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## Is it OK to Feed a Dog Table Scraps?

**Since the cave man's time, man has fed his dogs with his own garbage. Modern times, with kibble, are no different. The nature of the garbage has changed, though...**

**And so has the answer to the question.**

### **Learning from the wolf and from history**

Regardless the emotional comfort people might get from continuing doing what they are used to, a past mistake is *not* rectified by being repeated.

As discussed also in detail in my book ["The Wolf's Natural Diet – a Feeding Guide for Your Dog?"](#), wolves will scavenge. They are truly opportunistic eaters. However, scavenging is *not* their main *preference* for food, and it does not represent their main source of food either, except in areas where simply no other food is available.

Also, it is unknown to us to which degree this scavenging supplies the wolf with any valuable or important nutrition. It might – and it might not. The only thing we know for sure is that it does not *hurt* the wolf, and that wolves can indeed *survive* on scavenging alone.

Despite dogs being the same species, they are not living under the wolf's conditions. One important consequence of this is that their overall intake of food is much lower. This constitutes a problem, as it does not give the dog the same margin for tolerance of low-value foods that only supply energy but not many nutrients. The wolf can afford to consume a lot of food with marginal nutritional value, because he simply burns up the excess energy, and by eating more, he accumulates those sparse minerals in sufficient amounts for his body. Mind you, wolves exercise some 16-18 hours every day.... Because of the dogs' lower energy consumption, we should expect them to require food of a higher nutritional quality than what the wolf can make do with.

During the domestication process, dogs have most likely been fed the caveman's garbage – which was *not* his valuable cooked food, or the vegetables he exerted great energy gathering for himself. His main waste was the guts and bones from his kill.

It was not until some 4-500 years ago that the pet dog concept was developed. This constitutes a very short time of the overall domestication; in fact, maximum some 3%... In evolutionary terms, this is definitely not enough to develop anything more than maximum some *tolerance* to unnatural foods.

## **Defining “table scraps”**

If table scraps are made up of fat, cartilage, and bone with some meat left on, which you trim off the steaks and other food you prepare for yourself, so you can give this to the dog *raw*, I see no reason why such table scraps should not be part of the dog’s menu. They simply become part of the raw diet. They are created during the *preparation* of the human meal, though, so a more adequate term might be “kitchen counter scraps”.

For most people, however, table scraps are the *leftovers* from their own meals. These are made up of primarily cooked foods, occasionally also some raw salad or other vegetable supplements. These leftovers will generally contain very little meat, if any, but typically a lot of carbohydrate-rich vegetables, cooked grains, and gravy. This typically includes a lot of cooked fats, which are just as unhealthy for your dog as they are for you....

## **What are the benefits?**

For the person, the benefits of feeding table scraps are mainly financial – and: it is convenient.

For the dog, the value strongly depends on what kind of table scraps we are talking about. However, regardless of how those scraps are composed, the fact that they generally are *cooked* constitutes a serious upper limit for the nutritional value, since cooking will destroy many valuable nutrients – and create none. However, cooking of plant material will also make *whatever nutrients are left* easier to access and utilize for the dog. This is particularly true for minerals.

This means that, at best, table scraps are a cheap and convenient source of energy, *possibly* also a valuable source of certain minerals. Potassium is an important example of such a mineral that generally is sparse in meat yet comparably abundant in most vegetables. There are many more, subject to which vegetables we talk about, where they are grown, and which meaty foods you have access to! Ignoring the potential value of vegetables, including cooked vegetables, as good sources of certain minerals, is simply incompetent. But, without some additional research and some more specific details about the exact foods you have available, it is also impossible to give any meaningful and standard guidelines for this. There are simply too many critical variables.

## **What are the disadvantages and liabilities?**

Dogs do not derive a lot of nutritional value from raw vegetables, as the cellulose in the plant fibers typically follows the poop out again, including whatever good value might be contained inside the cellulose plant cell walls. Nevertheless, dogs do derive *some* value also from raw plant foods, although it is significantly less than the 90-95% they digest from meat and animal fat. It is incorrect to state that dogs have “no value” from vegetables, though, regardless how popular such an opinion might be among fanatic “prey-model” feeders.

