

Fermented Vegetables for Pets

By Dr. Karen Becker

Hi, this is Dr. Karen Becker, and today we're going to discuss fermented vegetables for pets. Vegetables are important to the health of dogs because they contain essential nutrients that are not provided by other foods like bones and meats. Cats, as strict carnivores, would only consume the pre-digested vegetable matter found in their prey's GI tracts. Only a tiny amount of veggies are added into commercial diets or homemade cat foods. Basically, we're trying to provide a source of roughage, phytonutrients, and antioxidants.

There are a few different ways to prepare veggies that can make them optimally digestible for pets, and one of those ways is to ferment them. Fermentation actually imitates the digestion of plant foods in the stomachs of small mammals that dogs and cats in the wild would be eating. Fermented veggies have a very long history in virtually every native diet, and have always been highly valued for their health benefits. But what you might not realize is that fermented veggies can also be beneficial in keeping your pets healthy, thanks in large part to their probiotic effect.

Through the ages, humans have consumed large amounts of probiotics – not in a supplement form as many of us do today, but in the form of fermented foods. The fermentation of vegetables produces beneficial microbes called probiotics that help balance gut bacteria and the gut flora. This in turn boosts your pet's overall immunity. Remember that a healthy gut equals a healthy pet. Fermented veggies not only provide a wider variety of beneficial bacteria than probiotic supplements offer, but they also provide far more of them.

About the highest level of colony-forming units you'll find in human probiotic supplements is about 10 billion. But fermented veggies produced by probiotic starter cultures can produce 10 trillion colony-forming units of bacteria. That means one human serving size of fermented veggies provides the same benefit as an entire bottle of high-potency probiotics.

As I've discussed in many videos and articles here at the Mercola Healthy Pets site, beneficial gut bacteria plays a critical role in dealing with digestive issues and a wide range of other health problems in our dogs and cats.

Fermented vegetables are potent chelators and detoxifiers, so they help rid your pet's body of a wide variety of toxins, including heavy metals. The fermentation process makes the nutrients inside the foods more bioavailable as well. It produces vitamin C, B vitamins, vitamin K2, and enzymes (which all support metabolic activity), choline (which balances and nourishes the blood), and acetylcholine as well. The lactic acid produced by fermentation is a chemical repressor that fights cancer cells without harming healthy cells.

Some dogs and even the occasional kitty will eat fermented veggies on their own. Others simply will not touch them because the taste is pretty pungent. It's kind of like a tangy form of sauerkraut. Some dogs will eat anything. You can just supply it, put it right on their food, and they'll do fine. Some dogs are very cautious, and they want nothing to do with it. It's pretty important that you introduce fermented veggies slowly to your dog or cat and in small quantities.

If your pet is slow to accept new foods, try starting with as teeny, tiny amount, like as small as half a teaspoon mixed in with their regular food. If he eats it, then try increasing the amount a little each day until you're up to maybe one to three teaspoons a day for every 20 pounds of body weight. It's important to honor your pet's pace of acceptance for this new food. It's kind of strange-tasting, so if your pet doesn't like it, don't force it.

If you happen to be lucky enough that you have a Labrador or a golden retriever that just eats anything, you can just put it right down without having to add it to anything. I can just put fermented vegetables on a plate, and my dogs will just eat it. They don't bat an eye about it; they just love any type of food. It's a great way to get probiotics into their diet naturally just by offering them a dollop on a daily basis.

Other dogs, however, will refuse all food. Even a tiny amount of veggies, they want nothing to do with it. You're left with giving probiotic supplements instead of offering food sources of probiotics, and that is what it is.

Offering too many fermented veggies at one time can cause GI upset. If your dog or cat simply loves them, that's great. But still, start with a small amount and work it up. You can slowly increase the volume of fermented foods as your pet's GI tract adapts to it.

The liquid produced by the fermentation process is a rich source of lactic acid and other nutrients. You can add it in small amounts to your pet's food as well. Of course, you can buy fermented veggies that are commercially available. But it's cheaper and really easier to make them yourself. I've included a how-to video link at the end of this article to help get you started.

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