

At The Feed Bag, we are continuously striving to learn more, so that we can give you the best possible advice for keeping your pet healthy and happy. After recently attending a nutritional summit with lectures given by Holistic Veterinarians, we have summarized the findings and are happy to share the information with you.

Connie Roller, Manager

Are There Alternatives to Prescription Diets?

By

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Sometimes a trip to the vet with our dog or cat can result in the veterinarian making a recommendation for a change in diet. For the average veterinarian, that would mean a prescription diet. For the Holistic veterinarian, that would mean taking a serious look at what may be deficient (or in excess) in the pet's current diet. Only recently have vet schools been adding holistic nutritional training in the curriculum. Historically, nutritional training has been very limited in vet schools, and often the training is done by large pet food corporations, which leaves little room for unbiased information given to the students. Veterinarians who prefer natural and holistic methods generally have to do their own research and learning after graduation.

Dogs and cats are carnivores; they need a diet heavy in meats. Carbohydrates serve no nutritional value to our pets. Carbohydrates like corn and wheat are actually harmful to animals. The main reason being: they cause inflammation. Inflammation is the main source of most of our animal's health issues. Arthritis, for example, simply means inflammation of the joints. G.I issues are caused by inflammation while symptoms of allergies and diabetes are severely worsened by inflammation. Cancer cells feed off of carbohydrates to reproduce. Now that we know what to avoid, what DO our pets need in order to improve their conditions? The following paragraphs will describe how to go about treating the most common animal illnesses simply with diet change and supplements.

Joint issues: The easiest treatment of joint issues is prevention! We must control our animal's weight so as not to put unnecessary pressure on their joints. If we already have an overweight animal with joint issues, the best thing we can do for them is provide them with exercise that will burn calories while not stressing the joints. The perfect exercise: swimming. In addition to keeping our animals lean, we need to supplement with cartilage supporting agents. This would be glucosamine and chondroitin. As far as diet goes, we need to be choosing what is referred to as an inflammatory diet. This means feeding low amounts or no carbohydrates, high protein (of quality meats), high carnitine, and lots of essential fatty acids. Following these healthy guidelines will help our animals live a life of less aches and pains.

Cancer: The most important rule to follow when feeding an animal with cancer is to avoid carbohydrates at all cost. As we touched on before, cancer cells reproduce by feeding on sugars. (carbs = sugars). We also want to make sure we avoid feeding our animals trans fats, preservatives, chemicals, and rendered proteins. We want to be feeding an unprocessed whole food diet. For this reason, lots of people will cook for their animals suffering from cancer to ensure only fresh ingredients are going into their bodies. There are many things we can add to our pets diets that will help them fight off cancer. We want to feed them LOTS of antioxidants. This can be accomplished by simply feeding them berries. Blueberries, strawberries, blackberries, raspberries, and cranberries have the highest amounts of antioxidants. Omegas 3's are essential in all animal's diets but especially in animals suffering from cancer. Omegas 3's are essential fatty acids that help to reduce inflammation, help maintain a healthy metabolism, and provide a good source of energy. Another important component to fighting cancer is having a sufficient amount of healthy fats. A great way to supply these healthy fats is with coconut oil. Coconut oil contains loric acid which helps increase immunity, reduces inflammation, and is another good source of antioxidants. Arginine, an amino acid, is another great thing to add to our animal's diet to help maintain healthy immune function. Ensuring we take the time to follow these steps will improve our pet's immune system helping them fight off cancer growth.

Gastrointestinal problems: The best way to treat GI issues is, once again, to avoid carbohydrates in our animal's diet. This way, we are not adding more inflammation to an already inflamed GI tract. Feeding novel proteins, that is, foods that our animals are not used to, is also strongly recommended. A bland, low fat diet is best since animal's suffering from tummy issues cannot digest high fat foods well. There are also supplements that we can add to our pet's diets to help create a healthier digestive system. One example would be slippery elm. Slippery elm is an herb that is known to reduce inflammation and pain while having a soothing effect on the stomach. Another example would be probiotics, prebiotics, and plant enzymes. Probitoics are the good bacteria that live in the gut while Prebiotics help the good bacteria to grow. Plant enzymes aid in healthy digestion. The best thing we can do for our pets is to help prevent a GI problem before it starts. We can accomplish this by feeding our animals in a way that will give them a "gut of steel." To do this, it's recommended that we feed our young pets a variety of proteins. By doing this, we are preventing them from building up a hypersensitivity to one meat. Gastrointestinal issues are something that a lot of our animals suffer from but with a better understanding of their nutritional needs we can help prevent and/or treat these tummy problems.

