

Mogens Eliassen:  
"The Wolf's Natural Diet – a Feeding Guide for Your Dog?"

**Invention of the pet dog**

It is actually not until just a few hundred years ago that this picture started to change.... This was roughly the time when man started using dogs for purposes other than hunting companions or herding. It was when the "pet dog" was created. This development goes back about 4-500 years – particularly with female members of noble families wanting smaller dogs for their companionship and entertainment. These "lap dogs" were now, for the first time in the history of the wolf, totally disconnected from their original food sources and completely dependent on man-made choices for what was adequate for them to eat.

There is no doubt that the general care for these dogs would be based partially on *tradition* – which would ensure a *somewhat* adequate diet consisting of at least *some* meat and bones and organs. For some time. But it is also evident that human standards of what is to be considered "good food" would play a significant role in many cases – and increasingly so, the further the more this development progressed, so the departure from a natural diet would gradually increase.

Finally, once all connections with the original food sources were forgotten and lost in oblivion, the dog's ability to sustain life through scavenging, combined with the financial cost of certain foods, would cause a major deviation from what a wolf would choose to eat in a natural environment. In many European communities, meat was expensive. Even *people* could not afford to eat it, so there would not be many opportunities for the *dog* to get much of it either. This is particularly true during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Some breeds have had a worse time with this than others, but very few have totally avoided the impact of this.

There are two main things that can happen under these circumstances, in terms of the dog's nutritional needs:

1. The dog *will* develop a **tolerance towards certain inappropriate foods**, thus widening its ability to digest and possibly utilize new food sources;
2. The dog *may* develop serious **problems in regards to utilizing, even tolerating, original and natural foods!** And those problems will *not* be unveiled because the dogs do not get any natural food...

Let's discuss those possibilities in greater detail.

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**Tolerance to unnatural foods**

First, the tolerance factor. Let's assume that we have a breed of dog in a society that has potatoes as its main food source, and only occasionally meat. What would a dog get to eat here? Most likely not much besides potatoes and cooked bones.... Some garbage too, possibly.

What if dogs had a difficult time living on that kind of diet? Well, they could all die – but chances are that some might be able to handle it a little better than others. Maybe even long enough to reproduce....

The point is that this kind of change of the available food *will* exert an *evolutionary selection pressure* on this breed of the species – and it will quickly result in a breeding that favours those individuals that can tolerate this kind of diet, at least well enough to sustain reproduction. They might not be overly healthy – but that would not count, as man would take care of them and they would not have to be measured against the wolf's ability to fend for itself in the wild. (In fact, man would have no standard for comparison, so all that would matter would be that these dogs were now bred on the basis of them tolerating a diet that was no longer optimal, but maybe even outright deficient.)



Like wolves, dogs will eat just about anything when they are hungry enough. They do not study nutrition or read labels; they simply follow their instincts in a bid for survival, based on what is available. With no natural food sources around, they will make do with what man serves... And if they don't, they don't have many chances of passing on their genes to future generations....

Please note that "tolerating a diet" does not mean, "thriving on a diet".

*(To be continued)*

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