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Can dogs be classified as omnivores?

There has long been debate as to whether the dog is a carnivore or an omnivore.

By definition, an animal that indiscriminately eats all kinds of foods, of both animal and plant origin, is an omnivore.

Humans are considered omnivores.

A carnivore is an animal that consumes only flesh.

Cats, for example, are more readily agreed upon by most to be carnivores.

Then there are the herbivores, animals that feed on plants, such as horses and cattle.

All mammals have evolved and will still evolve over time to maximize their survival and have adapted physically to their environment in order to optimize their health and survival.

So before deciding whether the dog is an omnivore or a carnivore, it's important to first look at the unique physical features that their evolution has created.

Mimicking a carnivore's diet for the domesticated dog.

Most dog feeders around the globe feeding combination diets consisting of:

Some commercial dry/canned diets ... incorporate some raw or cooked meats, fat and bones - (a teaspoon crushed eggshell for added calcium if needed) - some organs (especially a portion raw liver and some green tripe).

Then also supplementing this diet with some homemade cooked foods that containing vegetables/fruits/ some specific grains (white & brown rice), some raw fish (also some tinned sardines or pilchards or other), raw eggs, some herbs and various commercial vitamins and minerals supplement to complement the nutritional and medical value of the diet in the feed pan.

With this combination and verity because there is no one ideal food diet for the domesticated dog today.

This mostly have to do with the availability of food items and financial circumstances.

You "might" find "some" feeders trying to only feed raw and "some" only feed commercial dry diets ... but then I am sure even they also give leftovers from the kitchen and the master's table.

Also true >> *that for hundreds of years the domesticated dog have "also" been fed in a very similar way ... raw with some human leftover cooked food and table scraps.*

These diets contained carbohydrates, veggies, fruits and precooked human food and of course - cooked and raw meats and more ... food that was available at the time.

Could it then be? ... That the domesticated dog's as carnivore's metabolism adapted to what humans were and are feeding - other than whole raw prey diet their relatives the wolves eat ... because of evolution and domestication?

This question relates not only to the ability of the modern dog – as domesticated animal to eat greater portions of non-species (inappropriate) foods as carnivores - but also to the long term value and health resulting by forcing continuous quantities of inappropriate omnivores diet upon the dog as carnivore.

The exact derivative of our dogs will never be known as there are so many conflicting research and arguments, **but fact are facts** and the fact is that the modern dog is indeed directly related to the wild wolves and other wild dog families as their starting point.

As custodians we care and continuously looking (and influenced by others) at what is best nutrition for our dogs – accepting it is a quest for life.

If so, can our domesticated dogs today no longer only digest copious amounts of raw meat, blood, bone, organs and hide – whole prey animals?

Still, many would reason – carnivore or omnivore?

Does this statement then mean our domesticated modern dogs of today – especially the game working APBT dog - can be classed as omnivores or part omnivores **just because they can and do eat what we give them and survive?**

To our own understanding and experiences - dogs are very adaptable when it comes to food – even eating not food items - this we experience as dogmen.

Then again, just because they do eat almost anything what we give (and then some) - does it make them omnivores?

Some might argue ... does or will it really matter, as long as they are kept in good health and a pleasure to have as a companion?

Also true >> that our dogs are actually forced to eat what we give because they do not need to hunt or look for food in the wild.

Then is it true that what we give might not be the best diet for them? We as humans will also agree that we do eat wrong foods, even knowing it is wrong and knowing what health damage it will cause on the long term – but then it is our decision ... our choice and we are not forced to eat anything.

But- we have choices ... then again depending on our circumstances we might not have a choice.

This is the difference between “man” and animal, we have choices. What you give your dogs to eat is what they get - after all Dogs, are dogs.

*With all reasoning and all good points and arguments considered – the truth is **dogs are indeed carnivores** - and by our doings – **yours and mine** – feeding them an omnivore or part omnivore diet **will not change the facts that they are carnivores.***

Dr. Tom Lonsdale quoted “Unnatural diets predispose animals to unnatural outcomes”.

It was said that the difference between theory and practice in theory is less than the difference in theory and practice in practice.

John Holmes rightfully said “a dog is not almost human, and I know of no greater insult to the canine race than to describe it as such”

We inclined to forget that dogs are animals – yep animals – domesticated animals to serve a purpose – serve man.

