



Wilmette Pet Center

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Facts about raw bones

It's a cliché as old as time: dogs chew bones. From Pluto sneaking a bone from a larger dog to images of dogs burying their bones for later, it's a concept that's part of owning dogs. It's the most natural thing for them to chew on, too; their wild counter parts regularly chew on the bones of their prey.



It's important to know which bones are safe for your dog to chew: You only want to give your dog raw bones, fresh or frozen. NEVER GIVE COOKED BONES. Raw bones are digestible while cooked bones not only lack that nutrition, but they are brittle and can break or shatter.

There are two types of raw bones that you can feed your dog:



Edible bones: these are softer, non-weight bearing bones of birds, like chicken necks, wings, and turkey necks. These bones are a source of calcium, phosphorous, and trace minerals, important nutrients needed by dogs, especially growing pups. They are loaded with cartilage, which is high in glucosamine, that compound that helps keep joints nice and flexible.

Recreation bones: These are the larger, denser bones, like beef or bison femurs. These bones are not meant to be chewed up and swallowed, so they do not supply much in the way of nutrition, although bones with marrow will add some calories and fat to their diet. They do provide mental stimulation and help keep your dog busy.

Benefits of raw bones:

Raw bones are a source of vital calcium and magnesium, in the ration their body needs. The pure meat and marrow are full of protein, nutrition, and enzymes. They provide a great deal of mental satisfaction, stress relief, and enjoyment. They are also a perfect way to keep them occupied when you want to keep them quiet.

They are also a great way to naturally keep their teeth clean! As they chew, the action is like a good tooth brush and flossing, and the movement of their tongue helps spread saliva and those enzymes around the mouth; these help break up plaque and reduce the risk of gum disease. Giving bones on a regular basis keep teeth healthy and reduces the need to take your dog to the vet for cleanings!



The naturally clean teeth of an avid chewer

Feeding raw bones is also, oddly enough, good for helping dogs with issues with anal gland problems. Some dogs need to have these glands expressed on a regular basis; the undigested content of the bone helps firm the stools; firm poops naturally expresses the anal glands when the dog goes to the bathroom.

How to introduce raw bones:

Slowly introduce your dog to bones so they can get used to them and learn how to properly chew on them. Start slowly, giving the bone for 5 or 10 minutes and then taking it away. Build up their time with the bone over the next week or two until they are accustomed to it. Always supervise them with any chew, especially new ones. It can take some dogs a few times before they understand that this is a new chew for them.

How to give frozen bones:

Important note: Because the bone is raw, you should practice safe meat handling techniques: Never give them a raw bone on a surface that cannot easily be cleaned, such as carpets and couches; keep it to a tiled area or you can designate a special, bone-blanket that can be easily washed after enjoying their treat. Wash your hands and any surfaces they've touched after handling.

Two ways to do it:

- 1) Let your dog chew on the bone for an hour or two. Remove the bone, wash it off, and refreeze. You can do this 3 to 4 times in a row.
- 2) Let them chew on the bone all day long, in one sitting (with proper supervision, of course). This is a great way for a dog to cool off on a hot summer day, or keep them busy when you have company coming over.

By the time they're done with this, they probably have removed any taste and nutrition from the bone, so discard the bone.

The controversy

Bones, like raw diets, are one of the most controversial topics with dogs. Many vets are not fans of giving dogs bones, as they see dogs come in with damaged and cracked teeth from chewing

inappropriately sized bones and intestinal damage from feeding the wrong kinds of bones. Dogs can also choke on large pieces, especially if they gulp them down.

But bones are one of the most natural things for your dog to chew on; it's a vital source of nutrition for their wild counterparts.

"Bones from prey are required by wolves as the major source of calcium and phosphorus for the maintenance of their own skeletons. Bones, in fact, are a surprisingly well-balanced food for canids" (Mech, L.D. 2003. Wolves: Behavior, Ecology, and Conservation. pg125).

Wholistic vets are big fans of raw bones; given properly, bones are such a natural source of nutrition and dental health. Dr Becker points out:

"Dogs in the wild have beautiful teeth and healthy gums. This is because the prey they eat requires a lot of chewing, and the sinewy composition helps to clean each entire tooth."

Important note: Anything your dog puts into their mouth can present a choking hazard, from frozen bones to dry kibble (thousands of dogs are rushed to the vet for this very problem).

Always supervise your dog when giving them anything to chew.

Keep a few things in mind:

- Only feed raw bones; cooked, baked, and boiled bones can splinter and are not a safe chew for dogs. Pressure cooked bones are the exception, as they are soft enough to be eaten safely.
- Feed an appropriate sized bone to your dog; bones cannot be too large, but they can be too small. Chose a bone that is more than twice the size of their mouth, so they are not able to get their mouth all the way around it. Smaller pieces can splinter and break off, presenting a choking hazard.
- Remove any bones and pieces that break off.
- Like anything dogs chew, you need to monitor your dog when they are chewing bones.
- While bones can do a great deal to improve your dog's dental health, pets with severe dental problems or very weak teeth can have problems with larger, harder bones. If you have any concerns about your dog's teeth, contact your vet.
- Know your dog; if they are a powerful, aggressive chewer, bones might not be the best chew for them.



Give an appropriate sized bone for you dog; you cannot give them too large of a bone

As always, discuss any issues or questions about raw bones with your vet.

When given properly, under supervision, raw bones are one of the best, most natural chews and treat you can give your dog. It'll help keep their teeth clean, provide a source of calcium, keeps them occupied and relieves stress.