book if you should need it, but reading the first two pages of chapter 3 is a very good summary and almost all you need to know!



THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

In over forty years as a veterinarian I have explained the principles and benefits of a natural diet to most of my many thousands of clients as part of their pets' treatment programs.

In the first twenty-five years I gave out thousands of copies of my brochure *Natural Diet for Dogs and Cats*. Many more were read or downloaded from my website or passed on by clients to other pet owners. I remember one Silver Chain nurse would give a copy to her patients at home visits if she saw their dog had skin problems!



Over time I have had many happy reports from dog and cat owners on the rapid improvements in their pets' behaviour and health problems following the change from commercial processed pet food to a balanced, primarily raw, natural diet. However, for many people the brochure did not contain enough information, and there were still many questions left unanswered.

So here is the book they asked for.

This book provides dog and cat owners with what may be the most important healing tool for the animals under their care – an understanding of the physiological basis for a natural diet as close as possible to the diet for which nature equipped them and the simple steps to achieve this.

However, the scope of this book does not cover treatments for sick pets. For those who need more information on using natural diets to treat unwell pets, see my book *Natural Prescription Diets for Dogs and Cats*, and for more detail about diet for cats, plus some other simple natural treatments, see my most recent and in-depth book for cat owners, *Real Cat Food*. These are available as ebooks or in paperback from my website, www.claremiddle.com. There are also template recipes available on my website under the Natural Diet for Dogs and Cats section.

We are increasingly discovering that fresher, more natural whole food is important for our own long-term health. Similarly, feeding your animals the diet nature intended is likely to be the best way of keeping them happy and healthy. And as an added bonus, it is more economical than a premium quality commercial dried dog or cat food diet.

Dr Clare Middle

BVMS, CVA, CVH

1 PRINCIPLES OF FEEDING DOGS



We need to know a little about how the dog's digestive system works, so that the basic principles of feeding dogs a natural diet will make more sense.

The dog in the wild

The wolf and other wild dogs have been eating raw meat and raw bone for hundreds of thousands of years.¹ Evolutionarily speaking, domestic dogs are not long out of the wild. Their psychology and physiology are adapted to life in the wild and they could, in general, manage well in the wild, either immediately or within a generation or two. In fact, Australian dogs that have returned to the wild are doing too well and have become a problem.

Wild dogs are closely related to our domesticated dogs, and dogs can interbreed with wolves. The dog and the wolf were officially recognised and named as the same species, *Canis lupus*, in 1993, under the code of the International Commission of Zoological Nomenclature.²

Once we understand the digestive physiology and the basic psychology of dogs in their wild state, the principles of natural feeding will make complete sense.

Dogs are pack animals, not human children

Humans and dogs can form amazing and beautiful bonds. Unfortunately, humans therefore tend to assume that dogs are more similar to themselves than they really are. This anthropomorphisation of

our pets can cause significant problems in the feeding and training of dogs.

WARNING: If you anthropomorphise your dog, you may find the material in this book difficult to digest!

One important difference between dogs and humans is that dogs are hierarchical and tend to seek to know and be sure of their place in the ‘dog pack’ – that is, your family household.

Fortunately, this crucial fact is becoming better understood, and training methods have improved markedly in the last decade or so, incorporating a more scientific understanding of what the dog is perceiving and feeling.³ The appropriate feeding of treats provides an enlightening example of this.

You should only ever give a treat when the dog has thoroughly earned it, and never before or during a human meal.

Only feed a dog after all the humans in the household have been fed. If the dog is given a treat without earning it, the dog may get a false impression that it is higher than you in the pecking order.

If these rules are not followed, your dog is basically being told by you, in dog language, that they are higher in the household pack order than you are.

Dutiful dogs can become overburdened by a sense of responsibility greater than they are capable of managing, making them confused and stressed, and sometimes leading to behaviour problems and even aggression.

