Chasing our Tails

WHEN IT COMES TO MAXIMIZING OUR DOG'S HEALTH AND WELLNESS, ARE WE JUST RUNNING IN CIRCLES?



A new research report from Get Joy examines the paradox between the intentions of dog owners and the realities of their actions when it comes to contributing to the longevity of their dogs.

Get Joy®



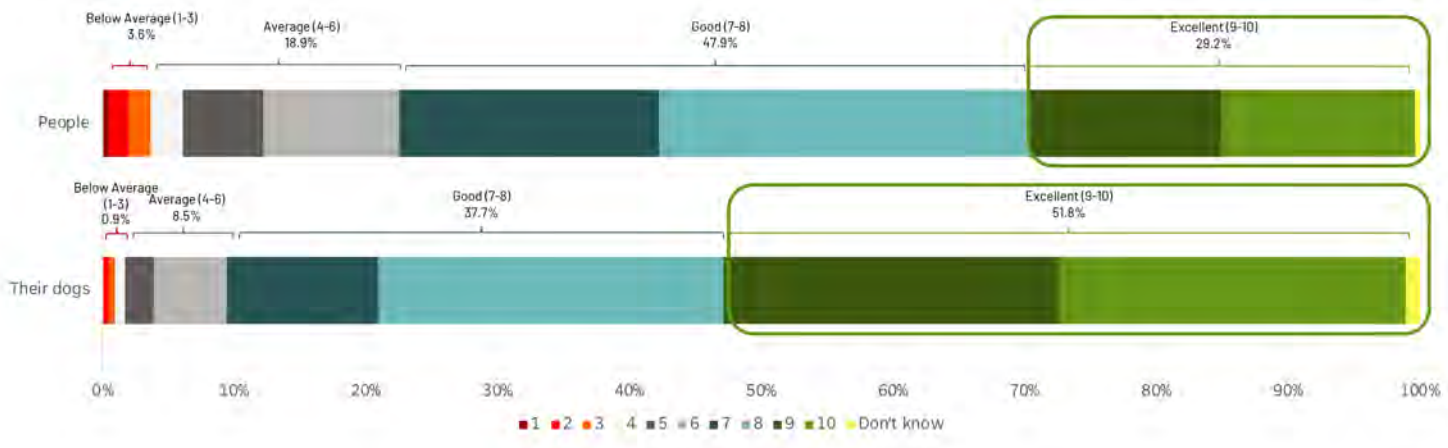
Dog owners think they take better care of their dogs than themselves.

MOST ANY DOG PARENT WILL SAY THE LONG-TERM HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF THEIR CANINE COMPANION IS A TOP PRIORITY. SO MUCH SO THAT 9 OUT OF 10 ADULTS (94%) SAY THEY'D INCREASE THE LONGEVITY OF THEIR BELOVED DOGS IF THEY COULD.

From their perspective, dog owners are working hard to make a long life a reality. Dog owners say they are extremely invested in the health and wellness of their dogs, maybe even equal to or more than their own.

In fact, nearly 90% of dog parents rank their dog's health as "good" or "excellent", according to Get Joy's recent survey.

