

# Every Dog Can Be a Vegan Dog

*Like humans, dogs can live healthy, long lives on a nutritionally complete plant-based diet.*

by Linda Middlesworth



**I**n 2005, my husband, Dave, and I went to a veg conference in Washington, DC, and we were shocked to find a British vendor there selling a vegan dog food. We had been vegan about 17 years, over which time we got healthier and healthier. I'd cured my heart disease, cancer, and prediabetes and lost 50 pounds, and Dave had resolved his high blood pressure. We knew that a vegan diet was the optimal diet for humans and the only diet



Dave & Linda Middlesworth, founders of V-dog

to prevent and reverse most chronic diseases, and we embraced it wholeheartedly. Along the way, in my zeal to help people get healthy, I earned a certificate in plant nutrition from Dr. T. Colin Campbell's eCornell course and completed Dr. John McDougall's Starch Solution certification course. I launched my VeganMentor business to help people transition to a healthy plant-based diet. And in 2012, I continued pursuing my knowledge and passion, becoming a Food for Life nutrition and cooking instructor with the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine. Great health through nutrition was a focal point at our house.

We loved being vegan, both for our own health and because it meant we were not hurting animals with our food choices. We never dreamed that we could save many more animals by creating plant food for dogs. We were accustomed to seeing dog food advertisements that highlighted their meat content, promoting the idea that modern dogs needed meat in their diets. But after doing a lot of research with pet nutritionists, Dave and I discovered that not only could dogs eat a diet without meat, but they could

actually thrive on a nutritionally balanced plant-based diet! Since we had always thought dogs were primarily carnivores, this was incredibly exciting!

Both Dave and I were raised with companion dogs our whole lives. Dave's mother told me that his dog, Peter, went everywhere with him, even to basketball practice. I spent all my time as a child with Skippy, our basset hound mix. Our love for dogs was deep. Years ago, we even had a fight about who wanted which dog in our arms in bed! At the time, our rescued pit bulls, 69-pound Sparky and 67-pound Pandy, didn't even really fit on our bed, but we just had to snuggle with them.

Dave and I founded V-dog in 2005, the first vegan dog food company in the U.S. We were so excited to have created a line of 100% vegan dog food, treats, and chews! We made sure it tasted great, did no harm to animals, and was nutritionally balanced. Dave passed away suddenly while hiking in Glacier, Montana, in 2014, but fortunately, our son, Darren, stepped up to become V-dog's president. He, Vice President Lindsay Rose Rubin, and our other hardworking, vegan employees are still running our family-owned business today as we celebrate our 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary. My Dave must be as proud as I am.

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## Can Dogs Thrive on a Vegan Diet?

The wild ancestors of today's dogs ate meat, but they were actually omnivores who ate plants, too. In fact, recent studies have shown that even wolves eat plants in addition to meat. But modern dogs are quite different from their wild ancestors. They've evolved over the last 5,000 and 7,000 years, developing an ability to better metabolize

plant foods.

However, many people, including veterinarians, still think that dogs are not going to thrive on plant food alone. Fortunately, there are many articles by veterinary specialists explaining that a vegan diet *can* be an alternative to a meat-only or meat-based diet. One that stands out is by Cailin Heinze, DVM, a veterinarian with Tufts University's Cummings Veterinary Medical Center. In it, she notes that one study

compared the modern-dog genome with the wolf genome and found that one of the major genetic differences between dogs and wolves is that dogs have evolved to be better able to digest starches (carbohydrates) than wolves. According to Heinze, "Compared to true carnivores, dogs produce more of the enzymes needed for starch digestion, have much lower protein and amino acid requirements, and can easily utilize vitamins A and D from plant sources, just as people do." Additionally, a Swedish study revealed that modern dogs have up to 30 copies of a gene (AMY2B) that assists in digesting plant material, making a vegan diet a healthy alternative to a meat-based diet.