As pack animals, dogs tend to copy the traits of the pack leaders to ensure their place in the pack. Therefore your dog will tend to copy your behaviour – whether you feel guilty or undecided, or confident and determined – about a new feeding regime, or anything else!

By law, a dog's behaviour is the responsibility of the owner, and it is important for owners to be aware of this, not only because it can save you expensive fines, but because it can make your dog happier and healthier!

I have seen dogs heal from itchy skin disease, irritable bowel disease, anxious or phobic behaviour and many other unpleasant conditions simply when owners begin correctly training the dog, because being happier – unstressed – allows the dog's immune system to function better.⁴

The dog's digestive system

In the wild, an empty, hungry dog is in peak form to hunt for its next kill. It may be days before the next main meal hops past, but that is fine, as dogs are adapted for this situation.

Dogs are capable of going without a meal for several days – with no loss of energy.

In the wild the next meal cannot be predicted: it is a random event. The dog's digestive system is very different from a human's. Their stomach has evolved to digest food best when it is very full. This means dogs can fill their stomach when they have the chance – after killing a large prey animal – and make the most of the opportunity.

Most digestion of a dog's food occurs in the stomach, which is a highly acidic pH 1–2, primarily due to the presence of hydrochloric acid.⁵ This is an extremely corrosive environment, capable of digesting large amounts of raw bone and raw meat.

In contrast, a human stomach is generally about pH 3–4. Human digestion occurs mainly in the intestines, and the stomach functions more like a mixing bowl, combining the food with the enzymes for digestion later in the intestines. Digestive enzymes are very sensitive to the correct pH to do their job well.

Carbohydrates can only be fully digested at a pH of about 4–5, while the optimum environment for starch digestion by the enzyme amylase is pH 6. A dog's stomach rarely or never has such a high pH, because dogs are not meant to be carbohydrate or starch eaters.⁶

Humans eat far more grain and a higher percentage of vegetable matter than dogs, and our digestion favours more continuous eating. We can't digest raw bone at all, or raw meat very well, because our stomachs have too high a pH for this to occur.

Dogs do not chew food well – they have a basic scissor-action jaw which breaks the food into smaller pieces, if at all, prior to swallowing. The thought of gulping down lumps of raw meat and raw bone may sound foreign to us, but that is how dogs are designed to eat! They do not need to chew their food very well like we do, as their stomach acidity does most of that work instead.

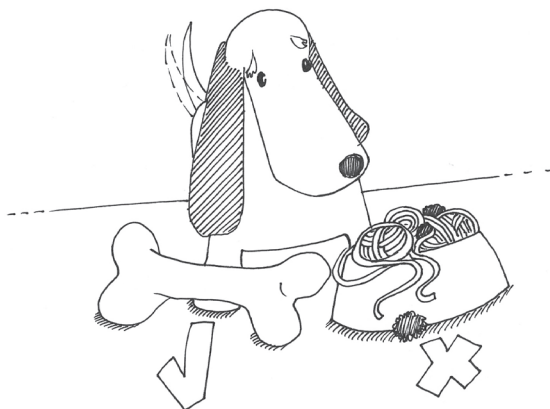
The dog's stomach differs from the human stomach in another important way: empty, it is not much larger than the surrounding intestines. However, it is capable of greatly expanding to hold up to 5% of the dog's own total body weight of food.⁷ And when the stomach is fully stretched, the glands on the inner stomach wall are stimulated to produce yet more enzymes and hydrochloric acid to aid digestion.

This feedback effect is further boosted by an enzyme called gastrin, which stimulates stomach wall contractions, so that the more full the stomach is, the more contractions occur.

The dog's stomach therefore has to be full and dilated for optimum digestion.

Meals must be principally meat and bone

It is important that the dog's stomach be primarily full of raw meat and raw bone. If a dog's stomach is full of high carbohydrate or starch food which can *only* be fully digested at a pH of 3–6, then full digestion is obviously unlikely.



A dog's stomach full of undigested carbohydrate – and even the premium brands of dried dog food are generally 26–30% carbohydrate – can lead to stagnation and bloating, which can be a life-threatening condition in dogs.