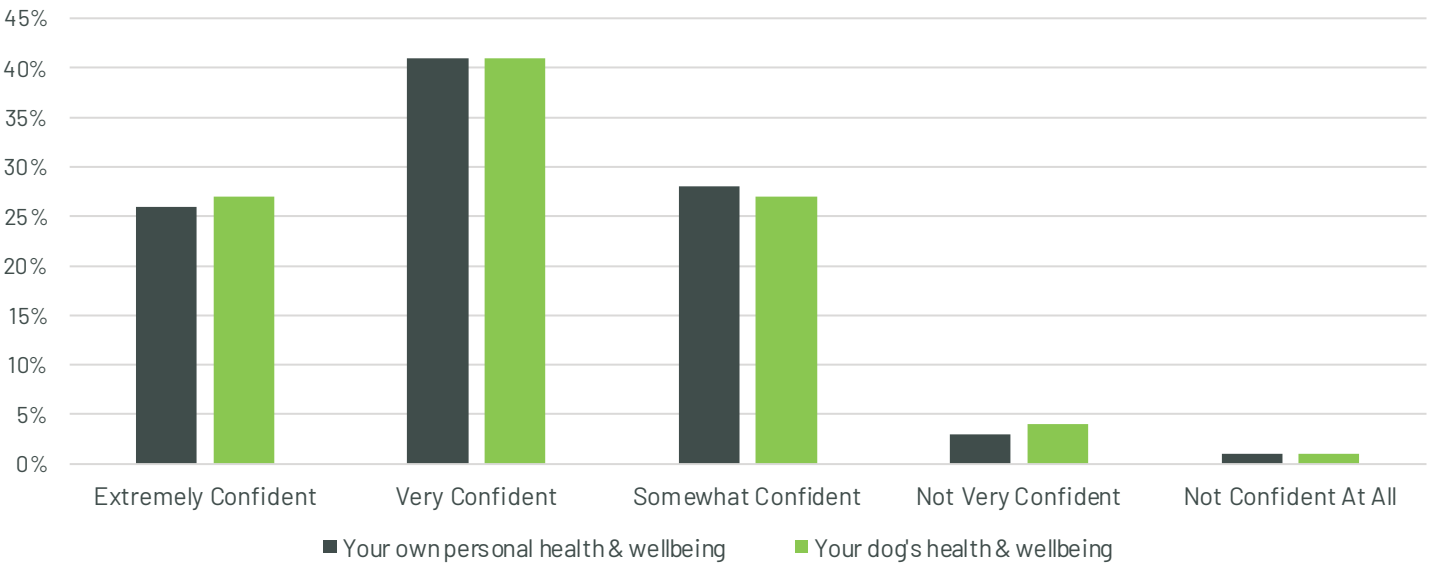
People are significantly more likely to identify the health and wellbeing of their dog as being better than their own.





Dog owners are extremely confident in their understanding of their dog's health and wellbeing – the same level of confidence for themselves.

Dog Owner's Personal Health vs. Their Dog's Health



Any vet will tell a dog owner that treating dogs with the same consideration as themselves is not frivolous, it is good for their dog's health. Humans and dogs share a surprising amount of genetic code: approximately 84%. And that shared DNA means that our health and wellness needs, as well as our susceptibility to disease, are not dissimilar.[1]



"We all want our dogs to live as long as possible. And while there are some things that we cannot control, like genetics, there are a host of other things that are within our control. Lifestyle and prevention are the key factors to good health, longevity, and happiness.

-DR. RENEE ALSARRAF, VETERINARY ONCOLOGIST

The most critical driver of dog wellness is not prioritized by the majority of dog parents.

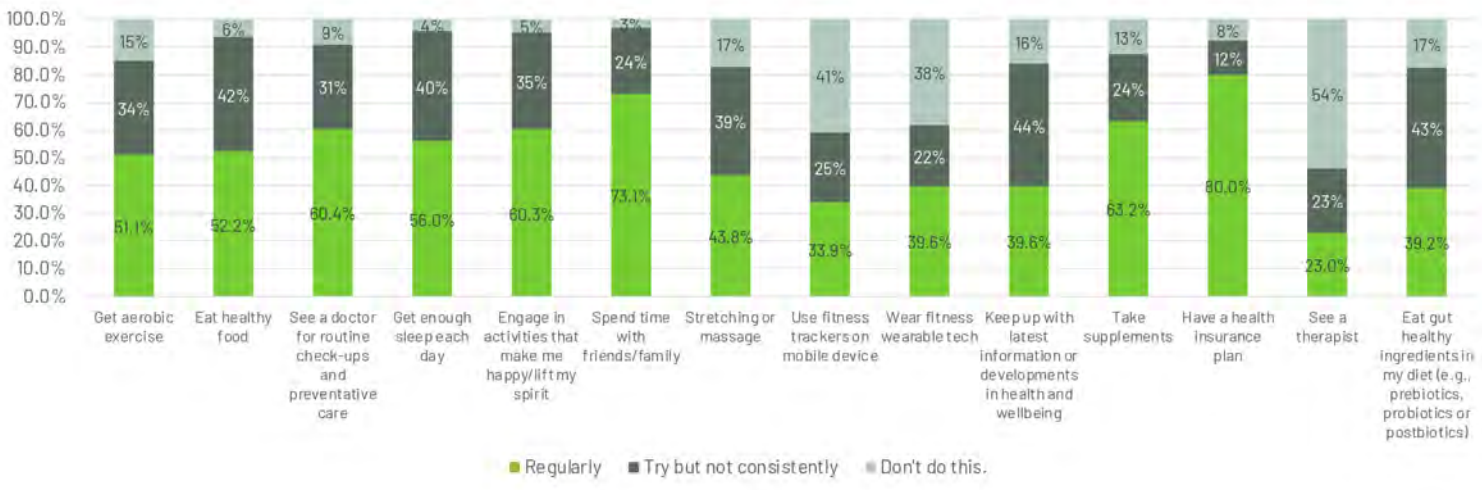
Dog parents certainly see themselves as committed to ensuring their canine companions lead long, fulfilling lives, and their commitment translates into action. A combination of diet, exercise, vet visits, and playful activities reveal the intricate tapestry of canine care and their ongoing pledge for pet wellness.