Allergies: Many of our pets suffer from itchy skin, chronic ear infections, eye drainage, yeast infections, and stomach upsets. These issues are all signs of an animal with an allergy. All allergies are either caused by food or environment but no matter the cause, there are simple steps that we can take to alleviate these very uncomfortable symptoms. The first step we want to take to help treat allergies is to avoid carbohydrates to prevent further inflammation. Allergies are simply an inflammatory response to a food or environment. The next step we want to take is feeding novel proteins. Vets trained in oriental medicine will suggest duck, rabbit, or whitefish because of their cooling properties. Adding more Omega 3 fatty acids to their diets will also help aid in alleviating our pet's allergy symptoms. A supplement called Spring Tonic has also shown to help with allergies by providing immune support. Treating allergies is, unfortunately, not a quick process. It can take 3 to 6 months to see the full results after making these changes to our pet's diets. This is because our animal's bodies need to rid itself of the foods that have been exacerbating the allergies before the new regiment can help heal. With the right diet and supplements we can help tackle this itchy issue and provide our pets with much needed relief.

Heart disease: Heart disease is a growing problem occurring in many of our animals. In smaller dogs this usually presents itself through a valve disease, while in larger dogs it's through dilated cardiomyopathy. While there are no simple solutions or miracle tricks to eliminate heart disease in our animals, there are ways to help treat and prevent. A meat based diet, with the addition of B vitamins, taurine, and L carnitine can do wonders for the heart. B vitamins work to help keep energy levels high, while taurine and L carnitine are both amino acids essential for good heart health. Antioxidants, such as grape seed extract, can help reduce inflammation. Herbs such as Hawthorn have also shown its ability to steady and strengthen a weak or erratic heartbeat. Using Fish oil provides the omega-3 fatty acids, EPA, and DHA that can be beneficial for heart disease. Ubiquinol is another great supplement that contains many antioxidants to help heart disease in our pets. It has even shown to help reduce or completely terminate heart murmurs. These diet changes and supplement additions can dramatically improve our pet's heart health.

Obesity: Obesity is an epidemic, not only in human society, but also amongst our furry friends. Table scraps, extra treats, and overfeeding can defiantly play a role in this issue. Animals dealing with extra weight should be on a dramatically reduced carbohydrate diet. Portion control is imperative, and extra food can be eliminated by using a measuring cup for precise counting. Weighing our dieting pets monthly can also be a huge help. Pea sized, grain free treats should be substituted for large carb loaded snacks. Most importantly, we need to get our chubby pets moving! All of our animals should be getting at least 20 minutes of heart pumping exercise a day. The easiest way to help our animals lose weight is by reducing their calorie intake and increasing their level of activity.

Diabetes: Diabetes can present itself in two forms. Type 1, which usually occurs in dogs who can't produce their own insulin or Type 2, which is commonly associated with cats that have impaired responses to insulin. Carbohydrate loading stresses the pancreas resulting in diabetes. We can steer clear of diabetes by creating a low fat, low carbohydrate diet for our animals. Adding digestive enzymes to our pet's diets can also help. Raw diets work best because they are grain free and high in protein. It is very important that we monitor our animal's glucose levels after following this new regimen. Blood sugars are bound to drop once grains and carbs are eliminated from our pet's diets resulting in a substantially decreased need for insulin. Diabetes is yet another health issue that can be controlled with appropriate dietary management.

As unfortunate as it is, there is no kibble or canned diet that can cure the health conditions that our animals so often develop. As responsible pet parents, we need to be their advocates. This simply means, educating ourselves on proper nutrition and doing what we feel makes the most sense for our pets. With love, a healthy diet and exercise our pets can reach their optimal health!