Carnivores are not carbohydrate eaters. For energy they depend on glucose from non-carbohydrate sources.⁸ Therefore grain, sugar, bread, cakes, pasta, rice, biscuits and commercial dried dog foods should therefore generally not be part of a dog's diet.

One cause of bloat⁹ is thought to be the gas produced by bacteria that proliferate in a stomach environment of about pH 3–6. These harmful bacteria do not survive well in the low pH stomach of a dog fed raw meat and bone. Bloat is unlikely

to occur in a dog whose stomach has adjusted to a primarily raw meat and bone diet.

Grains and cereals and dried or kibbled dog food, and tinned meat containing cereal, are therefore not good foods to be fed in large quantities to a dog, as they may hinder the correct digestive processes in the dog's stomach. The 3–5% carbohydrate of a balanced natural diet is far more appropriate for dog physiology.

A balanced diet for a dog:
60–80% raw meat, fat, offal, bone, fish
20–40% vegetables, bran, fruit, herbs,
fish oil, supplements

When dogs do need carbohydrates

In some cases, small amounts of carbohydrate can be justified if the dog is burning a lot of energy, for example:

- very active working or obedience trial dogs
- young pups growing quickly
- pregnant or lactating dogs
- very thin dogs who do not gain sufficient weight on non-carbohydrate foods
- dogs with digestive system impairment such as exocrine pancreas insufficiency
- dogs who have been on poor quality or high carbohydrate diets for a long time and no longer have the capacity to adapt to the low stomach pH needed for raw meat and bone

- very old dogs who are not adapting well to a natural diet
- dogs who are unwell and not adapting easily to a natural diet.

See pages 92–94 for a full discussion of the best foods for these special ‘high carbohydrate need’ dogs. But note that it would still be unwise to exceed 10% carbohydrate (by ‘wet’ weight, that is, cooked or soaked).

Select carbohydrates from:

- cooked oats, quinoa, barley, millet, dried peas, lentils, chickpeas, polenta
- cooked sweet potato, swede, turnip, parsnip
- the bran or outer husk of any grain, especially oat or rice bran and flax meal.
- Any of these would be far more nutritious than extruded dried pet food.

The problem with commercial dried foods

There is no law which enforces the manufacturers of commercial pet food to provide a full range of nutrients – pet food standards do not require what they call ‘optional botanicals’, i.e. fresh, plant-based foods containing antioxidants and other nutrients required for optimal health. Most have a high carbohydrate content to make it profitable to manufacture, as cereal is generally cheaper than protein, and easier to market because it keeps at room temperature, and

is convenient for owners to buy, store and handle. Even the best quality commercial dried dog foods can contain 26–30% carbohydrate, on a dry weight basis. Supermarket brands of dried kibble can contain up to 60% carbohydrate.

Unfortunately, it is not what nature intended for the dog's digestive system. Also, any grain content should be high quality food rather than the waste by-products or highly processed meal contained in many commercial dried foods.

The high temperatures and pressures used in the extrusion process can cause carbohydrates and proteins, via the Maillard reaction, to form acrylamide and other inflammatory and carcinogenic compounds. For this reason, I do not recommend feeding any dried kibble pet food if possible.

Low carbohydrate studies

Several studies confirm that the development of hip dysplasia in prone dog breeds is significantly reduced if the puppies are raised on a low carbohydrate diet with periods of fasting.¹⁰ The same research has established the benefits of feeding puppies and adult dogs a large proportion of raw bone in their diet.

Raw meat is best

Raw meat contains most essential amino acids, some essential fatty acids, most of the B group vitamins, many trace elements and some antioxidants.

Cooking destroys up to 70% of nutrients in raw meat.¹¹

Raw bone (and cartilage) not only keeps dogs' teeth healthy and clean, it also contains valuable nutrients including calcium phosphate, collagen and trace minerals. The marrow contains fatty acids and vitamins. Raw bone is nutritious and digestible, so long as it is not too large for the size of dog and if the dog is accustomed to eating raw bone.