However, the top priorities when it comes to their dog's wellness are activity-related: exercise, socialization, time with friends and family, and sleep top the list of actions they take to manage their dog's health and wellbeing. Diet, the biggest driver of a dog's wellbeing, is surprisingly not at the top of the list.

> "People have an expectation that their petis healthier." And he says one of the most "controllable pillars" of dog wellness is its diet, which is where the biggest gap exists.
>
> DR. BRETT LEVITZKE, DVM AND CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER AT VERG BROOKLYN

Top Activities for Managing Your Dog's Wellbeing

Top activities for managing dog(s) health and wellbeing are more passive, including spending time with family or other dogs, engaging in activities that make their dog happy and getting enough sleep.



DIET IS NOT AMONG THE TOP ACTIVITIES ON THE LIST, YET IT IS THE MOST CRUCIAL ACCORDING TO VETS.

Dog owners' current diet reality is undermining their efforts for a healthier dog.

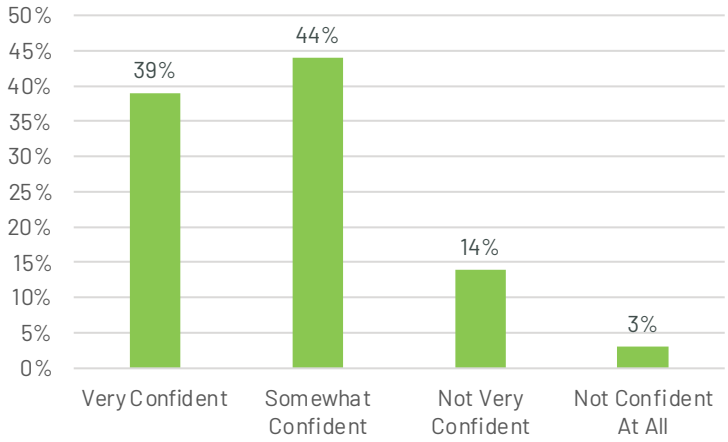


For all the focus on food, nutrition, and burgeoning topics like gut health (in humans and in dogs) in the news, there is a significant disconnect between dog owners' perception and reality when it comes to the impact of their dog's diet on their longevity. Unfortunately, their intentions for the wellness of their dog will not be realized for most, given the current choices they are making around diet.

With all of the processed food on dog food shelves around the U.S. and the evidence that it contributes to obesity, it's no surprise that **59% of dogs were classified as overweight or having obesity in 2022, according to the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention (APOP).**[2] Obesity leads to higher levels of disease and chronic illnesses in dogs, therefore shortening their lives. So are dog owners aware of the impact of food and are they feeding their dogs in a way that can positively impact their health and wellness? The answer is yes and no. Yes, nearly all adults surveyed (97%!) believe what a dog eats can impact its longevity, but that belief is not a reality in the bowls of their dogs.