So true – “The truth is truth even if no one believes it and a lie is a lie even if everyone believes it”.

Realize your dog is not a wolf and try as you will you can't feed it as such.

This barbwire statement doesn't mean dogs should be fed a high starch diet – it is simply pointing out that dogs ARE different than wolves.

But are there options beyond the realm of what is considered "acceptable" in typical prey model raw that could benefit some domesticated dogs?

Is it then really ideal to be this strict, or by ruling out everything except for meat, bone, organs and blood.

Are we then not limiting the potential of the modern domesticated scientific composed dog's diets?

The wild dog is directly related to their wolf's forefathers, and in the wild wolves still hunt and kill prey animals, birds, reptiles and rodents to eat, and will also eat of anything else they find as scavengers. More so in times of lack – fresh or rotten leftovers from lions or other carnivores.

The odd egg, the dead frog, the seasonable fresh or rotten fruit or berries and seasonable fish.

Even scavenging and eating any leftovers by humans they can find.

But this does not change the fact that they are carnivores.

*When game and fish again become plentiful in the wild, after a drought or migrating season or season, these carnivore scavenger's wolves – do and **will** then return to their natural habitat.*

Will they then start looking for fruit, vegetables and cooked human food?

Off course not!

They had to survive when starvation look them in the eye.

This is also a human thing – the will to survive.

There is a motion picture about a plane, crashing in the remote snow filled mountains and the human survivors was forced to eat the deceased to survive – does in made the human race cannibals or carnivores from that time on – of course not!

Getting use to what you eat and to the taste need time.

Given the chance, do you think your dogs will rather (choose) to eat a natural whole prey diet or meat sections thereof, or will they choose commercial dry pellets/kibble or a cooked diet containing vegetables starches and meat from the kitchen?

Try this out with your dog and see for yourself.

Then getting use to something would be a choice of taste - will it not? I never had the opportunity to eat crayfish, shellfish, mussels and the like but once I got use to it and to the taste - I really can make a dent in the tray it are served in – this goes for the taste of whiskey, wine, tobacco and foreign food - even the taste for “Mopani worms” or horseflesh or donkey or dog meat in RSA.

*I am sure my dogs and **yours** have developed tastes – **does it make them less a carnivore?***

Even though most veterinarians classify dogs as omnivores (then again some do not).

To realize - it is their business to sell commercial dry feeds – they are not butchers shops.

Looking at the basic classifications of animals - based on diet.

Carnivores - primarily meat eaters.

Obligate carnivores - those that require a diet exclusively of meat, and then vegetable matter in the diet is probably of little nutrition value.

Omnivores – vegetable, plants, roots matter and sometimes meat and fish when the opportunity present itself and then sometimes anything else they find or given in captivity.

Herbivores only eat plants and vegetation primarily.

Looking at some statements and answers.

*I am sure - you as dogman want to give only the best food to your dog in your circumstances. (yep! in **your** circumstances).*

You want to make and keep your dog happy and healthy – in the best condition for the task at hand.

Doing what is right come natural.

You are striving (knowing it is a quest for life) to have your dog around for the full capacity of their normal canine dog lifespan.

Teeth.

Just by looking at teeth will be a revelation and indication to what to feed your dog.

Dentition adaptation.

The size, shape and type dentition (the way the teeth fit together) of an animal's mouth have also adapted to fit their diet.

Herbivores, such as horses and cattle, have long, large, wide molars with flat surfaces to allow for proper grinding of their high fibre plant source diets – vegetation diet.

This grinding breaks down plant cellular structure material into smaller or "puree", more usable matter.

The incisors of herbivores are designed to pick the plant material, such as grass, plants, herbs, fruit, roots and vegetables.

The long tongue then pushes the grass or greens to the inside back of the mouth for grinding by the very strong and efficient molars.

The final, mechanically ground food is then swallowed for further fermenting and digestion.

The dentition of a carnivore is very different, however.

The carnivore teeth are designed to rip and tear meat from the bone and then gulp what was obtained down without really chewing, mostly only breaking it up to workable swallowing size – size to fit in the mouth of the carnivore animal for further digestion in the stomach.

The canine teeth are long, pointed and sharp to allow deep penetration into the prey animal.

The teeth also have a tight inter-digitation to lock in place to allow the carnivore to grip and rip the flesh away from the prey.

