

Should You Feed Your Pet Table Scraps? You May Be Surprised

Conventional veterinarians and other pet food 'experts' tend to give a universal thumbs-down to feeding table scraps. But is that advice really in your pet's best interest? If you can answer 'yes' to these four questions, then it may, in fact, be a good idea to share your meal.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Despite all the warnings against feeding table scraps to pets, whether or not it's a good idea to occasionally do so depends on several factors
- If your leftovers are species-appropriate and safe for your dog or cat to eat, table scraps can be some of the healthiest foods to add to your pet's bowl — possibly the first human-grade, better quality food they've ever eaten
- In fact, species-appropriate, nutritionally optimal, fresh, real people food is the best quality food for your animal companion, compared to commercially available, animal-grade processed pet food
- You can safely replace up to 15% biologically appropriate, healthy, human food (fresh meats and veggies) without rocking the nutritional balance of your pet's bowl
- Rather than feeding your pet at the table, replace feed-grade kibble with fresh people food in his bowl. Offering food from your plate at the table, or in the kitchen during meal preparation or cleanup, can quickly turn your dog or cat into an incurable beggar

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Have you ever noticed that conventional veterinarians and many other presumed experts on companion animal nutrition give a universal thumbs-down to feeding "table scraps" to pets? Most also extend this to any and all people food as well. Instead, they want you to offer your dog or cat only processed pet food from a bag, can or pouch twice a day, every day, for a lifetime.

However, a species-appropriate, nutritionally balanced, fresh diet of "people" (i.e., real, human grade) food — not processed pet feed — is the best way to nourish your dog or cat for optimal health and a long life.

But back to the dreaded table scraps for a minute — a table scrap is defined as "a piece of food left over from a meal," according to the Free Dictionary.¹ It seems that if the food you eat is species-appropriate and safe for your dog or cat to eat, and your pet isn't overweight, and you count those calories as part of his or her optimal daily calorie intake, then feeding a few "table scraps" now and then isn't a problem. In fact, it may be the healthiest food they've ever consumed.

To Share or Not to Share?

Whether or not you share your meal with your pet really depends on what the meal consists of and what ingredients are used. Obviously, fried/fatty, sugary, highly spiced and processed foods are a bad idea.

Since Thanksgiving is right around the corner and serves as a good example, offering your pet cooked turkey meat and a few fresh cooked veggies served plain is fine. Examples of holiday people food you want to avoid giving your pet include dressing, bread, rolls and other starchy grains, processed or sugary foods; dishes containing **raisins, grapes, onions, leeks or chives** and all desserts.

It's important to note that rather than feeding your pet at the table, it's a better idea to replace up to 15% of feed-grade kibble with fresh people food in his bowl. Offering food from your plate at the table, or in the kitchen during meal preparation or cleanup, can quickly turn your dog or cat into an incurable beggar.

Food-Grade and Feed-Grade — Opposite Ends of the Quality Spectrum

You should assume your pet's processed diet is made from feed-grade raw materials, unless the website and/or bag specifically states, "made with human edible ingredients." The vast majority of pet foods are made with raw materials not fit for human consumption. The differences between "animal feed" (what's in your pet's bowl) and human food are the quality of raw materials, inspection and what's allowed to be used.

The FDA has allowed "**compliance policies**" (essentially a pass to break the law) for pet food companies to use contaminated raw materials, including ingredients tainted by pesticides, industrial chemicals, filth, microbes and unpermitted drug residues. Here's a screen shot from the FDA's website about the use of diseased animals allowed in pet food (courtesy of **TruthAboutPetFood.com**):

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CPG Sec. 690.300 Canned Pet Food

"Pet food consisting of material from diseased animals or animals which have died otherwise than by slaughter, will be considered fit for animal consumption."

BACKGROUND:

Animal origin material from diseased animals or animals which have died otherwise than by slaughter.

