

Safe pet foods

Recall after contamination kills animals spurs owners to consider making meals

By Rebecca Boren

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For animal lovers, the news is grim — and getting grimmer. Menu Foods Income Fund, a Canada-based pet food maker, has recalled 95 brands of canned and pouched pet food that is believed to be killing dogs and cats.

The lethal meals range from supermarket-chain house brands to pricey gourmet doggy and kitty health food. Since the current death toll of at least 16 animals is primarily made up of cats Menu Foods killed while testing the contaminated product, it's almost certainly the tip of the iceberg.

"We've had a couple of animals that have come in with acute kidney disease, that we're suspicious of, but have yet to confirm," said Michael Matz, a specialty veterinarian at Veterinary Specialty Center of Tucson, 4909 N. La Canada Blvd. "The Animal Poison Control Center said every part of the country has reported animals to them."

No wonder more and more dog and cat owners are considering making their own pet food.

"We've gotten a lot of calls and a lot of people coming in," said Micki Voisard, whose Dog Chefs of America is based in Tubac. Voisard teaches people how to cook human food for Fido. "People that have been coming in for four years, who kind of go, 'Oh yeah, that's cute, Micki, but I feed my dog Iams,' boy, they're on their hands and knees."

As Voisard notes, this is not the first recall of suspect pet foods — just the best publicized. In 2006, for example, super-premium kibble made by Diamond Pet Foods was blamed in the deaths of more than 100 dogs. The food turned out to be contaminated by a naturally occurring — but nonetheless lethal — toxin found in corn.

"I think it's a wake-up call," said Vickie Reason, owner of Tucson's Happy Tails Pet Services. "It's a wake-up call to pet owners" to insist that pet food manufacturers meet higher standards, Reason said. "If you can't provide us with quality, we will make it on our own."

Reason's 20-plus pet sitters have spent much of the last 12 days inspecting and replacing the recalled foods in clients' homes, while Reason herself discovered that a little poodle who is visiting her home was equipped with a case of the stuff.

Nonetheless, the idea of cooking for Garfield or Snoopy remains controversial. Some Web sites blithely recommend simply dishing up a plate of the family dinner. Others advocate — and claim many years of success — feeding dogs diets composed primarily of raw, meaty bones, like wolves eat in the wild.

"We don't find Yorkshire terriers in the wild," responds Matz, who is not a fan of homemade pet foods. "The vast majority of those diets are not complete. Some people feed raw-food diets, which I'm opposed to only because of the public health significance of that. Dogs are appearing with E. coli and salmonella in veterinary literature."

Similarly, cats cannot live by tuna alone — much as yours might want to. So what's a conscientious pet owner to do?

Reason, for one, steers a middle course, supplementing high-quality commercial food with vegetables and fruits for her own cat and two dogs. Pudgy pups, in particular, will benefit from replacing a portion of their kibble with cooked veggies.

"My dogs think oranges are to die for — other citrus, too," Reason said. "I give them carrots, pieces of apple, and make that their treat. They enjoy the same variety we do."

Baci Chicken

For dogs or cats, though cats may prefer it with a fillet of sole.

Makes about 5 cups

- 1 medium to large boneless chicken breast (may use other cuts but remove any and all bones); organic, ranch-grown
- 5 cups water (preferably bottled or reverse osmosis)

- 1 medium sweet potato
- 1 cup brown rice
- 1 stalk of celery
- 4 medium carrots
- 4 broccoli florets

Do not add seasonings like salt or pepper; your dog doesn't need them.

Put water in large pot. Place the chicken in and cook over high heat for about 10 minutes.

After washing the vegetables, cut them into 1/2 inch pieces or cubes.

Turn the heat down to simmer and add the sweet potato, brown rice, carrots and celery to the pot.

Simmer for approximately 1 1/2 to 2 hours before adding the broccoli. Simmer another 5-10 minutes or until most of the liquid has been absorbed, extract the chicken and cube or shred and return to the pot. Let cool at least 30 minutes before feeding.

Mixture may be stored in the refrigerator and fed over the course of a week.

— *Happy Tails Pet Services*

Jeffrey Scott and Sara Stewart / Arizona Daily Star photo illustration

Slightly Cooked Muffins

For dogs

Yield varies according to choice of meats and vegetables

- About 1 pound of meat, chosen from the following list: chicken, turkey, lamb, beef tri-tip, beef hearts, beef or chicken liver, ostrich or use these canned meats every couple of weeks: sardines (in water only), salmon, jack mackerel
- One vegetable, chosen from the following: one medium zucchini or yellow squash, 1/2 cup spinach (avoid if dog has kidney problems), one medium beet, 1/2 cup parsley, 1/2 cup green beans, one stalk broccoli, one medium carrot.
- 2 to 3 eggs
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- Old-fashioned oats
- Cottage or ricotta cheese (optional)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

If you are using fresh meat or poultry, place in a pot with enough water to just cover by 1-2 inches. Bring just to boil, do not go over boiling point. Remove from heat. Let mixture cool.

Grate vegetable into a bowl.

In separate bowl, beat the eggs with the olive oil. Add to the veggie.

Put meat through food processor (unless it is already ground), reserving the cooking broth. Add ground meat to vegetable mixture.

If using canned fish, just open and add to vegetable.

Add the reserved cooking broth.

Add just enough oats to mix to keep the muffins together but don't overdo. A little cottage or ricotta cheese can also be used to hold batter together.

Spoon mixture into muffin tins or onto a cookie sheet.

Bake 6-8 minutes. Can be frozen.

— *Dog Chefs of America*

- *Rebecca Boren is a Tucson-based freelance writer.*

The Recall

Menu Foods Income Fund has recalled 95 brands of cat and dog food it manufactures, ranging from grocery chain-store brands to such respected purveyors as Nutro and Eukanuba.