There is little to no grinding (no need to pulp or pureed the meat) – the meat is mechanically broken down by only two or three chomps of the molars before the food is swallowed.

To better understand the difference, the teeth of the omnivorous human more closely reflect the herbivore teeth with short canines and large strong molar arcades that allow for the grinding of fruits, vegetables meat and cooked or baked food items.

Feldhamer, G.A. 1999. Mammology: Adaptation, Diversity, and Ecology. McGraw-Hill. pg 258 - “canine fang are designed for grabbing, ripping, tearing, shredding, and canine molars sharply pointed for shearing meat and crunching bone.

*Carnivores **are not** equipped with large flat molars for grinding up plant matter or anything else.*

Their molars are sharp, heavily raised pointed and situated in a scissors bite formation (along with the rest of their teeth) these teeth can and do powerfully and do dispose of meat, bone, and hide.

Carnivores (our modern dogs included) are equipped with a peculiar set of teeth that includes the presence of carnassial teeth: the fourth upper premolar and first lower molar.

Bellow – looking at a skull and teeth of the APBT.

You will find these same carnassial teeth in the mouth of your today’s modern dog these teeth have never changed by evolution.

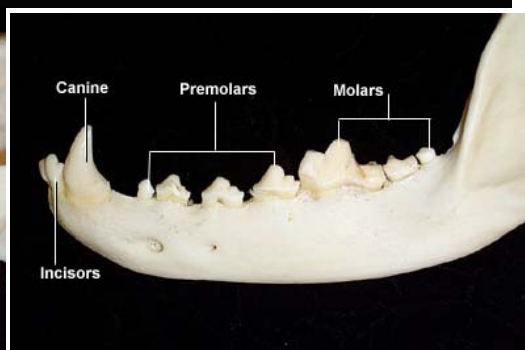
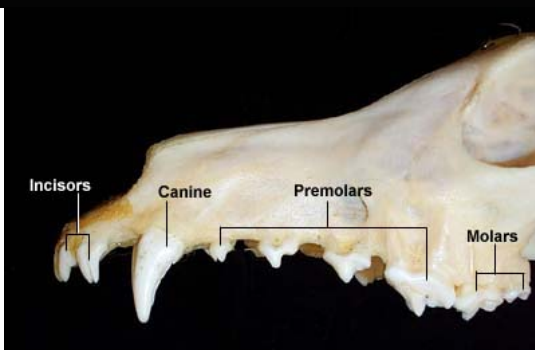
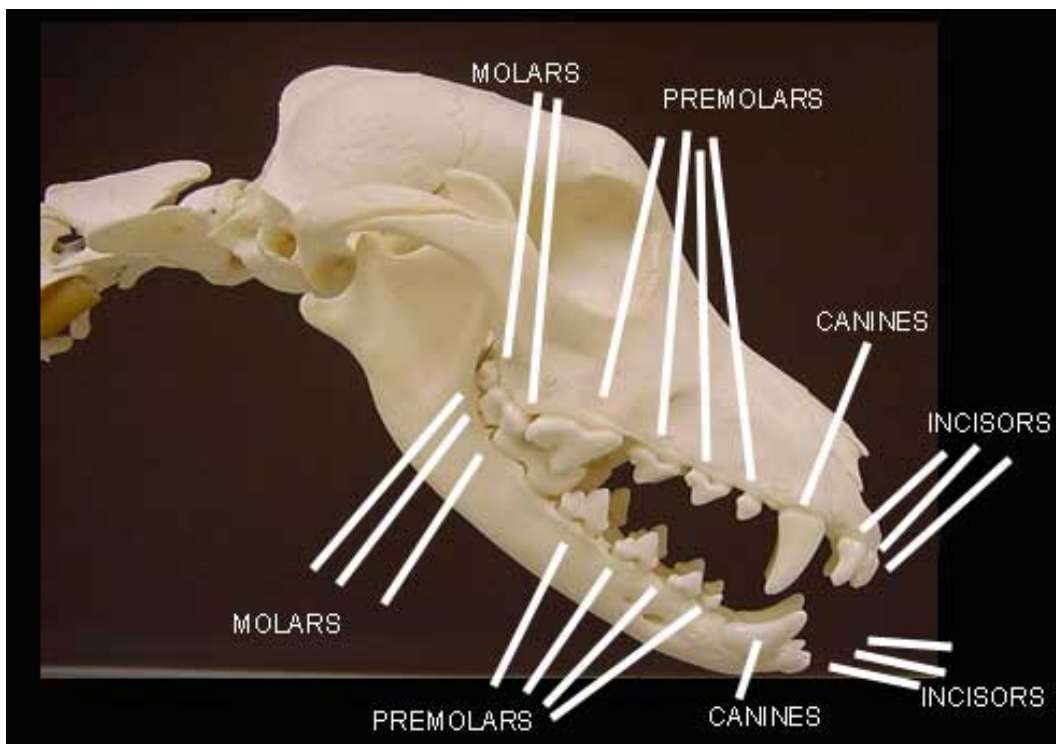
These animals safely consume a raw meat diet because it's the healthiest for them.



