

If you thought store-bought kibble was the only way to feed your dog or cat, then you'd be mistaken. "One can make his or her own pet food at home, but it is a task that shouldn't be taken lightly," says Dr. Jerry Klein, chief veterinary officer at the American Kennel Club. "It will take a lot of dedication on the part of the owner, a lot of work and for some pets, may become quite expensive."

Before treating your pet to a homemade diet, Dr. Jamie Richardson, medical chief of staff at Small Door Veterinary, says it's crucial to talk to your vet first. "Certain guidelines must be followed to ensure the diet for your pet is complete and balanced," she explains. "Any pet owner that has decided to make a home-cooked diet for their pet should first consult their veterinarian to ensure there are no underlying medical issues that may make certain types of diets less desirable for your pet."

Curious what else you should know before putting your pet on a homemade diet? We asked both veterinary nutrition experts for advice.

Related: [Here's Exactly How Martha Stewart Makes Homemade Dog Food](#)

Learn which foods are safe to include in your animal's diet.

If you get the okay from your vet to put your pet on a homemade diet, Dr. Richardson says there are several safe and healthy ingredients you can use. "Chicken breast, ground chicken and turkey, ground lean beef, sweet potato, bell pepper, squash, pumpkin, zucchini, spinach, and beans, and cooked barley, oats, quinoa, pasta, and rice are all nutritious, pet-friendly ingredients," she says. "However, if your pet has a chronic medical condition, certain ingredients may not be suitable so please contact your veterinarian or a veterinary nutritionist."

And find out which foods to avoid.

Not all natural ingredients are good for our furry friends, which is why Dr. Richardson says it's important to know which foods to stay away from when making your own pet food.

"Ingredients to avoid include garlic and anything in the onion family, avocado, very fatty meats, raw meat, nuts, and dairy," she says. "These should be avoided as they are either toxic or dangerous to pets or have a fat content that's too high (which can cause pancreatitis and obesity, amongst other things)."

Consult reliable resources.

For pet owners who are trying out homemade diets for the first time, Dr. Richardson recommends checking out the Balance It website. "Balance It was designed by a board-certified veterinary nutritionist and helps formulate a balanced diet based on your preferred ingredients, species (dog or cat), and weight," she explains. "Purchasing the pet-specific vitamin or mineral supplement sold through their website helps to ensure that the diet is balanced. The site will provide recommendations on the quantity required."

Know how to prep pet meals ahead of time.

Much like you can prep meals ahead of time for people, Dr. Richardson says you can do the same for pets. "Batch make enough to last for one to two weeks, separate individual portion sizes, and freeze them until a few hours before mealtime," she says. "While this may be labor-intensive on the prep day, it helps to minimize the work required during the week."

Know how to serve and store them.

Since homemade pet diets are formulated with human food, our experts say they should be served and stored similarly. "Pets generally prefer home-cooked meals at room temperature or slightly warmed, as this enhances the flavor of the ingredients compared to food freshly taken out of the refrigerator," Dr. Richardson explains. Also, much like regular food, homemade pet food can spoil if it's left in the refrigerator for too long. "Most foods can be refrigerated for up to a week," Dr. Klein says.