

A fistful of dog food – raw feeding observations in Hungary

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Introduction and Goals: The feeding RMBDs (so called raw meat-based diets) to dogs and cats reached significant popularity in the past few years in Hungary. In our study, the most common motivations of feeding RMBDs were analyzed. Our goals were to gain insight into the common reasons of feeding this specific unconventional diet, where/when the guardians of dogs learned about it, what were the most important motivations to choose RMBDs. Once the choice was made, how do guardians find precise recipes and feeding guides and after using the diet for some time how satisfied were they with the outcomes.

Materials and method: a standardized questionnaire was filled out by guardians of dogs (regardless of their pets' diet) via internet. 767 people filled in the questionnaire covering all areas of Hungary. Based on diet we classified dogs into 3 groups: 1. Feeding only RMBD (NY), 2. Mixed diet (which can contain RMBD or other types of food) (V), Non-RMBD feeders (E). We had 438 responders from group NY, 91 from group V and 38 from group E. Statistical analysis was performed using Statistica 13 (StatSoft) software.

Results and discussion

First decision making. Regarding the source of first information about nutrition, among non-RMBD feeders the most common source of advice was the veterinarian (38%), however among RMBD feeders, first information came from facebook groups (34%) or "from a friend" (31%). This shows that info about raw meat-based diets mostly reaches guardians via non-scientific and non-professionally educated routes. Meanwhile, non-RMBD feeders are more likely to follow diets based on professional recommendations by qualified personnel. The most important motivation behind making a diet-choice was expecting the diet to be healthy. There was no statistical difference between the 3 groups in this regard, which reflected that most guardians of dogs were health-conscious and aware of the importance of the diet.

75% of RMBD feeders put emphasis on raw food being the most natural diet, which was important for only 10% of non-RMBD feeders, and 47% of mixed diet feeders. The top 10 important factors RMBD feeders mentioned when making the diet-choice were (in decreasing order): the food is healthy, natural, building a proper muscle mass/weight-control, having an exact knowledge of the diet constituents, good digestibility, good hair-coat, dental calculus prevention, the dog is more energetic, the dog is a carnivore and needs to be fed like its ancestors and raw food improves the immune-system. For non-raw feeders the top 10 important factors

influencing the diet-choice were (in decreasing order): feeding is quick and easy, easy to buy the food, the diet is surely nutritionally well balanced and complete, having exact knowledge of the diet constituents, the food is safe, this is what my dogs likes, improves gut-health and digestibility, provides nice hair-coat, good muscle mass/weight control and the food is healthy.

Detailed feeding recommendations. For vast majority of the raw feeders facebook discussion groups were the primary (82 %) and for 13% the only information source about detailed feeding regimen. RMBD feeders declared that they had received diet composition recommendations from acquaintance (33%), scientific articles (32%), specific product/brand pages (29%), reader/user review sites and books (26%) and 23% from their vet. The non-raw feeders primarily identified the veterinarian as a source of detailed information (53%). RMBDs lack high quality scientific studies documenting their usefulness. Guardians first hear about raw diets from non-scientific and non-professional sources of social network groups and friends, additionally detailed feeding recommendation sources are mostly the same. It is worth noting that many RMBD feeders point to scientific articles as source of information, however, the authors found very limited access to such articles. Tracking down articles cited as "scientific resources" in the discussion groups, we found these to be professionally formatted quotes from social media groups abroad reflecting personal opinions and not published in peer-reviewed studies.

Complacency. From the aspect of complacency there was a significant difference between the groups: 84% of RMBD users were fully satisfied with their feeding practice, while in other groups satisfaction ranged from moderate to high. During the study, the authors followed numerous social media raw feeding discussions groups to gain firsthand information about satisfaction feedback and found high number of posts mostly reporting diarrhoea problems. These concerns were not reflected in the responses to our questionnaire, which may reflect an almost cult-like typical closed-group dynamics reporting only positive outcomes to "outsiders". An important raw-feeding benefit mentioned by many is weight-control and good appetite of dogs on RMBDs. Details of social media recommended RMBDs are outside the scope of this abstract, however it needs to be mentioned, that the recommended daily portions (e.g. 2% of body weight) are exceedingly low and nutritionally inadequate in many cases.

Biography: Krisztina Kungl graduated at the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Wrocław University of Environmental and Life Sciences,

Poland. In the Department of Internal Medicine and Clinic of Diseases of Horses, Dogs and Cats she was responsible teacher for Companion animal clinical nutrition and fodder hygiene. She completed her PhD research on the Effects of dietary supplementation of ω 3 and ω 6 fatty acids on hair coat and skin in the healthy dog, which resulted in a worldwide patent of the

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She currently holds a post at the Department of Clinical Pathology and Oncology, University of Veterinary Medicine, Budapest, Hungary, where she continues nutrition consultation and formulation of individualized home-made diets for dogs and cats.

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