

Converting to Natural Feeding

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If your dog is a puppy less than 12 weeks of age, you simply shift, "cold turkey". No need for reading this chapter, as far as your puppy is concerned...

Problems to avoid when converting

If your dog is older than 12 weeks, it has had time to adjust (or actually *maladjust*) to an unnatural diet and a sudden change could cause some problems you just as well can avoid. Some of those problems include:

- The dog's stomach has not re-gained enough **elasticity and muscle strength** to handle the much bigger volume of a natural meal. This can lead to weight loss (the dog does not get enough food, even though it appears to eat much more than it ever ate kibble) if the dog eats with moderation. It can also, in rare cases, lead to bloat (a "turned stomach" - an extremely dangerous condition caused by the stomach getting twisted, so no passage of material to or from both the oesophagus and the intestine is possible; this will most often lead to the digestion process

**Excerpt from Mogens Eliassen's book:
"Raw Food For Dogs - the Ultimate Guide for Dog Owners"**

being brought to a halt, and the food will become subject to bacterial growth that quickly develops gases that make the dog's tummy appear like a balloon). The risk of bloat is particularly high for large breeds and for dogs that have only been fed many small meals all their lives - and then suddenly get to eat too much with no rest afterwards.

- ◆ The **enzyme chemistry** in the stomach and the pancreas has adjusted itself to handle kibble - and the dog will hence not digest the natural food very well. It takes some time (a few weeks, typically) before these organs will "learn" that they need to produce some different enzymes because the task they have to accomplish has changed. This is particularly the case for dogs that have been fed exclusively the same kind of food for a long time, or if the food has been high in grain products (please check the article "[Grain or not in a dog's diet?](#)" for more on grains).
- The dog will **not eat** the food! This will normally be a matter of patience - after 4-6 fast days, most dogs *will* eat it... and once they realise how good it is, they will adjust their preferences quite dramatically.
- The dog will **overeate** - and greatly increase the odds for a "turned stomach".
- The dog will go through a **detoxification period** that could make it quite sick if you force a dramatic change on it (please see the article "[How you can avoid detoxification problems when shifting your dog's diet...](#)" for more on this.) When the dog has been deprived from access to fundamental nutrients for a long time, the body will substitute other chemicals in those vacant positions. However, when "the real thing" becomes available, the body will try to rid itself of all the not-quite-right chemicals. It will do so as quickly as the supply allows. But that will also release all those "wrong" chemicals into the blood, all at the same time, and this can cause symptoms of poisoning.
- The dog will vomit the food in a few minutes after ingesting it! You can be 99% certain that this is caused by your having fed the dog in the past a predictable times, so you have created a **conditional reflex** in the stomach for expected the "old" food, thus preparing the wrong kinds of enzymes for the digestion. Please understand that this is not to be blamed on the raw food, but on your own past habitual feeding schedule! (Please also check the article "[Why feeding your dog a consistent diet 'on time' is a bad idea...](#)" for more on conditioning.)

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Remember that the volume factor alone is significant. Natural food takes up about three times the volume of kibble - and it takes much longer to digest, so you will feed less often, typically only half the number of meals you would do on kibble. This will double the average meal size - which is already three times the volume it would be on kibble, so the typical natural meal will be 6 times as large as what the dog was used to from its frequent small kibble meals. So, in general, the stomach will need much more muscle strength in order to handle a full natural meal.

The chemical aspects, however, are no less dramatic - just more difficult to understand for most people. Let it suffice here to explain that all kinds of cooked food, particularly when rich in grain products, will call for a neutral or slightly alkaline pH for the enzymes to provide an effective digestion. Raw meat and raw vegetables will call for a very acidic pH to be effectively digested, and they will need production of completely different enzymes that are not effective at high pH levels. (More about this shortly in the section "[Mixing the food](#)".)

Losing weight is not generally a major problem if the dog is healthy. If it is overweight, it might actually be an outright advantage, you would think. However, because the reason is that the dog does not digest the food properly, you can have nutrient deficiency problems associated with this. When certain nutrients are lacking for the body's metabolism, it could cause so much stress on the immune system that your dog would get sick, not because of the natural food, but because it did not have the strength to fight off an infection as effectively as it should. It is an unnecessary risk to take. All it takes to prevent it is that you introduce the natural food gradually, over a period of time that typically will be a few weeks.

In the next sections, we will discuss how you do this.

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Different approaches - pros and cons

The possible problems are not simple to solve all at the same time. For some dogs, one of them might be more profound than some of the others, so the specific solution you want to choose should depend on your dog and the feeding history it has had. Let's first discuss some of the option you have as a responsible dog owner.

(To be continued)