

Healthy Living

Healthy Food Dogs and Kids Can Share

TREAT them both right

By Leslie Crane Rugg and Eva Saks



Feed them well.

You want to give your dog the best. You want to give your child the best, too. No one advocates feeding your child dog food. But how about giving both of them ... salmon steak?

Sharing food with your dog seems radical, but it's merely a return to the way dogs were fed for millennia. The human-animal bond developed partly because dogs and humans could eat the same foods, and the act of sharing reinforced this intimate connection.

Shared food isn't novel compared with "dog food," which was invented only 150 years ago when Spratt's Patent Meat Fibrine Dog Cake hit the market. With this biscuit, dog food distinct from human food was created. After World War I, canned horsemeat joined biscuits as dog food, and after World War II, better living through chemistry brought on the golden age of processing: kibble for dogs, TV dinners and Tang for kids.

Nowadays, few of us would feed our kids a 1950s classic like baked ham slice slathered in mustard and garnished with maraschino cherries, a triumph of color over taste. Nor would we feed our dogs a mid-century meal of Gaines-Burgers, a triumph of marketing over nutrition. Instead, we are rediscovering the benefits of unprocessed, home-prepped, whole foods for our kids and dogs.

Michael Pollan's best-selling *In Defense of Food* warns us not to eat anything our great-grandmothers wouldn't recognize as food. A complementary principle applies: Don't feed your dog anything your great-grandmother's dog wouldn't recognize as food. What they would both recognize is the same: simply food, not a "Food, Inc." assemblage of processed factory ingredients.

The best food for dogs and kids is organic, whether meat, produce or whole grains. Too expensive? You can still

prepare healthy, sharable meals. Look for sales in your market's meat section. Chicken and beef can be cheaper per pound than kibble, canned food or packaged treats, and their nutritional value far exceeds that of dog food, whose first ingredients often include by-products and nutrient-poor, agricultural-grade grains. Dog food gives you less for more; shared food gives you more for less. Read unit prices!

Shared food is as fast as "fast food," as convenient as "convenience food." Give your kid and your dog carrots instead of potato chips and dog biscuits. Think freshness and simplicity, not complexity and trendiness. A dietary dividend: Kids are more likely to try new foods if the dog's enjoying them.

Enrich your perspective on shared food with the TREATS system. Named for what dogs and kids both enjoy, TREATS stands for:

Taste over Image

Read Labels

Eat Local, Fresh, Organic

Always Flavor It Yourself

Tooth or Dare

Sporting Life

Taste over Image: Don't buy the succulent-looking chicken plumped with saltwater, pumped with antibiotics and fed pesticide-laced corn. Buy organic or at least "natural" chicken. It tastes better and needs no artificial enhancement.

Read Labels: The packaging depicts a cornucopia of ripe fruits and vegetables, but what's really inside? Only the manufacturer knows for sure, but you can learn a lot by reading labels. Note the number and incomprehensibility of ingredients in processed food. A whole food has one ingredient: a banana contains banana.

Eat Organic, Seasonal, Local: Patronize a farmers' market or farm stand. Be brave—if the First Lady can commandeer a plot of White House lawn, you can grow a victory garden. At least set up a window box and grow herbs to ...

Always Flavor It Yourself: Don't buy foods with salt or sugar added. Let your child and dog discover the real taste of food. Experiment with spices like cinnamon, ginger and anise.

Tooth or Dare: Fight dental decay and gum disease; don't buy kid- and dog-targeted commercial foods. Children's cereals "might as well be cookies," says Marion Nestle in *What to Eat*. Give your kid and dog an apple to share. Dog food doesn't promote dental health, and it often contains sugar (as does canine toothpaste!). In the wild, canids' teeth stay clean through a diet consisting primarily of meat and bones. (With their wolf-like dentition, dogs are classified taxonomically as carnivores, which does not preclude opportunistically eating vegetation, including digestible vegetables.)

Sporting Life: Encourage your kid and dog to play together. Childhood and canine obesity are major health problems. An active lifestyle is as important as a healthful diet with portion control.

Here's the real treat: When your kid and dog enjoy a shared meal, they're celebrating the human-animal bond all over again. Bone appetit!