Raw fat is beneficial and safe for dogs. It contains essential fatty acids and is the best energy source for dogs. (The full discussion on raw meat, fat and bone begins on page 70.)

Cooking makes bone indigestible and makes fat harmful.

However, generations of some breeds of domesticated dog have long eaten some cooked meat, due to their relationship with humans. And it can be argued that a few dogs with impaired digestive ability, whether due to genetics, age, diet or disease, may be better with some cooked meat at some stages in their lives.¹²

If you must cook meat, it is important that you do not also cook the bone or fat:

- Cooked fat can be harmful, possibly causing acute pancreatitis.
- Never feed cooked bone, as it cannot be

digested and may cause blockages or injury to the intestines.

- Remove the fat before cooking the meat.
- Cooking can change the nutrients in fats and oils from useful into harmful ones, so any oil additives should be cold pressed and added unheated.
- Supplements such as fish oil, kelp, flax meal and alfalfa must be added uncooked or unheated.

Optional – fast your dog about once a week

It is characteristic of the dog's digestive process that the dog thrives best on the whole digestive tract being completely empty at regular intervals.

An empty gut allows the liver to complete its metabolic processes fully, which can only happen when the rest of the digestive tract is totally empty.¹³ It takes between about eighteen and thirty hours for the dog's stomach, intestines and bowel to empty.

It is only then – when the blood glucose has dropped beneath a certain level and there is no other source of energy – that the liver is forced to convert glycogen from fat and muscle, and from the liver itself, into glucose for energy.¹⁴ This process is accompanied by the maximum release of pesticides, toxins and other harmful chemicals or drugs from the liver.

The liver is an important organ and its healthy functioning can reduce the incidence of allergy, infection, autoimmunity and cancer.¹⁵

Toxic chemicals may have accumulated in the liver over many years, from many sources – digested from food or absorbed through the lungs or skin – and may include household cleaning products, white ant and other insect or weed sprays, flea products, aluminium or mercury from vaccination, exhaust fumes, and pesticides from vegetables, fruit and grain hulls.¹⁶

Liver detoxification may never occur completely if the dog is fed twice or more a day, seven days a week, week after week. More than six meals a week may compromise the liver's ability to ever fully detoxify.¹⁷

I recommend you introduce a fasting day when your puppy is about six months old or more and is down to one meal a day.

Fasting enhances performance

Not only does the liver totally cleanse the body of toxins, it burns excess fat, so the dog can hunt even more effectively. Its senses are also more acute when detoxified.

In the wild a dog with an empty stomach is in peak form to hunt for its next kill.

The dog's use of glycogen as a fuel is an amazingly efficient process. A dog can go for days without food, working hard physically and mentally, in order to find prey.

For this reason, emergency search and rescue dog handlers fast their dogs as soon as a missing person is reported. They know the dogs will be more energetic and work more effectively if they have not been fed for a day or two.¹⁸ Similarly, many dog trainers fast a dog to enhance the effectiveness of their training program, and many owners of racing greyhounds fast their dogs so they can run more quickly.

Exercising your dog on its fasting day is a very good idea, because exercise will then add to the cleansing effect of the fast.

Fasting is not cruel

I have heard owners say they are afraid that if they fast their dog once a week, the dog will be miserable and hate them.

This is an example of looking at a dog's emotions in human terms: the owner is assuming (incorrectly) that not only is it not right for a dog to fast, but that the dog will rationalise in an intellectual way like a human.

It is not cruel to feed a dog only once every one or two days. It may be cruel to feed a dog twice daily, especially with a high carbohydrate meal, as it will never feel completely satisfied because full liver metabolism has not been achieved.

It might, however, be cruel to fast a dog that was on a diet of mainly commercial dried food. It is the combination of fasting with a raw meat diet that is important.

