

BARF

One of the most common questions that comes up regarding wolfdogs is, “Do they need meat in their diet?” The answer is no, they don’t *need* it, insofar as they are able to subsist on a diet of dry kibble alone. If the kibble is high quality, with ingredients the body can use rather than filler which is passed through, many do just fine. Do wolfdogs do *better* with meat in their diet? Ah, now that’s another question. Many people, myself included, feel that the answer is yes. In recent years, more and more wolfdog owners have discovered BARF (Bones And Raw Food, or Biologically Appropriate Raw Food). The staple of this natural diet, popularized by Dr. Ian Billinghurst in his book *Give Your Dog A Bone* (see *Resources*), is vitamin-rich, nutritious, raw meat.

Before we discuss the BARF diet, a word about dry kibble. There is a great variation in quality from one brand of kibble to another. Nutritional value is best researched by reading labels. The usual suspects as far as ingredients which are not well tolerated by wolfdogs are corn and soy. Some foods actually list corn as the first ingredient (meaning that is what there is most of). The first two ingredients should ideally be a meat such as chicken or turkey, without the word “meal” or worse, “by-product” after it. “Meat” is the clean flesh of cattle and other animals. “Meat meal” is rendered meal made from animal tissue. “Meat by-product” does not include meat at all, but may include organs, bone and blood. Poultry by-product meal may also include feet and heads.

Check the label to find out what the food is preserved with. It should list vitamins C or E, rather than potentially dangerous preservatives such as BHA, BHT or ethoxyquin (both of which are still commonly used). Bottom line, as each canine is an individual, assess how well your wolfdog is doing on his current

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diet. Signs of good nutrition include a shiny coat, clear eyes, firm stools and a healthy energy level.

Will Raw Meat Cause My Wolfdog to Eat Grandmothers?

There is a persistent myth that feeding raw meat turns canines into bloodthirsty, aggressive beasts. While a problem might develop if you feed live animals, feeding no-longer-moving raw meat is not a problem. I don't know of a single case where feeding raw meat resulted in any type of behavior problem (besides squabbles over the food in packs who were not yet accustomed to receiving it), and there is certainly no scientific evidence to the contrary.

Some people hesitate to feed raw meat because they fear that their wolfdog will become infected with salmonella. You needn't worry. Canines have a shorter digestive tract than humans, and there is less chance that they will become infected. In the wild, wolves do not contract salmonella from eating raw kill! Although the BARF diet advocates raw meat, if you are truly concerned about parasites (especially if you do not have access to organic foods), boil the meat. Some of the nutrients will be lost, but you will feel safer and the benefits are still many. Or, rinse the meat well with hot water and human grade 30% hydrogen peroxide before serving raw. (The peroxide can be used full strength or diluted, but be sure to rinse well with water afterwards.)

Always be sure to wash your hands very carefully after handling raw meat. Use a disinfectant on any surfaces your hands or the meat might have come in contact with.

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Elk-Burger, Hold the Fries!

The BARF diet reflects what wolves eat in the wild. Wolves are, for the most part, carnivores. They eat other animals, thereby consuming meat, organs, bones and even fur. They also eat the contents of their prey's stomach and intestines, which contain plant materials. Your wolfdog is technically an omnivore, meaning he *can* eat meat, vegetables and fruit. According to Dr. Billinghurst, the diet should be varied, as feeding just one type of food item may result in an imbalance. On one-item-only diets, such as organ meats, the wolfdog's appearance may improve for a few months, but the imbalance it creates might show up later as skin problems, arthritis or worse; an organ-meats-only diet has an excess of protein, phosphorus, calories and vitamin A, and is deficient in calcium. Billinghurst warns that feeding a meat-only diet, even in the fairly safe form of cooked meat without the bones (cooked chicken bones can splinter and be fatal), can cause problems such as arthritis, eczema, kidney disease, heart disease and cancer.

What Dr. Billinghurst does recommend is balance and variety. Following the BARF plan, the bulk of your wolfdog's diet would be raw, meaty bones. He suggests that raw chicken backs and/or wings top the list, and mentions lamb, beef and pork as other potential meat sources. *Note: While chicken and turkey can carry salmonella, beef and pork may harbor E. coli bacteria. Beef and pork are also more likely to contain Trichinosis and Cystocerca, which are encysted tapeworms—for these reasons among others, many people prefer to feed chicken and turkey rather than beef or pork.* Another good meat source is marrow bones, often sold in the market as "bones for soup." Raw marrow contains ingredients which help to maintain a healthy immune system. Bones also provide a good outlet for your wolfdog's energy