

Carnivores & Gut Health



Carnivores are meant to ingest a high amount of animal protein, moderate amounts of fats, and low amounts of carbohydrates. Within the last hundred years or so, we have made a high carbohydrate, high fat, low animal protein diet the ideal option. If we think about what a carnivore has been eating for generations, we would find their diet to be mostly consistent with muscle meat, bone, organ, and their prey's stomach contents. Those stomach contents would be nuts and seeds, fruits and vegetables, grasses, insects even. Very rarely, if ever would you find a plethora of potatoes, legumes, grains, etc. We have to focus our attention on the gut of their prey to focus on the gut health of our furry companions!

Why is gut health so important? With 80% or more of the immune system being located in the gut, the saying, "You are what you eat" is quite applicable. Gut health includes a balanced diet, good bacteria, and digestive enzymes. A fresh raw, species-appropriate **diet** is the ideal, but that may not work with everyone's lifestyle or pet. A next step up would be to incorporate more whole fresh foods into your pet's dry diet. We can start by replacing a portion of kibble with whole, fresh foods (if unbalanced, not exceeding 20% of the overall diet). You can also replace some of the dry food with complete & balanced frozen raw, gently cooked, or freeze-dried raw.

In addition to a healthy diet, good bacteria through **probiotics** is what can help the gut fight off bad bacteria. The quality of this product is going to be very important. You want there to be a minimum of 3 strains of good bacteria, a minimum of 10 billion CFUs (colony forming units) and **ZERO** fillers, binders, extras (i.e. brewer's yeast, duck flavor, flour, etc.). **Digestive enzymes** are going to be especially important for carnivores. This is because carnivores lack the salivary enzyme called *amylase* which makes it difficult for them to properly break down and digest food, especially starches. Digestive enzymes will play a crucial role in gut health, as a build up of food in the gut can create bad bacteria, which has the potential to result in skin issues, yeast infections, tummy upset, poor nutrient absorption, and more. Enzymes can benefit a diet with low starch content (the raw diet) but are extremely beneficial for a high starch diet (dry, kibble).

When it comes to probiotics and digestive enzyme use, or any daily-used supplement for that matter, we want to **give the body a break**. We don't want to create an issue where the pet has built up a resistance to the product or for it to become less useful. Typically, supplements used daily should have at least one day of rest each week. It's also a good idea to **rotate** within different supplements. One example of this would be rotating between a whole food probiotic, like fermented raw goat milk and a high-quality powdered probiotic, like Glacier Peak Holistics' Pro-Bio. The amount you alternate or the frequency is entirely up to you and what works best for your pet!

From an article written by Jean Hofve, DVM, she refers to this quote from Gabriel Cousens, MD, in the book, *Conscious Eating*. He states, "Evidence...strongly suggests that eating foods devoid of enzymes as a result of cooking, food irradiation, and microwaving causes an enlargement of the pancreas and also stresses associated endocrine glands..." And continues with, "In all of nature, the human pancreas is three times larger, as compared to total body weight, than that of any other animal. What is interesting is that when mice are fed cooked foods, the ratio of their pancreas weight to total body weight becomes approximately that of a human's. When they are switched back to a raw-food diet, their pancreas shrinks back to normal size. The most obvious conclusion is that the pancreas becomes hypertrophied, or enlarged, because it is forced to keep up a high digestive enzyme output."

This shows us that in a carnivore's natural environment, enzymes like amylase in the saliva are not necessary. Since we have changed the makeup of their food consumption, it's up to us to help them better and properly digest those foods! Feeding enzymes with each meal is going to ultimately support their ability to digest food they were not meant to eat. But this doesn't just stop at dry food, a fresh cooked or raw diet can also benefit from digestive enzymes included in the meal. Everyone can benefit from a better ability to digest food. So let's enhance our pet's diets so that they can utilize each meal to the best of their ability!

Resources:

Digestive Enzymes - By Jean Hofve, DVM
<https://ivcjournal.com/digestive-enzymes/>

What Makes a Carnivore? - By Joslin Lee with The Simple Food Project
<https://simplefoodproject.com/carnivores/>