

Raw to the Bone!

By: Inna Shekhtman, Owner Red Dog Deli

"A hound dog found a bone and held it tightly in his mouth. He growled and scowled at anyone who attempted to take it away. Off into the woods he went to bury his prize. When he came to a stream, he trotted over the footbridge and happened to glance into the water. He saw his own reflection. Thinking it was another dog with a bigger bone, he growled and scowled at it. The reflection growled and scowled back. "I'll get THAT bone too," thought the greedy dog, and he snapped his sharp teeth at the image in the water. Alas, his own big bone fell with a splash, out of sight, the moment he opened his mouth to bite!"—Aesop's Fables



Dogs and bones seem like a natural combination. Watching a dog chew a nice meaty bone is almost hypnotic. A dog will spend hours gnawing on the bone with addictive vigour, enthusiasm and absolute focus, relishing each moment as if this was the ultimate purpose of their life. Historically, wolves - the wild relatives of the dog - are frequently observed chewing on the bones of their prey as part of their normal feeding ritual. Despite all of this, opinions on feeding dogs bones differ between owners, breeders, and veterinarians. Some vehemently caution against feeding bones, because of choking and other potential hazards. Others like Dr. Ian Billinghurst, proclaim raw meaty bones as the ultimate dog diet. To add to the confusion, the variety of bones available for today's consumer has grown in dizzying proportions to include myriads of smoked, green, dehydrated and raw products. I hope to offer you a bit of insight into the world of bones to help with choosing the best option for your dog's chewing enjoyment.

From a young age, dogs demonstrate an almost compulsive need to chew things. I am certain every dog owner has lost at least one expensive pair of shoes, piece of furniture or some other valuable item to this quirky impulse. This seemingly annoying habit actually serves an underlying purpose for our canine companions. Specifically, the right bones can offer numerous health benefits for dogs, including a very comprehensive natural dental plan as well as a natural source of calcium.

Dogs have a set of solid molars and extremely strong jaws that enable them to chew and crush bones. The chewing action helps them exercise and strengthen their jaws, and at the same time scrape the tartar and plaque from their teeth and stimulate their gums. In combination with the naturally acidity in the dog's mouth, this significantly diminishes the risk of dental problems such as tooth decay. While some kibble and other commercial products promise similar results, they are not as effective as a good raw bone. Specifically, while chewing on kibble may initially clean some plaque from your dog's teeth, it also absorbs the acid in the mouth and leaves

behind particulates of food that lodge between the teeth and offer a perfect breeding ground for new bacteria.

Bones are also an essential part of the diet, especially for dogs on raw food. Raw bones are abundant in the mineral called calcium and are critical in maintaining a mineral balance in your dog's diet. For example, if your dog usually consumes 900 grams (2 lbs) of food per day, then you can feed them 450 g (1 lb) of consumable bone and 450 g (1 lb) of ground meat and veggies. A shortage of calcium in the diet can lead to significant health issues, so if feeding bones to your dog is not an option, then consider adding supplements to make up for this dietary shortfall. In addition to the physical health, chewing bones contributes to the improvement of the dog's mental health by helping relieve their frustration, anxiety and boredom with hours of chewing pleasure!

There is a legitimate concern with any bone you feed of your dog choking on a bone or bone fragments getting lodged in the digestive tract. It is important to take a moment to address what we can do to minimize the risk of harm to your dog, while allowing them to satisfy their natural needs and inclinations:

- ❖ **Only feed RAW bone.** With the exception of load bearing leg bones, raw bones are fairly soft and pliable. Cooking changes the physical properties of the bones, making them dry and brittle, less digestible and more likely to create sharp splinters when broken or crushed.
- ❖ Give your dog bones that are appropriate to its size and chewing habits. The bone should be big enough that it cannot be swallowed whole and it requires your dog to chew it into pieces.
- ❖ Always supervise your dog with bones, and be prepared to take it away if it becomes small enough to be swallowed, especially with a dog new to bones (have a treat handy so you can do a fair exchange).
- ❖ Bones can be messy and cause damage to your property when not properly contained. Select a safe location where your dog can enjoy chewing in peace and quiet. Cover this spot with a blanket or a towel (urinary pads work great for this since they absorb any liquids and mess from the bones without letting it soak through). Teach your dog to stay in this area when they are chewing. If your dog tries to drag the bone somewhere else, patiently take it from them, and return it to the designated area, and get them to lay down in the spot before giving them back the bone. Your dog will soon get the point.

Bones such as chicken backs, chicken necks, wings, turkey necks, some knuckle bones, and other bones composed primarily of soft cartilage and tissue are considered consumable bones because they are soft enough for the dog to swallow and digest. These bones are fed as part of the raw diet and will frequently be chewed up, consumed and digested by your dog. Recreational bones such as leg femurs are too hard for the dog to crush and break up into edible pieces, but provide endless hours of teeth-cleaning entertainment.

What about other bone products? Smoked bones are essentially cooked, and therefore can splinter into sharp pieces, and should be fed with supervision and care. The smoking process

also destroys any nutritional benefits of the bone. Other bone products such as green dental bones, pig's ears and rawhide bones are equally likely to cause intestinal obstructions and other choking problems. Many of these products include ingredients such as preservatives that are less than desirable for your dog's overall health. Though manufacturers claim these product to be entirely digestible, intact bones have been excised from dog's intestines after causing intestinal distress. If raw bones are absolutely not an option for your dog, choose products that are softer and more flexible such as bully-sticks.

Whatever your situation, remember that for your dog, chewing is not an option any more than breathing or eating. Whether they chew on raw bones, sticks, or toys, this need has to be fulfilled for their physical and mental health. And a good bone, just as your dog's health, is a terrible thing to waste!

