



# VEGAN DIETS

## Are vegan diets healthy for dogs & cats?

### Their Biology

- Teeth shaped to tear.
- Jaw unable to grind side to side.
- Saliva not adapted to predigest via chewing.
- Cats: lack amylase to digest carbohydrates.
- Food stays in stomach longer to bathe in bactericidal acids.
- Short intestinal tract with quick transit time: well suited to minimize bacterial growth, ill-suited to extract nutrition from plant fiber.

### Learn More

- *Dr. Pitcairn's Guide to Natural Health for Dogs and Cats*
- *Petdiets.com*
- *Healthydogworkshop.com*

*We at Dexter's understand the important role our buying choices have in our impact on the planet, and we actively promote products that pay attention to those issues. Alongside that is our dedication to the health of the dogs and cats we share our homes with, and our commitment to honoring their needs while they are in our care. We respect people who choose a vegan diet for themselves, but must respectfully disagree with those who insist on their dogs and cats following the same restrictions. We hope that the information presented here will help you understand our position and reassure you that we are happy to help you navigate the world of pet foods so you can make the best choice for the animals in your care.*

**Compassion and Ethics begin at home.** The foundation of our responsibility to our companion animals is to care for them in a way that honors their inherent needs. This includes doing our best to feed them a healthy, species-appropriate diet.

We believe in feeding pets so that they thrive. It's important to understand that the requirements that allow commercial pet foods to carry the "nutritionally complete" designation are minimal and in no way reflect the quality of the ingredients. Processed diets can be made from substandard ingredients and still be ok'd for sale because they have demonstrated that they are adequate for survival in the short term. They do not have to demonstrate that they promote optimal health.

**Cats must eat meat.** Cats are obligate carnivores. This means that the nutrients their bodies need must be from animal sources. They are not designed to eat a plant-based diet; their teeth, digestive chemistry, organ function, and intestinal tract tell us this. Their health will suffer if they are forced to subsist on a plant-based diet. It is unethical to insist that a cat eat a vegan diet.

**Dogs should eat meat.** Dogs have adapted to inadequate diets for as long as they've been living under the care of humans despite the fact that their physiology is quite clear in communicating that a plant-based diet is not ideal. While they can manage on a carefully balanced vegetarian diet, it provides only a thin layer of "health insurance" if their body is asked to deal with a serious illness. This is due in part to the dependence of synthetically derived nutrients to supplement a plant based diet that can be 50% unusable by your dog.

**But is a vegan diet bad for my pet?** The protein from plants is harder for dogs and cats to assimilate. They do not have the same type of enzymes in their saliva that we do which begin the breakdown of starches. Cats in particular barely have any amylase, the enzyme needed to break down starches (which only come from plants). Grains used in commercial vegan diets contribute to chronic inflammation in many dogs and cats, which can lead to serious illness, including cancer. The splitting (or fractionating) of plant-based ingredients is very common and results in another layer of processing. By the time your pet eats the food they are completely dependent on the additional synthetic vitamins and minerals for their survival.



## Product Suggestions

These are our top choices for ethically sourced commercial foods:

### RAW DIETS:

Dexter's Naturals, Smallbatch, Raw Bistro.

### FRESH-COOKED:

Smallbatch, Open Farm, My Perfect Pet.

### FREEZE-DRIED or DEHYDRATED:

Smallbatch, Grandma Lucy's, The Honest Kitchen, Open Farm.

### DRY:

Orijen, Acana, Open Farm, Square Egg (vegetarian for dogs)

### Supplements

- Answers Raw Goat Milk
- Answers Raw Cow Kefir
- Mr Ros Marine Phytoplankton
- Animal Essentials Seaweed Calcium
- Herbal Energetics Pet Boost
- Sustenance Herbs Canine Wellness
- Green Mush
- Liquid Health K9 Vegetarian Glucosamine



For cats a vegan diet is unequivocally bad. There are some dogs that for medical reasons seem to do better on a vegetarian diet. Most commonly we see negative results in dogs & cats fed a vegan diet. Some of the symptoms include: poor coat and hair loss, bone & tooth loss, compulsive eating of dirt, carpet, paper, and trash. Most often the deficiencies of the diet don't show up right away, but weaken the system over years.

The *source* of the ingredients is also important when evaluating commercial pet food diets. In 2007 thousands of dogs and cats died due to adulterated grain & legume products from China. The adulteration was to make the powdered ingredients appear to contain higher levels of protein when tested... the "guaranteed analysis" on the label is a laboratory test, not a reflection of the quality of ingredients. Using highly processed ingredients increases the chance for adulteration, and vegan dry foods require large amounts of commercially processed grains and legumes.

**How can I feed an ethically produced meat-based diet?** The most ethical and sustainable way to feed your pet is with a locally made, regionally sourced, meat-based fresh diet. Buying regionally sourced meat has a smaller ecological footprint than buying imported grains.

If choosing a dry food diet you should use the same criteria we do when deciding which companies are the best of the best. Our top choices source close to their facilities from family-owned farms.

**I just can't bring myself to buy meat-based products, but I love my pet...**

**what do I do?** You can feed your dog a homemade vegetarian (not vegan) diet based on well-regarded veterinary recipes. It is very easy to feed an unbalanced home diet, especially without animal products. The nutrients in a homemade vegan diet can easily be 50% unusable by your pet if supplementation is not added.

Diets for cats require some animal-based ingredients such as fish oil to fulfill their nutritional needs (vitamin A, for example, which cats cannot convert from the beta-carotene in plant sources).

One source for at-home preparations is the book *Dr. Pitcairn's New Complete Guide To Natural Health for Dogs & Cats* by Richard Pitcairn DVM.

You can also have a diet designed for your pet for a fairly reasonable price. We have several links on our website for such services, including [petdiets.com](http://petdiets.com) and [healthydogworkshop.com](http://healthydogworkshop.com). This is especially important if your pet has any medical conditions.

We do have one dry dog food that is vegetarian, Square Egg, that uses eggs and whey as protein sources.

**If you wish to feed your dog a dry vegan food you should add natural supplements to optimize it and top their food with eggs (which can be purchased from animal-friendly sources like your local farmers market), and raw cultured dairy (which can be purchased at Dexter's Deli).**