## Vegan Diet Health and Benefits

Before we did our nutritional research, we found some really scary and disgusting information about the dog kibble people buy in most stores. I used to buy what I thought was clean, healthy, meat-based dog kibble at my veterinarian's office. To my horror, I found out that the "meat" in dog food mostly consists of animals and body parts that are not allowed in human food. According to GreenMatters.com, some of the meat that ends up in your dog food can come from roadkill, animal shelters, and other unpalatable sources. Many dog foods contain questionable meat and by-products that can cause allergies and contribute to illnesses. Also, factory farms use medications and antibiotics to raise their animals, and these end up in dog food as well.

Dogs can and do live long, healthy lives on a diet. As an example, PETA reports that Bramble, a border collie,



*V-dog proudly exhibits at an Animal Rights National Conference.*

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lived to be 25 years old on a vegan diet; in fact, she was in the Guinness Book of World Records in 2002 for being the oldest living dog at the time. That's an amazing achievement for any dog! Studies show that a nutritionally balanced plant-based diet helps reduce inflammation, allergic reactions, and skin conditions and may help dogs maintain a healthy weight. A nutritionally balanced dog food made from 100% plant foods gives dogs all the necessary ingredients they need to live a full and healthy life.

People who eat a plant-based diet are often asked, "How do you get enough protein?" The same question is asked about our vegan dog food. The Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) sets the standards for ingredients needed in a nutritionally balanced dog food (including water, protein, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals), and vegan food can meet these requirements without any meat-derived products. I'm proud to say that our dog food is AAFCO-approved, confirming that it has the required amount of protein and other components based on nutritional studies.

Vegan protein is in all plant foods. Some have significant amounts, such as lentils, peas, oats, and chickpeas, which have been used in dog food for decades. Also, many people are surprised to learn that while modern dogs do require protein, they do not need a high amount. AAFCO recommends that dog food contain about 18 percent protein for adult dogs and a little more for puppies. Levels higher than that can lead to kidney problems. Finally, vegan dog food should provide the 10 amino acids essential for dogs to help build muscle, produce hormones, and fight infections. Our V-dog products meet all of these requirements.

Like people, dogs also need carbohydrates and healthy fats in their diets. Complex carbohydrates provide energy for the body's cells and are the preferred source of energy, both for muscles and for brain function. Healthy vegan fats help to improve dogs' coats and skin, so nuts and seeds like walnuts, cashews, almonds, and chia seeds and vegetable

oils such as sunflower, flaxseed, and canola are important. Fruits, vegetables, and nuts are also part of a balanced, nutritionally sound, plant-based diet for any vegan—dog or human.

## Kindness, Health, and Our Survival Are Everything

One thing my Dave and I had in common was a love for our family and all animals, and we worked on how we could live our lives while making the smallest environmental footprint. We knew that by creating V-dog (known as V-planet outside the U.S.), we were helping with climate change. Breeding and killing animals for food requires us to destroy the rainforest and pollute land, air, and water. We are proud that V-dog is not contributing to the earth's destruction and demise.

We both wanted to create a dog food that fit our ethics and stance on social justice for animals. We abhorred hurting any animals, whether it was a cow, a pig, a chicken, a goat, a lamb, or a fish. All animals are sentient and feel pain just like our dogs do. To ensure that we would not have to send even one animal to the slaughterhouse was our main reason for taking on this endeavor.

We believe in the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you

would have them do unto you." How we treat each other matters; how we treat nonhuman animals matters; and how we treat our earth matters. We can all choose to be kind. We can all choose to pursue optimal health. We can all choose to work to save our planet. I am so glad to help in one small way with our vegan dog food. I know my Dave is, too. 

**Linda Middlesworth** and her late husband, Dave, cofounded V-dog, a plant-based dog food company, in 2005. She currently produces vegan events for the 4,700-member Sacramento Vegan Society and runs a 30-day Vegan Health Watch program through her website, VeganMentor.com. She has certifications in plant nutrition through Dr. T. Colin Campbell's eCornell course and in Dr. John McDougall's The Starch Solution, and she is a Food for Life nutrition and cooking instructor with Dr. Neal Barnard's Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine. In addition, she is certified in personal training, aerobics, and kickboxing and is active in the Sacramento animal rights movement. She is a proud mother and grandmother with three children and five grandchildren. To learn more, contact her at [linda@veganmentor.com](mailto:linda@veganmentor.com), or visit her website, [veganmentor.com](http://veganmentor.com).