

### **'Tis the Season for Home Made Foods**

With the holiday season in full swing and meal prepping under way, it is important that we acknowledge our pet's nutritional needs, as well as our own health, when cooking for them. Many people use, or have considered using, home cooked or raw diets for their pets for a variety of reasons. If you happen to be one of the many, it is strongly recommended to consult with a veterinarian and/or veterinary nutritionist before embarking on this adventure. The more you know before you start, the better and safer the nutrition will be.

The American Veterinary Medical Association actually discourages the use of raw feeding of animal sourced proteins to dogs and cats that has not first been through a process to eliminate pathogens that pose a health risk to humans and pets. Through the application of appropriate heat, via cooking or pasteurization, pathogenic organisms can be destroyed that would otherwise cause harm. Animal proteins of concern can include beef, pork, poultry, fish, milk, eggs and other meat from wild or domesticated animals. Many documented studies have demonstrated that raw or undercooked protein may be contaminated with pathogenic organisms such as Salmonella, Campylobacter, Escherichia coli, Listeria and Staphylococcus species. These have the potential to lead to food borne illness if not prepared adequately to ensure the elimination of pathogens, and these organisms can even be passed from pet to human! In addition, some pre made raw food diets can contain large pieces of bone, which have the potential of creating a gastrointestinal obstruction if swallowed.

The safest food you can feed is a nutritionally balanced and complete, commercially available pet food, or veterinary nutritionist approved home cooked diet. Hand washing before and after feeding pets, as well as providing clean bowls and disposing of any leftover portions at the end of the day, can also help decrease the public health risks associated with untreated animal protein in our pet's diets. After consulting with your veterinarian, if you are still interested in a homemade diet option for your pet, please consider contacting the American College of Veterinary Nutrition to help you locate a nutritionist ([www.acvn.org](http://www.acvn.org)).