But this animal cannot eat raw meat because it is dangerous for them?

THAT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE!

They all possess identical jaws and are meant for the same thing. Ripping, crushing and tearing raw meat and bones



See the fangs, carnassial teeth & pointed molars in today's modern dog - **yep your dog. Now look at the teeth of the omnivore.**

This in contrast with the teeth of typical carnivores – your dog.

The bear, wild hog and baboon typical examples.

Omnivores like humans need flat molars to grind grains, vegetation matter and soft meat as food. They are typically omnivorous – eating both plants, vegetables, fruits and meat by chewing “grinding”.

Bellow the teeth of the omnivores.

Wild bear, molars designed to grind vegetation (primarily diet) but they also eat meat bone and fish and for fighting therefore the canines teeth.



Bellow see the molars of the omnivore's wild hog.

Molars designed to grind vegetation (primarily diet) but they also eat meat bone and fish when the opportunity present itself.



We humans also have nice, large, flat molars that can grind up veggies, nuts, spinach, fruits and bite into any "soft" and semi cooked meat and nibble and grind at biltong "droe wors."

Bears hogs and baboons, while having impressive fangs, also have large flat molars in the back of their mouth to assist in grinding up plant matter (their natural diet).

Dogs and most canids lack these kinds of molars. Why?

Because they do not need them - plant matter, grains, vegetables, fruits, nuts etc. are not part of their diet – never been.

Teeth are highly specialized items (tools) and are structured specifically for the species specific diet – just like Mother Nature intended for the specific species – the diet they have to eat (and for the job at hand)

(Feldhamer, G.A. 1999. Mammology: Adaptation, Diversity, and Ecology. McGraw-Hill. pgs 260) - The difference between a bear or baboon's teeth and a dog's teeth (both species are in Order Carnivora) demonstrates how this can be.

One can logically ask - if a dog, cat or ferret - all carnivores - has the dentition of a carnivorous animal, why do we feed them man made foods, dry commercial pelleted/kibble feeds and or heavy grain-based and vegetable matter as foods if they are carnivores – are they then not carnivores?

It does not make sense does it?

Looking at the carnivore's musculature and external anatomy.

Dogs – especially the game working dogs breeds – are **predators** - are equipped with powerful jaw and neck muscles that assist in biting, pulling down prey and ripping out and crunching down soft raw meat, bone, and hide – just present a whole prey animal – rabbit, chicken or sheep to the APBT and see nature in work. Their jaws hinge open widely, allowing them to gulp large chunks of meat and bone. No chewing done or needed here.

Looking at carnivore's skulls.

Their skulls are heavy, and are shaped to prevent lateral movement of the lower jaw when captured prey struggles (the mandibular fossa is deep and C-shaped).

*Feldhamer, G.A. 1999 - This shape permits **only an up-and-down crushing motion**, whereas herbivores and omnivores have flatter mandibular fossa that allows for the lateral motion necessary to grind plant matter (See McGraw-Hill. pgs 258-259.).*

*This translates **to a simple fact** that everything about a dog body design says they were designed for a carnivorous, hunting lifestyle, geared toward the hunt the killing and eating their prey – raw meats, bone and hide.*

The domesticated dog (most breeds) resulted by the folly of man, yep, man have done some major breeding and cross breeding's from the domesticated wild wolves and dog types.

Through it all - tempering with this body design it only resulted in varying sizes and conformations – but they are all still carnivores.

It makes sense does it not?