There are also situations when fasting is not beneficial, such as in late pregnancy, puppyhood, and for animals with diabetes, or if fasting makes the dog or owner anxious.

If you are not happy fasting your dog, it will still benefit from being on a natural diet. It is important for you to feel happy about your choice, as your pet will detect your confidence and respond accordingly.

Optional – feed your dog at random times

It is difficult for some people to accept the idea of feeding a dog only five to six times a week, as it is so different from the daily routine humans tend to follow. Equally counterintuitive may be the notion that it is psychologically and physiologically beneficial to feed your dog at random times.

In the wild, the arrival of food can never be predicted: it is a random event.

Dog trainers are well aware of the principle of random reward:¹⁹ the dog is always alert and ready to earn rewards (or meals), and is pleased when it

gets one, but training effectiveness is not reliant on a food reward every time the dog behaves well.

If you feed at the same time each day, the dog will automatically respond like 'Pavlov's Dog' and expect to be fed. This is a conditioned or stress-association response, and precisely what we do not want just prior to feeding, as the stress release of adrenalin reduces blood flow to the upper gastrointestinal tract and reduces effective digestion.

It will be much easier to get your dog to feed randomly if you have had it on a natural diet as a puppy.

Introduce random meal times gradually to older puppies. Decrease the number of daily meals to once daily feeding, then include a fast day, if you want to, by the time the puppy is about six months old.

Some owners and dogs will not adapt readily to fewer meals, so move slowly into the new program to find the right level for you and your dog.

A sample feeding program

Here is just one example of a weekly feeding program, where the dog is fed five meals in the week. You could use the same timetable for the next week, or vary it.

Day 1 – 9am
Day 2 – noon
Day 3 – 7pm
Day 4 – fast
Day 5 – 3pm
Day 6 – 8pm
Day 7 – fast

Note that this feeding regime is for dogs fed a primarily raw meat and bone diet, with no more than 3–5% carbohydrate in each meal. It would not be suitable if the dog ate a diet of primarily commercial dried food.

Dominant dogs may benefit from being fed after the humans' main meal, not before, so factor this in.

If random feeding does not work out for you and your dog, that is all right. Simply feeding a natural diet will greatly benefit your pet's health.

Feed by percentage body weight

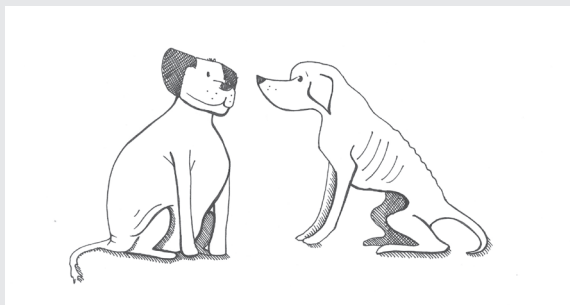
You should feed approximately 20–30% of the dog's body weight a week – about 3–5% of the dog's body weight in food at each meal, assuming the dog is fed six to seven meals a week.

**Growing puppies usually need at least
5% of their body weight daily.**

Fine-tune the amount by deciding whether your dog needs to lose weight or gain it.

Is my dog too fat or too thin?

The best way to tell if your dog is the correct weight is to see if you can easily count six ribs while running your hand over the side of its ribcage.



If you can't easily count that many (or any!) ribs, the dog is too fat, so feed 10% less raw meat and check again in about a month.

If you can feel more than six ribs (or all 13!), then the dog is too thin. Feed 10% more raw meat and check again in about a month.

The smaller the dog, the closer to 5% of its body weight should be fed per meal. This percentage could even be higher in very high energy requiring individuals such as lactating bitches and puppies. Larger dogs generally require the lower end of the range, closer to 3% of their body weight daily.

- A 5kg dog may eat 30% of its body weight weekly, or 1.5kg.

If seven meals a week are fed, each meal weighs about 210g.

If six meals, each meal weighs about 250g.

If five meals, each meal weighs about 300g.

- A 25kg dog may eat 25% of its body weight weekly, or 6.25kg.