The main problem with table scraps is that, subject to what exactly they are, they rarely constitute anything but cheap energy fillers that literally take up room for more valuable foods. This leaves a potential risk for malnourishment, if the remaining food sources are of marginal value.

### **What is recommended?**

In the case of “kitchen counter scraps”, I see no problem letting such food wastes become dog food. They are valuable for the dog, and they can easily become part of an overall meal plan of well-balanced raw foods.

For ordinary table scraps, however, I suggest being more careful, because such foods generally have lower value for the dog than raw foods, in terms of nutrients, as many of them are destroyed by heating. Most dogs *tolerate* cooked foods well, though, but that does not mean that such foods are *valuable*.

It also doesn't count that dogs might be *attracted* to such cooked foods – those foods were not available during evolution when the dog's instincts were developed.

I do not feel good about putting any specific limits on how much such low-value food you can give any dog. Neither do I feel it is warranted to whip up some fanatic hysteria about it. I know from many years of experience that most dogs handle table scraps very well, particularly when fed in moderation. This is, of course, what we should expect, considering that dogs have been bred for centuries to tolerate it!

The problem is that the possible consequences are subject to other parameters as well. If you, in general, feed your dog a super diet, then even a significant amount of valueless foods *might* not hurt. Besides, not all table scraps are valueless, as I pointed out, particularly for the cooked vegetables.

But if you feed your dog a diet that is only borderline “good”, then reducing the valuable nutrients by another 30% is simply not a responsible option.

This is why you won't find any specific recommendations in my book [“Raw Food for Dogs – the Ultimate Reference for Dog Owners”](#) in regards to using table scraps. I simply do not want to promote that notion of continuing feeding our dogs garbage. But I also don't see why a responsible raw feeder should throw away some valuable leftovers that *could* constitute a reasonable meal supplement for the dog! That decision has to be based on an individual judgment, founded on a thorough understanding of the specific situation. And classifying all table scraps as “table scraps” is not going to suffice in terms of required knowledge for making an informed decision on this!

The problem is that “table scraps” is simply not defined well enough to warrant any blanket recommendation. Even if they were, in most cases, the benefits will remain dubious, whereas the disadvantages are obvious.

Let me illustrate with two examples:

1. Feeding your dog as much as 30% of its diet in the form of some cooked rice or pasta you just made too much of for your own dinner, is not acceptable in accordance with my standards. Please throw that cheap crap into the garbage where it belongs! It is 95% carbohydrate, with negligible additional value.

You can consider this nothing but “energy fill”. If you choose to feed such cheap calories, be aware that you now might have a nutrient deficiency to fill up with good foods, in order to compensate. If you generally feed your dog well, this might not be a problem. But if you are one of those who think that chicken necks and backs constitute “a balanced diet of raw meaty bones”, you might be heading for some serious vet bills...

2. If you made a stew with all kinds of “good stuff”, possibly including some vegetables, then there should not be any problem in feeding that to the dog, as long as it does not become a daily habit to feed the dog this way! However, this is still *not* a blanket recommendation from my side. Yes, the risk you incur in doing so *might* be completely negligible if you have good check on balancing your dog’s diet well, with lots of valuable raw ingredients of different nature. But, *no*, that risk *could* become unacceptable, if you are seriously limited in your ability to provide a balanced and varied raw diet in general. **The prime exception will be that you are aware of some significant mineral deficiencies in the foods you generally can get for your dog, and you deliberately supplement those through cooked vegetables you make plenty of, as you have similar needs for those minerals as your dog has! This makes you a very rare person, though – but a person I want to commend for doing exactly this!**

Overall, trying to come up with a simple answer to the question of feeding table scraps or not is subject to these wise words of Albert Einstein:

**“Make everything as simple as possible, *but not simpler.*”**

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