The predator like equipped body and speed and agility of the game APBT speak predator.

The way they eat speaks carnivore's predator.

Man meddling has done nothing to change the internal anatomy and physiology of our carnivorous canines.

*(Feldhamer, G.A. 1999. Mammology: Adaptation, Diversity, and Ecology. McGraw-Hill. pg 260.) - Dogs have the **undeniable internal anatomy and physiology** of a carnivore they have a highly elastic stomach designed to hold large quantities of meat, bone, organs, and hide. Their stomachs are simple, with an undeveloped caecum (Feldhamer, G.A. 1999. Mammology: Adaptation, Diversity, and Ecology. McGraw-Hill. pg 260.).*

They have a relatively short foregut and a short, smooth, un-sacculated colon. This means appropriate foods pass through quickly. From the start of eating their prey it takes 3 hours for the content of the stomach to dispose of the meal.

To know in that vegetable and plant matter however will need more time to first sit and ferment - typical herbivores and omnivores – no arguments here.

*This equates to longer, sacculated colons, larger and longer small intestines, and occasionally the presence of a caecum. **Dogs have none of these**, but do have the shorter foregut and hindgut **consistent with carnivorous animals.***

This explains why most plant matter (see the grass they sometimes eat in the dog poo (or puked up) comes out the same way it came in. There was no time for it to be broken down (chewed) fermentation and digested.

The commercial animal dry feed industry and especially the dog-feed industry know this.

Their unscientific explanation for including vegetables, fruits and large quantities of grains in their dry pellet/kibble dog feeds are that by the pre-processed (heat applied method) it is now possible for your dog to get everything “they say” - needed out of it – cooked and powdered and sprayed over with laboratory processed vitamins, minerals and preservatives and taste enhancers.

As we by now know after and especially reading this, feeding vegetables and grains in any format to a carnivorous animal is a questionable practice.

*And we also know – **fact** - processed foods heated over 43 degrees C – that heat destroys the nutritional value of food whatever you cook. Nothing then to argue about right?*

Looking at the importance of fatty acids.

Omega-3's.

All animals need Omega-3 fatty acids to support health.

An Omega-3 fatty acid is considered an essential fatty acid, meaning the animal's body does not produce it, so it needs to be consumed.

There are both plant / vegetable and animal raw meat and fish based sources of Omega-3.

Vegetable / greens based sources of Omega-3 are in the form of **alpha-linolenic acid, known as ALA.**

ALA is found in green leafy vegetables and seeds such as Flax, Hemp, Chia and other plant oils.

The digestive system of the animal species need to and are equipped to convert the ALA to eicosapentaenoic acid, EPA, and docosahexenoic acid, or DHA.

EPA and DHA are the active forms of Omega-3 fatty acids.

Herbivores and omnivores can convert plant based ALA sources to EPA and DHA through a series of enzymatic reactions.

Cats, however, completely lack the enzymes necessary for this conversion, and **dogs** can only convert approximately 5 to 15 % of any ALA sources.

What do a species then need to break down carbohydrates and starches? Dogs **do not** produce the **necessary enzymes** in their saliva ("amylase", for example) to start the breakdown of carbohydrates and starches.

Amylase in saliva is something omnivorous and herbivorous animals release in their spit during the chewing process - but **not the carnivorous animals.**

Forced to eat these carbohydrates and starches (usually very highly loaded) contained in commercial dog feeds place the burden entirely on the carnivore's canine dog's pancreas, forcing it to produce large amounts of amylase trying to deal with this foreign matter like starch, cellulose, and carbohydrates in plant matter entering the stomach.

Instead of just producing normal amounts of the enzymes needed to digest "wet" proteins and fats which, when fed raw, begin to "self-digest" when the raw diet are crushed by normal ripping, tearing and crunching down of meats, tendons and bone matter - with their normal intestine enzymes (obtained by raw meat blood and bones) naturally continue in the digesting processes.