83% of pet parents are confident about what's in their dog's food, but only a little over half (58%) can name just three ingredients in that food. And does naming even three common ingredients hold weight against the dozens (if not hundreds) of artificial ingredients and additives commonly found in processed dog food?

Dog Owner's Confidence In What's In Their Dog's Food

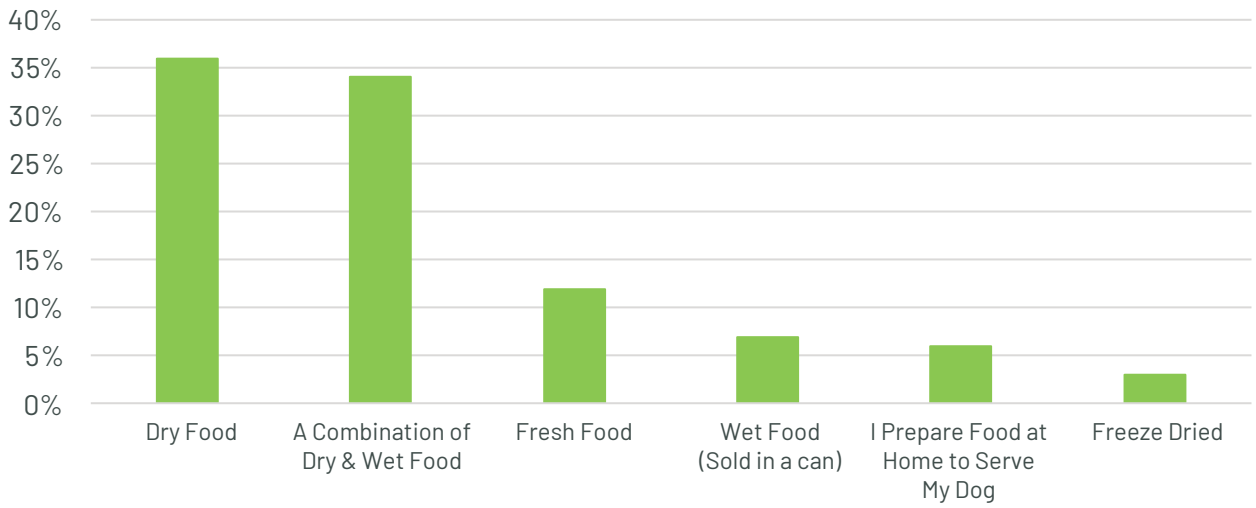


NEARLY FOUR IN TEN SAY THEY ARE VERY CONFIDENT THAT THEY KNOW THE INGREDIENTS IN THE FOOD THEY FEED THEIR DOG.

WITHOUT EVEN KNOWING, PET PARENTS ARE POTENTIALLY UNDERMINING ALL THEIR EFFORTS TO RAISE HAPPY, HEALTHY PUPS BY WHAT THEY'RE PUTTING DOWN FOR DINNER. THE SURVEY REVEALED MORE THAN

75% of respondents are not feeding their dogs fresh food. And it's likely they don't understand the unhealthy effects of this diet choice.

The most frequent type of food given to dogs is dry or a combination of dry and wet. Just over 1 in 10 say they feed their dog fresh food for dogs.



Despite best efforts and intentions for overall wellness, the majority of dog owners are feeding processed food to their dog, undermining their good intentions and negating the postive effects of the other efforts they are making. A processed-food diet has dog owners chasing their tails when it comes to improving dog longevity. While convenient, these offerings often fall short in promoting the overall health of canines and may be contributing to longer-term health issues.

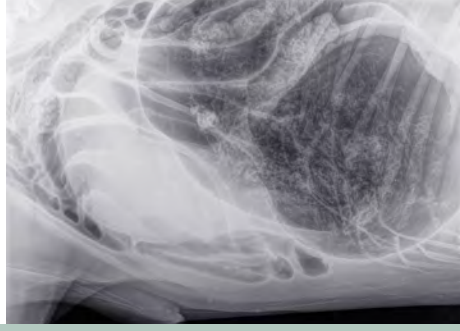
Researchers from the University of Helsinki conducted an experiment where dogs that ate processed foods or kibble for their whole lives, were weaned onto raw food for 3 months. These dogs showed an 81% decrease in disease markers in their bloodstream. Conversely, dogs that had eaten raw food their whole life were weaned onto kibble for 3 months and showed an increase in disease markers of 353%.[3]



PROCESSED FOOD DIETS CONTRIBUTE TO HIGHER "BODY COMPOSITION SCORES" THAN FRESH FOODS, ACCORDING TO A RECENT STUDY ON DOG OBESITY RATES.