Canned and pouch foods (something or other in "gravy") are all Menu makes and the only products being recalled. So far, there is no evidence that dry dog and cat foods are contaminated.

The recall now covers all listed brands packaged between Dec. 3, 2006, and March 6, 2007.

Scientists at the New York State Food Laboratory last week identified aminopterin, a rat poison, as the likely culprit in the poisoning scare.

The Menu Foods list of recalled products can be found online at: www.menufoods.com/recall or by calling 1-866-895-2708.

You may also want to check the Web site owned by your preferred brand of dog or cat food. Science Diet, for one, joined the recall on its own.

If you have a recalled food in your house . . .

- Don't feed it to your dog or cat.

Return it to wherever you purchased it or throw it out (being sure to dispose of tightly sealed containers to avoid poisoning wildlife).

- Save receipts or bar codes for future reference.
- If you have an open container of the food, put it in a secure plastic bag and freeze it to preserve a specimen in case it's needed for later analysis.
- Watch your pet for signs of poisoning (read symptoms below).

If you buy commercial food

- Dry kibble gives the most actual food for the money you spend. If your dog/cat prefers wet food, you can moisten the dry kibble with low-sodium chicken or beef broth.
- Canned and pouch foods are mostly water; semi-moist foods such as ersatz ground beef are a good part water and are largely designed, in appearance and smell, to appeal to humans, not their animal companions.
- Read the ingredient list on a food you are considering. Look for real meats, fish and poultry (meal is OK); rice, other grains, fruits and vegetables. Avoid preservatives (except for tocopherols, aka vitamin E), byproducts and major ingredients that you don't recognize. Cat foods should be mostly animal protein.
- Although widely recognized and widely used, terms such as "premium," "super-premium" and "holistic" have no legal meanings.
- Tucson internal medicine vet Michael Matz recommends looking for the AAFCO (American Association of Feed Control Officials) logo on pet foods. The AAFCO logo is the seal of approval for conventional pet diets.
- Expect to spend \$1 per pound and up for a high-quality dog food. Actual price will depend on how much you buy at a time and where you buy it. Cat foods, because of their higher meat content, cost more.
- Do not feed dog food to cats, or cat food to dogs. Dogs are fairly omnivorous (like humans); cats are nearly pure carnivores.
- Do not leave an open bag of kibble in your kitchen or closet, where it will deteriorate and/or attract insects and other unwelcome diners. Store your pet's food in a metal or plastic container with a tight lid.
- Do not store pet food in a hot garage during the Arizona summer.

Pets in peril

(Who's at risk in the recall)

- An aged or infirm pet will have difficulty recovering from the effects of eating the contaminated food.

Symptoms and treatment

- Animals that eat the poisoned food suffer from acute renal — that's kidney — failure.
- Unlike chronic kidney failure — a common ailment and cause of death among geriatric pets — acute renal failure strikes suddenly and can develop in a few days.
- Watch out for: loss of appetite, lethargy, vomiting, increased water consumption prior to any actual signs of illness. Some animals may forget their housebreaking, or miss the litter box.
- Any dog/cat exhibiting such symptoms needs to get to the vet ASAP. Some causes of acute renal failure, such as drinking antifreeze, can be treated if caught early enough.

Sources: ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center; Michael Matz, DVM; Micki Voisard, Dog Chefs of America.

Puppy Loves

While dogs have individual tastes, most like . . .

- Green beans
- Carrots
- Broccoli (in moderation)
- Apples
- Melons (all types)
- Cherries

Remember, though, that large quantities of any unfamiliar food can cause turbulent tummies.

Do not feed Fido . . .

(Cats won't eat most of these substances anyway)

- Chocolate in any form, including cocoa
- Grapes or raisins
- Xylitol (sugar-free sweetener found in many packaged foods, including toothpaste)
- Fruit pits and seeds
- Green (under ripe) potatoes
- Spices

Limit these foods

- Cheese and other dairy products
- Onions and possibly garlic
- Processed meats such as bologna and hot dogs
- Citrus fruits
- Spinach (and never feed to pets with history of urinary-tract problems)

Requirements and supplements

The chief criticism of most homemade pet foods is that they are not nutritionally complete and that most pet owners don't know enough to supply the missing vitamins and minerals.

The doggy prescription diets handed out by Catalina Pet Hospital in Tucson call for the addition of calcium carbonate (found at health-food stores in the form of ground eggshells), dicalcium phosphate (or bone meal), and potassium chloride (salt substitute) or salt. Too much salt will cause major health problems.

Veterinarian Michael Matz recommends consulting an animal nutritionist to find out your pet's needs.

The diets also recommend giving a daily canine multivitamin.

Active or working dogs will need more calories than hammock hounds, generally in the form of additional fat.

Cats need similar minerals in their food. Some kitties will also need a multivitamin and supplemental taurine.

Kitty Cuisine

- Cats are pretty nearly pure carnivores — they need animal protein, and can digest little else.
- But some like melons.

Sautéed Liver

For dogs or cats

Heat 1 teaspoon corn oil in pan. Add 1/4 pound beef liver. Fry on both sides. Add 1/2 cup water and mix with browned bits. For dogs, cut liver into pieces and serve. For cats, grind liver in blender with pan juices.

More Online

Find pet-food recipes online at:

- [www.simplypets.com/ pet-recipes/Cat/Meal](http://www.simplypets.com/pet-recipes/Cat/Meal).
- [www.cooksrecipes.com/ category/pet-recipes.html](http://www.cooksrecipes.com/category/pet-recipes.html).
- [www.globalpaw.com/ dogtreats/dogmeals/ veggievittles.php](http://www.globalpaw.com/dogtreats/dogmeals/veggievittles.php)

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