If seven meals a week are fed, each meal weighs about 850g.

If six meals, each meal weighs about 1 kg.

If five meals, each meal weighs about 1.25kg.

- A 40kg dog may eat 20% of its body weight weekly, or 8kg.

If seven meals a week are fed, each meal weighs about 1 kg.

If six meals, each meal weighs about 1.3kg.

If five meals, each meal weighs about 1.6kg.

Feed until full

To best mirror the wild situation for which their digestive system is adapted, dogs depend on us feeding them a stomach full of raw meat and raw bones (and fish/fish oil, vegetables and herbs of course).

Dogs have few digestive enzymes released in their mouth: the stomach is the major digestion organ, and it has to be well stretched for the optimal release of digestive enzymes to occur.²⁰ This means that ideally the dog should be fed until it is quite full.

A dog's intestine is really just for absorbing the already digested food, so it is crucial to get correct digestion happening in its stomach.

Those dogs fed on too high a carbohydrate diet may continually be asking for food because they

'know' there is something not right with their feeding situation (and they are correct). If they are always fed in response to their begging, they will never have the chance to complete their liver metabolism, since this requires the intestines to be empty.

Of course you must not feed a dog full with dried dog food or processed or tinned dog food, pasta, rice, or anything other than predominately raw meat and raw bones, otherwise the dog may suffer bloat. (See pages 28–31.)

Do not leave food out constantly

Random feeding is not ad hoc feeding. Optimal digestion for a dog occurs with a small number of large meals.

It is rarely a good idea to leave food out for dogs to help themselves when they feel like it. With a constant supply of glucose from graze feeding, the liver will not produce energy from glycogen stores, or fulfil its important function of clearing harmful chemicals stored in the body.

Also, if you stop providing continuous food for your dog, you will be able to use mealtimes and the occasional well-timed treat to train your dog more effectively.²¹

Treats, when used appropriately, can be useful training aids.²² Tiny pieces can be given to minimise the food intake of the dog between meals, while still

helping with training. Dogs must earn a treat, and it must be a 'chance' event, so the dog does not expect a treat at the same time every day, irrespective of it being earned.

Feed according to the season

Nature changes with the seasons, so it is fine to change the diet from time to time, just as it is natural for the dog's weight to alter from time to time. When it comes to the non-meat components of the diet, it is better to eat whatever food is in season – it will be more nutritious and economical than food that is out of season.

Having observed thousands of sick animals over many years of practice, I agree with the ancient Chinese position that certain diseases are more likely to present in particular weather conditions, and that different foods can help address these tendencies to disease.

According to traditional Chinese medicine,²³ it is better to feed 'cooling' foods in summer – raw vegetables, salad and fruit, especially melon. In winter, it is better to feed 'warming' foods such as ginger and cooked vegetables. Following these principles may help relieve ear infections in hot humid weather, heat stress in hot weather, bladder infections with the onset of wet weather, painful backs and joints in winter, and so on.

It also helps to feed raw or cooling foods to animals who feel the heat badly, and more cooked or warming foods to those sensitive to the cold.²⁴

Your dog is happy: you are happy

Feeding your dog should become part of your usual routine, not a chore. Relax and enjoy it. Not only are there many advantages to feeding your dog a natural diet no more than once a day, at random times, and with fasting days – there are considerable advantages to you too:

- You will be preparing fewer meals for your dog.
- You can use vegetables and fruits you have readily to hand.
- You won't need to watch the clock for dog feeding time or worry about getting home late because the dog hasn't been fed.
- Your dog will stop begging for treats.
- Your dog will feel satisfied and will not be hungry most of the time.
- Your dog will produce less than half the amount of faeces for you to clean up from the garden.
- You can go away for a weekend and leave the dog with water only (and supervision and company) – relax and imagine all that liver cleansing!

Regardless of the number of meals per week and time of feeding, all dogs on a natural diet reap the ultimate benefit – increased health and happiness.