

JUNK PET FOOD AND THE DAMAGE DONE

Dogs, cats and ferrets fed a regular diet of processed food suffer from a range of cruel and debilitating diseases.

Pet owners can improve their pets' health by feeding them a natural, chewy diet primarily of whole raw carcasses or at least raw meaty bones.

by Dr Tom Lonsdale,
BVetMed, MRCVS © 2007

Post Office Box 6096
Windsor DC, NSW 2756, Australia
Telephone: +61 (0)2 4574 0537
Email: tom@rawmeatybones.com
Website:
<http://www.rawmeatybones.com>

Imagine if all the Big Macs, Happy Meals and Coca-Colas consumed by Morgan Spurlock during his month-long binge for the film documentary *Super Size Me*¹ were instead tipped into a vat, ground to a pulp and cooked under pressure. Let us imagine that half the resultant glop was sealed in cans and the other half dehydrated, extruded into kibble and packed in bags—with brightly coloured labels asserting the health benefits.

Suppose, then, that Spurlock either slurped through the contents of the McCans or crunched his way through the McKibble. And now—this is an important aspect—imagine that Spurlock had neither a toothbrush nor the ability to ask for one, so consequently didn't clean his teeth for the month-long experiment. Now I ask: what would Spurlock's physical, dental and mental health be like after such a crazy experiment? Would doctors, dentists and health regulators provide official endorsement for the canned and kibbled diet? Indeed, would it be likely that Spurlock picked up his McCans and McKibble at his local medical or dental practice?

For the vast majority of pet dogs (modified wolves), cats (modified desert predators) and ferrets (modified polecats), a diet of McCans or McKibble is their everyday reality. Spurlock's doctor told him he had to stop his unnatural experiment inside 30 days because he was killing himself. By contrast, the world's pet doctors (vets) encourage pet owners to feed McCans and McKibble *every day* of their pets' lives. I know; I was one such vet.

Poisoned five ways

For the first 15 years of my working life as a graduate of the Royal Veterinary College, University of London, I went along with conventional veterinary wisdom. I counselled my clients against the feeding of home-prepared meals because they were unlikely to get the "balance" of nutrients right, I suggested. Raw meat posed a risk due to bacteria and lack of calcium, so I said. As for bones, everyone knew that bones posed a hazard for breaking teeth and causing obstruction. And whoever heard of feeding bones to cats? The manufacturers have removed the guesswork, I assured my clients. "Giant companies understand the science and have the resources to ensure the best possible fare for your pet. It's convenient, too!"

With the matter of diet for my patients glossed over, I could return to the more pressing problems associated with diagnosis and treatment. After all, that's what I was trained to do and that's what my clients expected of me—and the stream of sick pets with skin disease, heart, liver, bowel and dental disease, cancer and other maladies was never ending.

Oh, how I cringe! How culpably, horribly wrong I had been! As varied as my patients were in size, species, age, sex and breed, the one common uniting feature was their junk food diet. They were all fed McCans and McKibble, and almost without exception this was the reason why the animals needed my services. Yes, it's as simple and dramatic as that, and for the following reasons:

1. Canned soft foods and grain-based kibble do not clean teeth. In fact, food sludge sticks to teeth and feeds the bacteria in dental plaque. The body's second line of defence, the immune system, mobilises against the bacterial invaders. The result: inflamed gums, bad breath, circulating bacteria and bacterial poisons that affect the rest of the body.^{2,3}

2. Dogs, cats and ferrets don't have the digestive enzymes in the right quality or quantity to deal with the nutrients in grains and other plant material, whether those nutrients are raw or cooked. When grains are cooked at high temperatures at the pet food

factory, the starches, proteins and fats become denatured or toxic to varying degrees.⁴ Junk food is laden with colorants, preservatives, humectants and a raft of other strange chemical additives—none with any nutritive value and all toxic to varying degrees.⁵ Once in the bowel of a carnivore, toxic nutrients are absorbed into the circulation and affect various body systems.