Fact >> dogs on the other hand do not have the kind of friendly bacteria/enzymes that break down cellulose and starch for them.
As a result, **most of the nutrients contained** in plant matter and even pre-processed plant matter stay unavailable to dogs and follow the normal out hatch and is pooped out.
This is why dog food manufacturers have to add such high amounts of “synthetic vitamins and minerals” into or onto their product to create the illusion “balanced nutrition they claim.
The fact of the matter is, most of the natural vitamins and minerals have been destroyed during the cooking processes for making the commercial pellet and therefore the need for added supplements to the processed dog food products.
Simple arithmetic’s - if a dog can only digest say 40-60% out of the total 100% volume of its grain-based / carbohydrate filled food, then it will only be receiving 40-60% (ideally) of the supplied vitamins and minerals it needs – The rest is pooped out.
To compensate for this, the dog-feed manufacturer must add or spray on a higher concentration of vitamins and minerals than the dog actually needs or sell the dog owner extra supplements.

Looking at the pancreas and liver’s health.

The role of the liver is to help clear toxins from the body and facilitate digestion.

The liver is the body’s largest organ and it works in conjunction with the gall bladder, pancreas and stomach.

An unhealthy diet containing chemicals, preservatives and non-species appropriate grains vegetables and fruits and other toxins as well as excessive vaccination, can place a toll on the liver.

Poor eating habits may cause pain during the digestive process.

Conditions that are associated with the liver and gall bladder include:

Digestion

Vomiting

Brittle nails

Pain in the upper back

Irritability and aggression

Leg paralysis, tremors, lumps and swelling
Lick granulomas and skin problems.

Have evolution changed the carnivore into an omnivores?

Absolutely not!

Looking at the argument of evolution.

Evolution can do funny things during "time" with a species, so classification will not help settle this issue.

The specific teeth and specific digestive system of the species will undeniably indicate the correct diet, as of the species today (domesticated or not) and also of the ancestors of the domesticated dog.

Fact >> evolution did not alter the teeth and or the digestive system for our domesticated dog yet.

The digestive system function **is** to successfully digest nutrition of what you eat.

Another notable and arguable nutrition issue, with the modern dog, revolves around the **ability** of dogs to digest grains and vegetables (forced on them by us - humans).

Then again, the digestive tracts of animals will give clues as to what kind of needed diet they can or cannot digest successfully.

Fact >> the shorter the length of small intestine, the less capable the animals are of digesting plant materials.

This then goes hand in hand with the **ability** to process what they eat (utilize – absorb).

Fact > > herbivores have very complex and long digestive tracts, whereas humans have somewhat simpler and shorter digestive tracts.

If you compare the length of the small intestine in cats (obligate carnivores) with that of a dog, the dog's small intestine is longer relative to the animal's body length (4:1 intestine/body length ratio in cats, 6:1 in dogs).

Based on this equation of the dogs and the cats' digestive system anatomy, and plant digestibility, it would seem that dogs are more adapted to eat a diet that includes vegetable material than cats.

Does this reasoning make the dog an omnivore? Nope!

The importance of "amylase" the enzyme that digests starch.

Grains are mostly starch, so an animal digestive system would need to make amylase if it is going to digest starch.

Humans do have "amylase" in their saliva, so starch digestion begins when you chew your food.

Dogs, like cats, do not have amylase in their saliva.

Important to know, dogs do and can secrete large amounts of amylase from their pancreas in the event needed.

Since meat does not contain starch, why would dogs need to make amylase in their pancreas?

Is it not then obviously, that because dogs are not equipped to eat and digest plant-derived starches they then are not omnivores but carnivores?

Foxes, which are closely related to dogs also derived from wolves, eat just about anything in the wild – real scavengers, any meats and from bugs, reptile's rodents to birds, fruits, grains and berries.

They too indeed then very adaptable "carnivores" - But never the less carnivores and not omnivores.

Looking at "Obligate carnivores".

Obligated carnivores are those that require a diet exclusively of meat, and then vegetable matter in the diet is probably of little nutrition value.

Cats are obligate carnivores, and one of their dietary requirements is a compound found exclusively in meat and animal tissues known as "taurine"

Taurine is essential for all animals, but because it is absent in plant material, herbivores and omnivores must synthesize it from other amino acids in their herbivores diet.

In order for obligate carnivores to get enough "taurine" they must eat other animals that contain taurine in their meat and organs – simple as that.

Cats need taurine in their diet, and they are obligate carnivores.

So what about taurine with dogs?

Dogs synthesize their own taurine, indicating that they are not obligate carnivores in terms of physiology.

