



EXPLORATORY STUDY: 632 SHARED EXPERIENCES FROM DOG OWNERS CHANGING THEIR DOGS' FOOD TO A RAW FOOD (BARF) DIET

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Introduction

Biologically Appropriate Raw Food or Bone And Raw Food, both referred to as BARF for short, is gaining in popularity among both dog and cat owners. While there are claims of health benefits (1,2), no research exists. This exploratory study utilized uncensored, unstructured descriptive owner feedback from a Finnish BARF manufacturing company's homepage (Oy Mush Ltd.).

Materials and methods

On their home page, a Finnish BARF manufacturer asked people to use a limited open space to write freely about their BARF experience. The whole uncensored data file was obtained directly from the company that handles the internet page. The data contained information both about BARF use from an owner's perspective as well as info about changes and reactions in the dog. The whole data was organized by an independent Helsinki University researcher into suitable categories. This paper reviews owner reported changes in symptoms of a variety of diseases after the change to a BARF diet.

Outcome

Of all responders (n=632),

- 206 (33%) reported that their dogs had had skin related problems (diseases),
- 145 (23%) gastrointestinal (GI) problems
- 38 (6%) eye related problems,
- 15 (2%) urinary tract problems, and
- 18 (3%) one of many other diseases prior to the diet change .

Of the dogs in the above disease groups,

- 152 (74%), 127 (88%), 30 (79%), 8 (53%), and 9 (50%), respectively, voluntarily reported *total recovery* from the symptoms and further

- 36 (17%), 9 (6%), 3 (8%), 2 (13%), and 3 (17%), respectively, voluntarily reported *significant recovery* after change to a BARF diet.

The following general improvements were also reported: Better hair coat (n=127, 20%), Less feces, less odor, and/or better functioning GI-tract (n=119, 19%), dogs more active (n=81, 13%), a better over-all wellbeing (n=68, 11%), better mood (n=47, 7%), more “muscular” (n=36, 6%), more lean (n=19, 3%), and 11 owners (2%) even reported avoidance of euthanasia.

BARF food owners also reported better palatability of the new food (n=224,35%) and that dogs satiety improved (n=10, 2%). On weight issues they reported both success of desired weight loss (n=18, 3%), and desired weight gain (n=62, 10%).

Two of the owners (0.3%) reported that they were not happy with the change and 3 (0.5%) that they will stop BARF, whereas 399 (63%) reported that they were happy and 519 (82%) that they would continue with the BARF diet. 416 of the 632 responders (66%) reported that they nowadays served their dogs a 100% BARF diet.

Discussion

The outcome of this study points to health benefits from feeding raw food to dogs. The data used here comes from unstructured owner feedback where all data is extracted from written reports of varying length and content. As no questions were asked and no guidelines were given, the owners have written freely, maybe using other owners’ feedback as a model, and where thereby maybe inspired to give positive feedback. However, the outcome could also have been even more positive if everybody had reported on all of the described changes.

A limitation is also that none of the above diseases nor disease symptoms were verified by us. The above list, however, contains mostly general symptoms that owners usually monitor themselves anyway and based on seeing them, they usually also turn to a veterinarian.

These health benefit results are, however, also backed up by upcoming studies from the DOGRISK data.

Conclusions

In spite of the limitations of the study, such as self-selection of respondents, a likely tendency of social desirability in their answers, and the fact that the animals diseases were not verified by a veterinarian, this study points to health benefits of feeding raw food to dogs. Prospective research is needed.

References

1. Laflamme DP, Abood SK, Fascetti AJ et al. Pet feeding practices of dog and cat owners in the United States and Australia. J Am Vet Med Assoc. 2008 Mar 1;232(5):687-94.
- 2.Freeman LM, Michel KE. Evaluation of raw food diet for dogs. J Am Vet Med Assoc 2001;218:705–709.

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