A body composition score is a clinical scale that determines whether or not your dog is overweight.[4]

Obesity in dogs not only diminishes their quality of life but also significantly shortens their lifespan.



PROCESSED FOODS, COMMONLY ASSOCIATED WITH INFLAMMATION,EXACERBATE GUT-RELATED ISSUES IN DOGS, PERPETUATING A CYCLE OF POOR HEALTH. GIVEN THE DETRIMENTAL EFFECTS OF INFLAMMATION ON OVERALL WELLBEING, PRIORITIZING FRESH, GUT HEALTHY FOODS IS IMPERATIVE FOR THE LONG-TERM HEALTH AND VITALITY OF OUR CANINE COMPANIONS.[5]

The paradox between the perceived excellence of dog health and the prevalence of processed diets being fed to dogs underscores a glaring discrepancy in pet wellness routines. Pet owners think they're doing all the right things to create healthy lives for their dogs. But the reality of daily food decisions and a dominance of processed food diets is out of sync with a high rate of confidence in dog health among owners.

"If you ask somebody 'What's better to eat? Fresh or processed food?' They'll obviously choose the fresh option for themselves. But for their pets? It's a ton of processed food brands. There's an overconfidence and a huge disconnect for those feeding processed food.

-DR. BRETT LEVITZKE, VERG EMERGENCY AND SPECIALTY VETERINARY CLINIC

"At the forefront of good health for our canine friends is quality nutrition. Foods are the building blocks for a strong body, aiding the immune system while supporting the heart, brain, kidneys and liver. Read the label, know what you are giving your pet.

- DR. RENEE ALSARRAF, VETERINARY ONCOLOGIST



Dog owners know how critical the gut is for longevity, but aren't seeking out gut healthy foods for their dogs.

In addition to decisions around fresh vs. processed food, a newer conversation on canine wellbeing lies in the often overlooked realm of gut health. The symbiotic relationship between gut microbiota and overall health is a cornerstone of longevity in humans as we know, and the same is true with dogs. Yet, it reveals another paradox between knowledge and action among dog parents.

People overwhelmingly see the multiple benefits of gut healthy food for dogs, according to Get Joy's research.

LONG LIVES

83%

Believe it can extend the life of a dog.

WAGGING TAILS

89%

Believe it can improve the quality of the daily lives of dogs.

SMART BEHAVIORS

77%

Believe it can improve the brain health of dogs.

HEALTHY PUPS

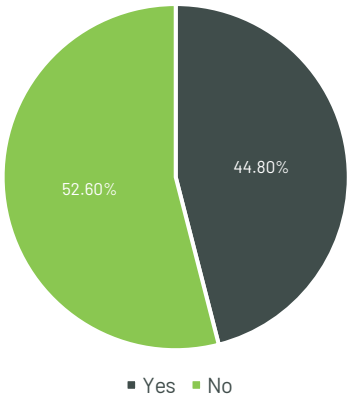
77%

Believe it can prevent disease in dogs.