The low acid canned food regulations (LACFRs) found in 21 CFR 113* are applicable to canned pet foods, *as referenced by 21 CFR 500.23.* When properly processed in accordance with these regulations, CVM considers canned pet foods, otherwise not in violation of the statute or regulations, to be safe and suitable for consumption by pets regardless of the origin of animal tissues used. CVM considers the retorting temperatures involved in the canning process adequate to destroy pathogenic organisms.

CVM relies on the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition for technical expertise on the LACFRs. CFSAN routinely reviews the scheduled thermal processes for canned foods including those processes used by pet food manufacturers, and notifies CVM when irregularities are found. CVM notifies the firm of the irregularities found in the canning process and requests that they submit the required information to CFSAN's Low Acid and Acidified Foods Team (HFS-617).

POLICY

Pet food consisting of material from diseased animals or animals which have died otherwise than by slaughter, which is in violation of 402(a)(5) will not ordinarily be actionable, if it is not otherwise in violation of the law. It will be considered fit for animal consumption.

The Center will consider regulatory action based on low acid canned food violations alone where the report

Yuck. As more and more pet parents recognize that every brand and prescription food (except **Darwin's Intelligent Design Veterinary Meals**) sold at veterinary hospitals, most online pet food retailers and big box pet stores falls into this category, they are beginning to understand why it's important to feed a balanced, homemade pet food or shelling out the cash for human grade brands (less than 1% of the current pet food market).

The greater the amount of healthy table scraps you share from your refrigerator as treats, the better! Of course, if you opt to replace your pet's entire bowl of feed-grade food with real, human-grade food, it should be nutritionally balanced for dogs or cats. If you decide to replace a portion of your pet's processed food with appropriate table scraps, you need to remove the calories added by swapping (not adding), so your pet doesn't gain weight.

You can safely replace up to 15% biologically appropriate, healthy, human food (fresh meats and veggies) without rocking the nutritional balance of your pet's bowl. If you opt to replace more, follow a nutritionally balanced recipe to make sure you're providing all micronutrients needed to maintain health.

More Foods and Snacks Safe to Share with Your Dog or Cat

Most of the following foods will be more popular with dogs than cats, but they're safe for both; be sure to serve them plain (no sugar, salt or spices, butter or other additives), in moderation and in small portions. Organic food provides fewer contaminants and residues to you and your pets.

1. **Apples** — Apples contain powerful antioxidants and vitamin C. Serve apple slices to your pet, but never the core or seeds.
2. **Asparagus** — Asparagus is an excellent source of vitamin K, A, B1, B2, C and E, along with the folate, iron, copper, fiber, manganese and potassium.
3. **Blueberries** — Fresh or frozen, blueberries are loaded with phytochemicals, and their deep blue hue is the result of anthocyanidins, which are powerful antioxidants. Blueberries are also a good source of healthy fiber, manganese and vitamins C and E. Introduce blueberries slowly to your pet — too much too soon can cause digestive upset.

Blueberries are available all year and make great training treats for dogs. A good rule of thumb is 2 to 4 blueberries as treats for every 10 pounds of dog a day. Replacing one of the processed treats you feed each day with fresh or frozen blueberries is a great way to increase antioxidants in your pet's diet.

4. **Broccoli** — Broccoli supports detoxification processes in your pet's body; contains healthy fiber to aid digestion; is rich in beneficial nutrients like potassium, calcium, protein and vitamin C; has anti-inflammatory properties; supports eye health; helps repair skin damage; and supports heart health.

Local organic produce is fine, however, conventionally grown broccoli is one of the cleanest (most pesticide-free) foods you can buy, so eat up! Your pet may prefer broccoli steamed, although many dogs eat florets fresh without a problem. Chopped broccoli stems make great detox treats, too.