Out of interest - the one dog, which could completely be a vegetarian, is actually the Chow Chow. The Chow Chow originated in China (Tibet) where it was raised as a meat source for human consumption. This was done on a scale that can be compared to the sheep ranches of New Zealand or the cattle farms in our own country today.

Since the Chow Chow was used as a meat source for human consumption, it was fed a diet of grains and vegetables - to produce a tender marbled meat (horror - but true).

One indicator of the Chow Chow's development as a vegetarian is the difference in the mouth, jaw, and tooth structure from those breeds that developed as "meat eaters."

For example, the Chow has a set of teeth that are flatter than the sharp incisors found in the other canine carnivorous breeds.

The assumption that dogs are natural omnivores then remains to be proven.

It is a myth and false that dogs are omnivores.

Dogs are carnivores, not omnivores.

Dogs are very adaptable, but just because they can survive on an omnivorous diet does not mean it is the correct or even the best diet for them.

The assumption that dogs are natural omnivores then remains to be proven, whereas the truth about dogs being natural carnivores is very well-supported by the evidence available to us.

Dogs are carnivores - because their dentition, internal and external anatomy, and physiology say it is not omnivores.

Even its evolutionary history says the dog is a carnivore.
To ask the opposite question in regards if the modern dog is an omnivore is to ask what about this domesticated dog of today makes you think it is an omnivore.

Heather Lyon a cell biologist says:

"I feel the need to point out that the 0.2% difference is only mitochondrial DNA, which is vastly different by definition than an animal's complete genome.

Mitochondrial DNA, abbreviated as mtDNA, refers to a very small circular piece of DNA found in the mitochondria of every complex animal.

This DNA is COMPLETELY SEPARATE from the animal's genome, which is housed in the nucleus of almost all cells in an organism. Mitochondrial DNA is about the same quantity of DNA contained by the average bacterial cell.

There is no information available regarding the similarity of the entire genome of a grey wolf compared to a domestic dog, and unfortunately this misunderstanding if the information has helped encourage the "my dog is a wolf" mind-set."

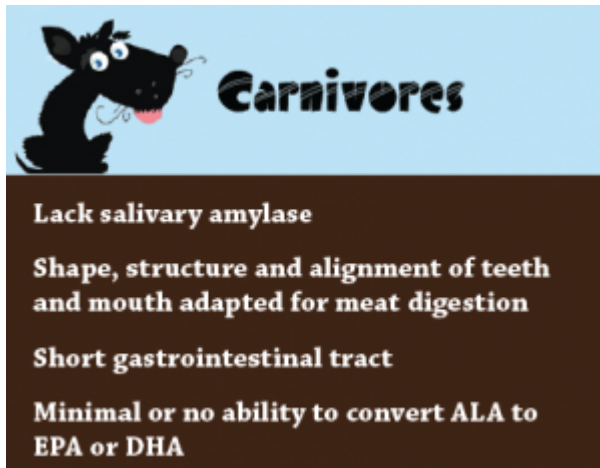
The thing I find most Prey Model feeders fail to take into account is that wild canids – wolves, coyotes etc. eat more than just prey.

While they may shake out the stomach content of large animals and eat only the lining, when it comes to small prey the entire animal is consumed, digestive tract and all.

Wolf biologists have also noted that in the spring time wolves will frequently kill multiple young (deer moose elk etc) eat ONLY the stomach content (partly digested milk solids) and walk away from the rest of the animal.

This interesting behaviour is mentioned in "Wolves of the Yukon". In one case upwards of 15 young elk were killed in one hunt and only the stomach contents consumed, making a good argument for including yogurt or kefir in the diet.

Conclusion.



Coyotes have frequently been documented eating melons and squash, beans and berries out of farmers' fields and while the coyote is not as closely related as the wolf, the coyote lives closer to the way early dog did – close to the fringes of human society eating what it can find compared to wolves who tend to avoid human areas.

Modern domesticated dogs did not descend from the Modern wolf – modern dog and modern wolf had a common ancestor but went their separate way in evolution thousands of years ago and while hybridization did occur in some breeds, domestic dog is still a unique animal.

It evolved at the fringes of society eating our off casts, it evolved at our fireside eating our leftovers, it evolved scavenging and eating a much greater variety than wolf ever did - these argument can and will be mind changing but feeding dogs is a quest for life.

I do not have any doubts that my dogs are carnivores.