3 out of 5

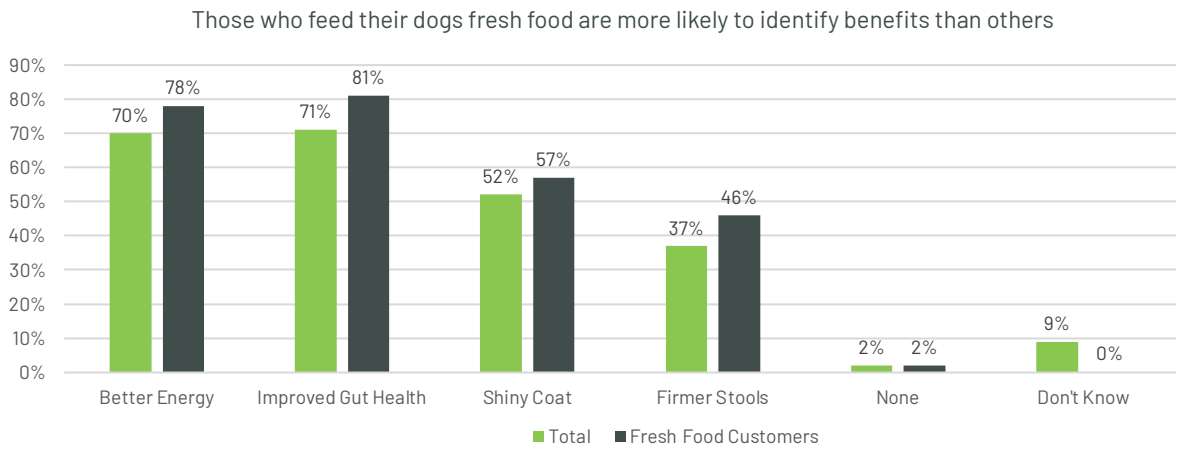
ADULTS SURVEYED ARE FAMILIAR WITH GUT HEALTH AND PROBIOTICS, AND THE POWER OF GUT HEALTHY FOODS IS WIDELY UNDERSTOOD AMONG DOG PARENTS.

Just over half say they've read, seen or heard conversations about how gut health (the microbiome) can affect their dog's health.



Not Going With Their Guts

Respondents see better energy and improved gut health as leading benefits of fresh food for dogs.



But surprisingly, it's not acted on through active food choices. Only 12% of pet parents are feeding their dog fresh foods that can improve gut health!

Gut healthy foods are a significant driver in overall wellbeing for dogs – and people generally see the benefits of components like probiotics. The knowledge is there, but the action is lacking. The fact is that gut health is the longevity driver for dogs and the sooner dog owners catch on, the better off our dogs will be.

Although more research needs to be done, so far, recent research has emphasized the significance of feeding wholesome, nutritious foods to dogs, with fresh foods outperforming processed alternatives in terms of digestibility by 5.67%.[6] The digestive system, particularly the gut, plays a central role in the overall health of an animal. Enhanced digestibility not only ensures better nutrient absorption, but also mitigates inflammation, a key factor in the development of various diseases.

Studies in both human and veterinary medicine have illuminated the link between gut health and obesity. Veterinary researchers have documented differences in the microbiome composition of obese and lean dogs, which are similar to findings in humans. This suggests a potential causal relationship between gut bacteria and weight gain, underscoring the importance of maintaining a healthy gut ecosystem.

PROCESSED FOODS, COMMONLY ASSOCIATED WITH INFLAMMATION, EXACERBATE GUT-RELATED ISSUES IN DOGS, PERPETUATING A CYCLE OF POOR HEALTH. GIVEN THE DETRIMENTAL EFFECTS OF INFLAMMATION ON OVERALL WELLBEING, PRIORITIZING FRESH, GUT HEALTHY FOODS IS IMPERATIVE FOR THE LONG-TERM HEALTH AND VITALITY OF OUR CANINE COMPANIONS.



