

Parasites in Raw Meat

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Many people will not feed raw meat to their dogs or cats because they are concerned about the possibility of harmful parasites in the meat. This is a valid concern and definitely requires to be discussed.

Parasitism is a Huge Topic

Clearly, this is a huge topic, with whole textbooks and university courses devoted to it. This short discussion serves as a brief introduction and overview only. It covers the salient points as they relate to parasites in raw meat, our pets and ourselves. It does not go into details for individual parasites. More detailed information on individual parasites is covered separately.

Two Areas of Concern

There are two areas of concern with parasites. Firstly, whether they can have any impact on human health - the so-called “zoonotic” diseases and secondly, how they may impact the health of our cats and dogs.

The parasitic diseases we discuss here do indeed impact both human and companion animal health and to clarify where parasites fit in relation to cats, dogs and humans, this discussion will begin with a definition of the word “parasite”.

Parasites - what are they?

Parasitism is a damaging relationship between different species, where one species, the parasite, benefits at the expense of the other, the host.

Traditionally, organisms defined as parasites have been species that have life stages in more than one host. Tapeworms are typical of this definition; for example there is the beef tapeworm and the hydatid tapeworm, both of which can cause disease in humans.

Today, that original definition of a parasite has been broadened; we now speak of *macro* and *micro* parasites. The microparasites include bacteria and viruses and perhaps prions.

However, in relation to the safety and health issues surrounding feeding raw meat to companion animals, it is useful to maintain the original definition of parasites as including only the macroparasites.

So when ‘parasites’ are mentioned, two distinct groups of organisms are included: the protozoa (single celled microscopic animals) and the helminths or



parasitic 'worms'. This division is important because the precautions we take in relation to parasites as opposed to bacterial or viral diseases are not quite the same.

Please also note in this discussion the so-called "ectoparasites" – parasitic species which live on the outside of a host such as fleas, ticks and mites – are not being referred to, as these clearly do not infest dogs and cats via the consumption of raw meat!

The protozoa and the helminths are referred to as "endoparasites" – they live inside the hose.

The Major Parasitic Concerns

To keep it simple, the three major concerns when it comes to parasites in raw meat are as follows:

Firstly, there is the possibility of **trichinosis** which is a disease of dogs and of humans which can be transmitted by **pork**.

Secondly, there is **hydatid** disease in humans which can be caught from dogs after they have eaten infected raw meat.

Thirdly, there is **toxoplasmosis** which can be caught from cats after they have eaten infected raw meat from practically any species.

Cooking

For the record, well cooked meat – or any food that is well cooked for that matter, will not contain any infective parasites. Unfortunately, although that is a simple way to make sure our pets' food cannot cause parasitic disease, cooking the food does destroy much of its valuable nutrition. The whole point of this article is to demonstrate how to avoid the problem of parasites in raw meat **WITHOUT** having to destroy nutrition through cooking.

Alternatives to Cooking

The question is, are there any other ways around this problem? In the case of the endoparasites, the answer is YES!

As a concerned 'pet parent', consider firstly where it is that you **source** your meat and secondly, know how you should **treat it**, when you get it home!

1. Food source

Avoid buying food that is likely to be contaminated with parasites.

To ensure you are not going to feed food contaminated with a particular parasite, the first thing to do is choose a species that does not or is highly unlikely to carry that particular parasite, and secondly, only buy that food from a reputable source; a source with highly evolved safeguards against parasite presence in the food.

2. Appropriate Species

Two examples of choosing an appropriate species would be to choose chicken in order to avoid hydatids and beef to avoid (or at least minimise the risk of) toxoplasmosis. Birds cannot be hosts for the hydatid tapeworm; only mammals can, therefore chicken does not in any circumstances contain hydatids. And *Toxoplasma* cysts are rarely found in beef, compared with many other meats.

3. Appropriate Source

Meat for raw consumption should only be procured from a reputable source in order to minimise parasitic contamination. As an example, home killed meat from a small holding where there are no safeguards in place to prevent parasitic contamination/infestation is considerably more likely to pose a risk than animal products from a large highly regulated industrial farm with multiple safeguards in place to prevent parasitic infestation of the meat. This is particularly important with the disease trichinosis in pigs.

The bottom line to appropriate food source is to source human grade food only. If you are sourcing food from a commercial enterprise, ensure that the company you choose follows this philosophy. e.g. Choose Doctor B'S BARF!

Food treatment

Having sourced the cleanest possible food with respect to parasite content, the next step is to freeze that food, to eliminate any possibility that product could still contain parasites.

Freezing – if it is cold enough and for long enough will kill these parasites.



In the case of chicken and hydatids – freezing is totally unnecessary. However, in the case of beef and toxoplasmosis, freezing would be a wise although mostly unnecessary precaution.

However, not just any freezer will do.

The freezing must be carried out at a low enough temperature and for a long enough time to ensure that the entire load is frozen deep enough and for long enough to render all possible parasites non-infective.

A very safe regime, which will allow for small fluctuations in temperature, is to freeze that food at -18 to -20°C for one or preferably two weeks.

This will render *Trichinella*, *Toxoplasma* and hydatid cysts non-infective. With pork and lamb, this is critical with respect to toxoplasmosis. It is critical for pork with respect to trichinosis, for lamb and beef with respect to hydatid tapeworms, for beef with respect to the beef tapeworm, *Taenia saginata* and lamb with respect to the sheep tapeworm, *Taenia ovis*.

Bottom line: freeze all meat prior to feeding it to your dog(s) or cats to ensure it does not pose a parasitic risk.

B's BARF, being a frozen product complies beautifully with these standards.

The Question of Faecal Contamination

The main risks from faecal contamination of meat and offal are different parasites from those we have discussed previously. The organisms of concern include species such as *Giardia* and *Cryptosporidium*, as well as certain types of bacteria, such as *Salmonella* and *E. coli*. To minimise such problems when feeding raw meat, as previously discussed, ensure proper sourcing and handling of that meat prior to and after it arrives at your place. The safest source is food destined for human consumption. And keeping that meat frozen until just prior to consumption will provide an additional safeguard against bacterial growth.

Doctor B's BARF is the Gold Standard in this respect!

Summary

Although there are some theoretical risks of feeding natural raw meat, bones and offal to pets, these can be mitigated by appropriate sourcing of the food and treating that food by freezing it properly.

You can be sure with the Doctor B's BARF range, the meat, bones and offal is all from human consumption abattoirs and the product has been frozen it for a week or more at -18 to -20°C, rendering it safe from potentially infectious parasites. The benefits of feeding this highly nutritious raw food to your pet far outweigh any risks.