3. Poorly digested grain-based junk food supports a large population of toxin-producing bacteria in the lower bowel. The bowel lining, in constant contact with poisons, may be adversely affected. Some poisons pass through the bowel wall into the blood circulation, are carried to other organs and create further problems.⁶

4. Like Morgan Spurlock, some pets show signs of ill health after a short time consuming junk food. For instance, puppies frequently suffer from bad skin and diarrhoea. Long-term exposure to the diet-related toxins listed in categories 1, 2 and 3 leads to diseases of body organs. Diseased organs produce more toxins, which enter the bloodstream and add to the spiral of worsening disease.⁷

5. Mostly pets suffer in silence; they can't speak in words. But when animals are affected by the above four categories of poison, their body language tells observant owners to seek help from the vet. Some vets say: "Stop! Stop feeding junk food." Sadly, though, most vets ignore categories 1, 2 and 3, and instead they diagnose diseased organs as mentioned in 4 (above). Treatment usually involves strong pharmaceuticals, which then contribute another level of toxic insult.⁸

You may ask: what about the genetic diseases, infectious diseases, parasitic diseases, the broken legs, other traumatic diseases and the diseases of old age? For sure, these are all important factors governing the well-being of our pet carnivores. But clearly, undeniably, pets worn down by the toxic effects of a junk food diet are at greater risk of succumbing to other diseases, and the recovery phase is likely to be longer, too.⁹

Stop!

Stop feeding junk pet food is the first and best bit of advice I can give you—for the benefit of your pet(s), the human economy and the natural environment. By stopping doing harm, we take the first step on the road to doing good. It gains us some breathing space, allowing us to survey the scene, investigate further and harness the benefits of our newfound wisdom.

Actually, it's not so new. Hippocrates, the famous Greek physician of the fifth century BC, said: "Leave your drugs in the chemist's pot if you can heal your patients with food."¹⁰

So why did we lose sight of the ancient wisdom? Why did we ignore the teachings of nature? And of utmost importance, why is it so difficult to discuss, let alone reverse, the current orthodoxy? By way of explanation, let me tell you a story that, when taken to a conclusion, should provide medical, scientific, social and environmental benefits worth billions of dollars. Since 1955, when Juliette de Bairacli Levy published her *Complete Herbal Book for the Dog*, there have been mutterings about the inadequacy of processed-food diets for pet dogs and cats.¹¹ By the late 1980s Australian vets were passing comment, and by the

early 1990s they were registering open dissent. Dr Breck Muir often remarked about the foul odours given off from both ends of dogs fed canned food. In the December 1991 issue of the *Australian Veterinary Association News*, he wrote:¹²

Canned pet food not the healthiest

The pet food situation has concerned me for some years, my feelings brought to this by the current competitive marketing of various dental work stations for veterinary use.

The scene as I see it goes like this: "Here is the best food ever made for your dog, Mrs Jones," handing her a can of commercial dog food or dry food, "but he may develop problems with his teeth, so here is a special toothbrush and paste for you to use to clean his teeth regularly, and then if that doesn't keep the periodontal

disease at bay we...have the very latest in dental equipment just like your own dentist has, and we can give Fido that perfectly enamelled ivory grin"—that he would have had had you not fed him the commercial food in the first place.

Here we have the perfectly engineered commercial circle—a problem doesn't exist, so we create one, and then come up with all the remedial treatments.

Also in December 1991, my article "Oral Disease in Cats and Dogs" appeared in the newsletter of the Sydney University Post Graduate Foundation in Veterinary Science.¹³

The stench of stale blood, dung and pus emanating from the mouths of so many of my patients has finally provoked this eruption of dissent.

The sheer numbers passing through the practice, when extrapolated to the world situation, tell me that oral disease is the source of the greatest intractable pain and discomfort

experienced by our companion animals.

This is a great and mindless cruelty we visit upon our animals from the whelping box to the grave. Just imagine having a mouth ulcer or toothache for a lifetime.

Whilst the chemical contents (masquerading as nutrients) of junk pet foods are a major cause of concern, the new emphasis on oral hygiene opened an important chapter focusing on the *physical form* of the food. Indisputably, lions, tigers, wolves and all other wild predators don't have access to toothbrushes, dental floss or annual check-ups at the dentist. Nature equipped carnivores with the tools of trade to complete a very necessary evolutionary function: eating and thus regulating herbivore populations on planet Earth. Strong, precision tools need to be kept sharp and clean, and it's by the very act of a carnivore's gnawing and ripping its way through tough hide, muscle, sinew and bone that its teeth and gums get scrubbed, scraped and polished.

For dogs, cats and ferrets, the biological principles are exactly the same as for their wild cousins. Nutrients need to be raw and

Clearly and undeniably, pets worn down by the toxic effects of a junk food diet are at greater risk of succumbing to other diseases, and the recovery phase is likely to be longer, too.