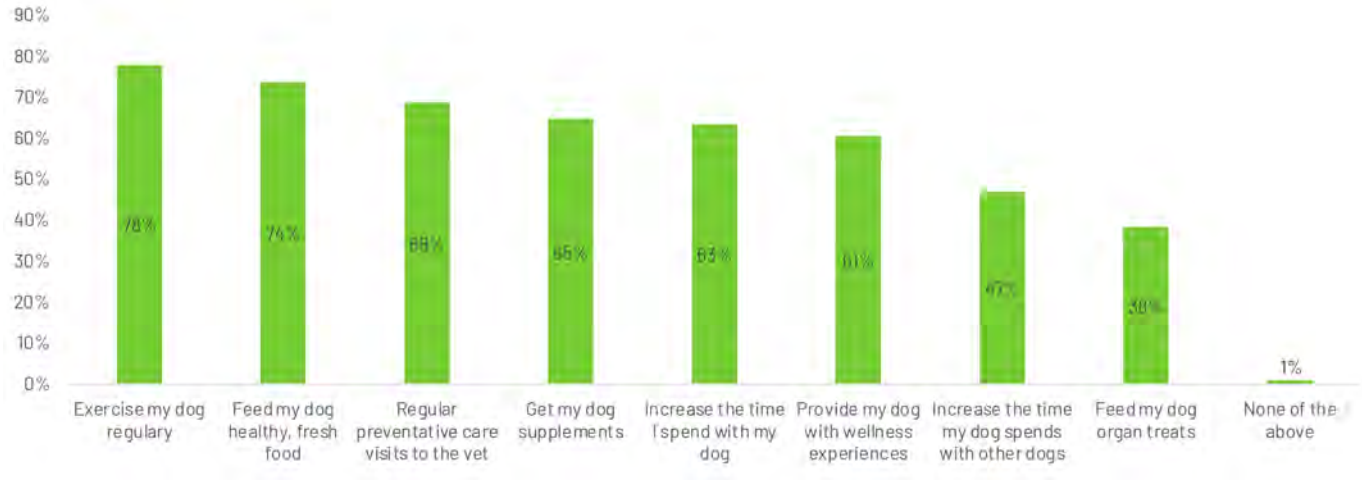
Dog families are willing to do more than they are already doing to increase longevity of their dogs.

We just have to show them the way.

DESPITE MANY DOG FAMILIES UNWITTINGLY CHASING THEIR TAILS WHEN IT COMES TO IMPROVING THE WELLNESS AND POTENTIALLY THE LONGEVITY OF THEIR DOGS, THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT DOG OWNERS ARE WILLING TO TAKE STEPS, INCLUDING FEEDING FRESH FOOD TO INCREASE THE LONGEVITY OF THEIR FOUR-LEGGED FAMILY MEMBERS.

In order to extend the life of their dogs, dog parents are willing to exercise, feed their dog healthy fresh food, and provide regular preventative care visits to the vet.

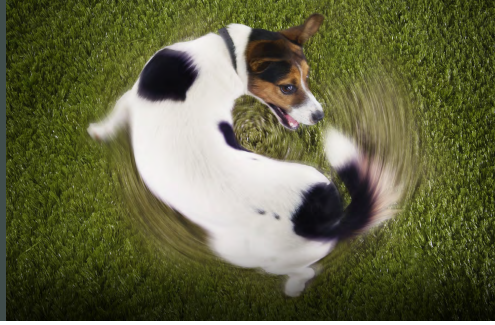
Which of the following would you do to extend the life of your dog?



> “Researchers at the University of Helsinki have recently found that owners can influence their dog’s gut health by providing a variety of “fresh, real foods,” even in addition to processed food.
>
> (VUORI ET AL. 2023).

Stop Chasing Your Tail!

So how can dog owners better align their intentions with their actions?



> Nutrition is something we do with our pets twice daily, says Dr. Levitzke. And even simple steps or changes can have a big result on our dog's overall wellness.

While more research is needed to fully understand the relationship between a dog's diet and its overall wellbeing, there are simple steps pet parents can take to bridge the gap between their perceived confidence in their dog's health and what hits their bowl.

LOOK AT THE LABELS

Do you really know the ingredients in your dog's food? Take a serious look at the labels between fresh and processed options. Think about the choice you'd make for yourself and the choice you're making for your dog.

GO FOR GUT HEALTH

Fresh food diets and supplements with pre, pro and postbiotics can have a significant impact on a dog's gut health. These aren't generally found in processed food.

TOP IT OFF

Switching to fresh from processed foods is the best way to ensure you are optimizing the gut health of your dog, which can lead to better overall health. If that is too far of a leap, even mixing in some fresh food as a topper is a great place to start for your dog's health. The bigger the proportion of fresh food to processed, the better.

INVEST NOW FOR SAVING LATER

Gut healthy fresh food options might cost more per feed, but consider the cost savings of skipping even just one emergency vet visit or avoiding a costly medical issue down the road.

