

HEALTHY DIET



ALICE CROOK/PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN

Feeding the family pet

Smee likes to use her cat Kong. Being overweight is a common problem in pets and can cause, or make worse, many health problems (arthritis, diabetes, heart disease). Kong feeders are available for both dogs and cats. The pet does some slight work to obtain the food, which slows eating and relieves boredom.

It can be challenging to decide from among the many options



Dr. Marguerite Cameron

Providing our furry friends with a nutritionally balanced diet is important for their quality of life and is part of responsible pet ownership. Just like people, our dogs and cats have specific nutritional requirements that must be met for them to grow strong and healthy as puppies and kittens, and maintain their vitality as adults and seniors. There is a great variety of commercial dietary options available, including grocery store staples, brands exclusive to veterinary clinics, and pet store diets with an "all natural" claim.

Faced with these choices, it can be difficult to decide on an option. Your best consultant for this dietary dilemma is your pet's veterinarian, with his or her understanding of animal physiology and knowledge of animal nutrition.

Your dog or cat's age and stage of life, breed, size, lifestyle and current health status are important considerations when selecting an appropriate diet for your pet.

Puppies and kittens have spe-



MAGGIE CAMERON/PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN

Ripley Superdog is shown with a favourite treat. Carrot sticks make a tasty, easy treat that is packed with fibre and low in calories.

At a glance

A properly chosen commercial pet food will provide your beloved family pet with a balanced and nutritious diet that will help to promote and maintain a good quality of life.

Ask your veterinarian about which foods are best suited for your pet's specific needs.

While homemade raw food diets might seem like a healthy and more "natural" alternative to commercially prepared pet foods, these types of diets can pose significant health risks to you, your family, and your pet, so please consult with your veterinarian or a board certified veterinary nutritionist before choosing this option.

cific nutritional needs that are different from their adult counterparts. As pets get older and less active, their caloric needs decrease.

Age-related conditions, such as arthritis or kidney disease, may require special dietary formulations - commercial veterinary diets are available to meet these needs.

Other important factors include economics, your pet's preferences and your personal beliefs about what is best for your furred family member.

In the face of pet food recalls, rising pet food prices and changing personal philosophies, an increasing number of pet owners are choosing the homemade route. However, homemade diets, especially those that contain raw animal products, raise safety concerns for both animal and human health. One is the risk of nutritional imbalance which is very common with home-prepared diets. Claims of nutritional adequacy in commercial pet foods are subject to national regulation and must be supported by laboratory testing; the same guarantee of complete nutrition cannot be made for homemade diets.

There is another important risk with homemade diets that include raw animal products, such as meats, organs, eggs and uncooked bones. This is the risk of exposure to disease-causing bacteria.

While there is no scientific evidence to support the reported benefits of raw diets, there are numerous documented cases of illness in people and pets from infections acquired through exposure to bacteria present in the raw foods.

Not only do the raw foods themselves pose a risk to pets, but the animal may shed the bacteria in its stool which can be a source of infection for people. Very young children, the elderly, and immune-compromised individuals are at particular risk for such infections.

The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association and the Public Health Agency of Canada have produced a joint position statement on the topic of raw food diets for pets at www.canadianveterinarians.net/documents/raw-food-diets-for-pets.

If, despite these drawbacks, you still wish to feed your pet a homemade diet, please enlist the help of your veterinarian or a board certified veterinary nutritionist who can provide you with a nutritionally balanced recipe and guidelines to help you maintain food safety.

Next month in Animal Talk: Electric underground fencing.

Dr. Marguerite Cameron is a council member of the P.E.I. Veterinary Medical Association, one of the member groups of the P.E.I. Companion Animal Welfare Initiative (CAWI). Animal Talk is a monthly column in The Guardian produced by CAWI, the goal of which is to improve the welfare of owned and un-owned companion animals on P.E.I. CAWI consists of the P.E.I. Humane Society, SpayAid, Cat Action Team, P.E.I. Veterinary Medical Association, P.E.I. Department of Agriculture and Forestry, P.E.I. 4-H and Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre at the Atlantic Veterinary College. Links to each of these groups are at gov.pe.ca/agriculture/CAWI. Readers are invited to send questions related to the well-being of owned and unowned companion animals to cawipei@gmail.com.

inside



Celebrating blues

Check out Doug Gallant review of Michael Jerome Browne's latest project, Sliding Delta.

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DID YOU know



Strategies for new pet owners

Lisa Spector of Care2.com has some suggestions on how to prevent failures when adopting pets:

Adopter's wife said, 'no' to Rat Terrier Jax.

Solution: Have a family meeting before adopting. Make sure the decision to adopt is a forever decision for all members in your household.

Bulldog is fearful and reactive to everything. Solution: Dog trainer Debbie Jacobs has a wealth of resources to help people be more effective in rehabilitating fearful/reactive dogs. Go to <http://fearful-dogs.com>. Source: <http://www.care2.com>.

WEIRD facts



1. Lips show a red or pink pigment because the skin is thinner and it's the underlying blood vessels that one is actually seeing.
2. The northern leopard frog swallows its prey using its eyes. It uses them to help push food down its throat by retracting them into its head.
3. For every human on Earth there are 1.6 million ants.
4. Russia has a larger surface area than Pluto. (Sources: <http://www.lifebuzz.com>, <http://www.buzzfeed.com>)

Happy endings



AARIKA DALTON/PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN

"Tori" was adopted from the PEIHS in September by Ricky and Aarika Dalton. Her name was soon changed to Pipsqueak (Squeak for short) because she "squeaks" instead of meowing for attention. According to Aarika and Ricky, "Squeak is growing like a weed and loves to play with toys. She particularly loves anything bathroom related - garbage, toilet and most of all the sink and running water. Pipsqueak has definitely made herself at home with us."

Clean IN A HURRY



10 Tips

Spring is finally here, and with it comes spring cleaning. Each day until March 31, The Guardian is providing "10 Cleaning Tasks You Can Totally Tackle In 5 Minutes" (www.housebeautiful.com/lifestyle/cleaning-tips/a3485/five-minute-cleaning-tips/).

Walk around with a lint roller.

This portable, versatile closet staple is a master at lifting dirt, crumbs, and dust from all of those spots you've let languish. Run it over a lampshade, the bottom of your purse, stuffed animals, and other hard-to-reach spots to spiff them up.