5. **Carrots** — Carrots are low in calories and high in fiber and vitamins. Many dogs enjoy snacking on a fresh crunchy carrot, and some will even eat the green tops.
6. **Chia** — Chia is a seed derived from the desert plant *Salvia hispanica* that grows abundantly in southern Mexico. It is a source of plant-based omega-3 fatty acids and also antioxidants. And unlike flax seeds, chia seeds don't need to be ground. Chia seeds also provide fiber, calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, manganese, copper, iron, molybdenum, niacin, and zinc. Try sprinkling some chia seeds on your dog's meals or mix some with a little coconut oil for a super nutrient dense bedtime snack.
7. **Cottage cheese** — Plain organic cottage cheese is high in calcium and protein.
8. **Fermented vegetables** — Fermented foods are potent detoxifiers and contain very high levels of probiotics and vitamins. Beneficial gut bacteria provided by probiotics break down and eliminate heavy metals and other toxins from the body and perform a number of other important functions.

Adding 1 to 3 teaspoons of fermented veggies to your pet's food each day (depending on body weight) is a great way to offer food-based probiotics and natural nutrients.

9. **Green beans** — Fresh, locally grown green beans are a source of vitamins A, C, and K. They also provide calcium, copper, fiber, folic acid, iron, niacin, manganese, potassium, riboflavin and thiamin, as well as beta carotene.
10. **Kale** — This dark green cruciferous vegetable is loaded with vitamins (especially vitamins K, A and C), iron, and antioxidants. It helps with liver detoxification and also has anti-inflammatory properties. Add 1 to 3 tablespoons of minced or chopped kale to your pet's food daily, depending on body weight, as a great source of fiber, nutrients and whole food antioxidants.
11. **Kefir** — Kefir is a fermented milk beverage that contains beneficial probiotics that support the immune system. Although regular, pasteurized cow's milk can be irritating to your dog's GI tract, fermented milk is different. One of the best and least expensive ways to add healthy bacteria to your pet's diet is to convert raw milk to kefir yourself.

All you need is one-half packet of kefir starter granules in a quart of raw milk (preferably organic), which you leave at room temperature overnight. Add 1 to 3 teaspoons of this super probiotic to your dog's food 1 to 2 times daily for overall improved GI defenses.

12. **Mushrooms** — Mushrooms range from life-saving to poisonous, so obviously you'll want to choose medicinal mushrooms only. Nontoxic, beneficial varieties include shiitake, reishi, maitake, lion's mane, king trumpet, turkey tail, and himematsutake mushrooms. All mushrooms that are safe for people are safe for pets.

Mushrooms can help regulate bowel function, but even better, they also contain potent anticancer properties and immune system enhancers. You can either lightly cook the mushrooms in a very small amount of olive or coconut oil before adding them to your dog's meal, or make a mushroom broth.

13. **Pumpkin** — Fresh pumpkin, either steamed or boiled (or canned 100% pumpkin), is relatively low in calories and high in soluble fiber. Pumpkin helps regulate bowel function, which relieves both diarrhea and constipation. It's also an excellent source of potassium, vitamin A and antioxidants.
14. **Pumpkin seeds (raw)** — Pepitas or raw pumpkin seeds, are a rich source of minerals, vitamin K, and phytosterols. They also contain L-tryptophan and are a good source of zinc, vitamin E, and B vitamins. Research suggests pumpkin seeds can prevent calcium oxalate kidney stones, reduce inflammation caused by arthritis, and support prostate health.
15. **Raw nuts (almonds and Brazil nuts)** — These nuts, served in moderation and very small portions, are safe for dogs. Many nuts are not — especially tree nuts — so stick with these 2 to be on the safe side.
16. **Sardines** — Fish are a rich source of omega-3 fatty acids, which are essential to your dog's well-being. If you supplement your pet's diet with fish, use sardines packed in water. Sardines don't live long enough to store toxins in their bodies, and they're a terrific source of omega-3s.
17. **Spinach** — This green leafy vegetable helps has anti-inflammatory properties and can help support heart health.
18. **Sweet potatoes** — Steamed sweet potatoes are rich in beta-carotene and antioxidants and are also high in vitamins A and C. Sweet potatoes with purple flesh have potent antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties that may lower the risk from heavy metals and oxygen radicals.
19. **Yogurt** — Plain organic yogurt is high in protein and calcium, and most pets love it.

Sources and References

[dvm360, June 20, 2019](#)

¹ [The Free Dictionary by Farlex](#)