A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Any trainer will tell you that a gym body starts in the kitchen. But, exercise and regular activity are just as important for an overall wellness routine as are other actions that should be considered at the same level. Diet + Exercise + Preventative Care (vet visits, supplements for acute conditions) + Socialization + Companionship should all be part of the routine.

Feeding good quality, highly digestible, complete and balanced food is essential to the overall health of any canine. Limiting snacks and treats while maintaining proper body weight and muscle tone is important in both quality and quantity of life. Free access to fresh water is vital for any animal. Proper exercise for your breed is an essential part of wellbeing. For some dogs, this may mean long walks, for others it may mean periodic sprinting or playing or even just a short walk around the block.

> Attention to mental health is important for our veterinary friends. Exercising their brain helps just as it does in people. Interacting with other dogs or people, getting to sniff on a walk, interactive toys all contribute to good mental health. A healthy diet absolutely plays a role in this as well.

– DR. RENEE ALSARRAF, VETERINARY ONCOLOGIST

Get Joy is committed to leading in more research to provide better resources and more information to pet parents, so they can make the best possible decisions to improve the lives of their beloved pets through a holistic approach to a wellness routine for dogs. Let's see more wagging tails, happier faces and healthier guts for our beloved companions. And let's close the gap between knowledge and action of dog wellness to increase the quality and quantity of life for dogs across the U.S.



"It is clear that dog families have the best intentions, but years of misinformation and a marketplace disproportionately over-loaded with processed foods make it difficult to know what can truly make the difference in the health and ultimate longevity of our dogs. Despite advancements in human nutrition and common knowledge about the benefits of fresh, whole foods, many dog parents still opt for processed foods for their canine companions.

I understand completely because I was exactly like these dog owners. My life took a profound turn when our family dog Cooper battled lymphoma. While exploring the healing power of nutrition, I had a wake-up call to the harmful effects of feeding my dog kibble. This realization led me on a journey to understand nutrition principles and ultimately inspired the creation of Get Joy.

Get Joy exists to help dog families get more joy out of life together for longer. Just taking a few actions on your dog's behalf canmake all the difference, and we look forward to providing a holistic approach to dog wellness that can help dog families actions better align with their intentions.

-TOM ARRIX, GET JOY FOUNDER & CEO

Survey Methodology

Get Joy conducted a quantitative survey of 1,000 dog parents in the US. The survey was fielded February 1 – 5, 2024 by Torfac, a global market research company using an online sampling approach to gather responses related to their own perspectives on health and wellness, how those perspectives align with their dog's health and wellness and other nutrition-focused topics. The survey was comprised of approximately half females and half males, distributed geographically across the US.

Endnotes

1 Martini, H. 2023. Man's Best Distant Relative: How Much DNA Do We Share With Dogs?. DNA Science.

2 2022; Pet Obesity Prevalence Survey; Association for Pet Obesity Prevention.

3 Vuori, K.A., Hemida, M., Moore, R. et al. The effect of puppyhood and adolescent diet on the incidence of chronic enteropathy in dogs later in life. Sci Rep 13, 1830 (2023). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-27866-z

4 Orsolya Julianna T, Kata V, Vanda Katalin J, Péter P. Factors Affecting Canine Obesity Seem to Be Independent of the Economic Status of the Country—A Survey on Hungarian Companion Dogs. Animals. 2020; 10(8):1267. https://doi.org/10.3390/ani10081267

5 Jaffey JA, Su D, Monasky R, Hanratty B, Flannery E, Horman M. Effects of a whole food diet on immune function and inflammatory phenotype in healthy dogs: A randomized, open-labeled, cross-over clinical trial. Front Vet Sci. 2022 Aug 23;9:898056. doi: 10.3389/fvets.2022.898056. PMID: 36082214; PMCID: PMC9447376.

6 Sungho Do, Thunyaporn Phungviwatnikul, Maria R C de Godoy, Kelly S Swanson, Nutrient digestibility and fecal characteristics, microbiota, and metabolites in dogs fed human-grade foods, Journal of Animal Science, Volume 99, Issue 2, February 2021, skab028, https://doi.org/10.1093/jas/skab028