

Free Range Chicken Feet – Fact Sheet

A Guide to Chicken Feet for Dogs

Chicken feet for dogs are becoming increasingly popular as owners are seeking out natural, healthy treats for their dogs. In fact, they're not only popular for dogs, but they are somewhat of a delicacy for humans too in many parts of the world. Nevertheless, for some, they are just a bit too life-like. So why are these tasty, yet rather creepy-looking treats so popular? How will they benefit your dog? And are they truly safe?

In this article we will unpack all the pros and cons of chicken feet, as well as answer some common questions about them. So, keep reading to find out more about this treat your dog is sure to love!

Key facts

Chicken feet can provide your dog with some excellent health benefits for their joints and teeth.

They are a wonderful natural treat, and are available in several different forms to suit individual dogs and owners.

They should be avoided if you have a young puppy, or a dog allergic to chicken. But if not, then your dog is sure to love giving them a try.

What are Chicken Feet?

There are no prizes for those who can guess what animal and anatomical part chicken feet come from! The feet of chickens are often a wasted part of the body of slaughtered chickens, so repurposing them into dog treats certainly ensures nothing goes to waste.

Chicken feet for dogs can be bought in several different forms.

Raw Chicken Feet

These can be bought straight from the butcher as off-cuts or at your local farmer's market. They might be fresh or frozen, but regardless which they are, they have had no processing at all. This means they need a thorough clean before giving to your dog. While you can dehydrate raw chicken feet at home for your dog, you can also give them fresh or frozen too.

Dehydrated Chicken Feet

These are cleaned, dehydrated in a dehydrator and packaged before you buy them. They have a long shelf-life of over six months (not that your dog will allow them to last that long). They are usually yellow in colour, and slightly shrivelled-looking in comparison to the raw form of the feet.

Puffed Chicken Feet

These are similar to dehydrated chicken feet; however, they are air-dried which means they retain more vitamins and nutrients in the drying process. They are usually whiter in colour than dehydrated feet, and retain their shape better, or even look a little puffed up.

Benefits of Chicken Feet for Dogs

Chicken feet are highly nutritious for dogs. They have two main health draws to them; they help manage joint conditions, and they help maintain dental hygiene.

Key benefits

Dental Health

The crunching action of chewing through a chicken foot helps clean your dog's teeth.

Joint Health

Chicken feet contain glucosamine and chondroitin which are both associated with good joints.

Joint Health

Chicken feet contain high concentrations of glucosamine and chondroitin, which are commonly found in canine joint supplements. These provide the building blocks for joint cartilage, and therefore help improve overall joint health for arthritic dogs, or dogs with joint conditions such as hip dysplasia. So, if you are looking for a natural alternative to joint supplements, it's worth giving chicken feet a go! It's been suggested that each foot is packed with approximately 450mg of glucosamine. In comparison to an average joint supplement, that's a daily dose for a medium-sized dog!

Dental Health

Another major health benefit is the wonders they do for your dog's teeth. While chicken feet might leave your dog's breath smelling a little funny for a short time after eating, the crunching action through the feet helps to clean the teeth. This is due to the mild abrasion it creates on the outer enamel that scrapes away built-up left-over food and plaque. It's important to note that no treat outweighs the benefit of actually brushing your dog's teeth daily, but if you struggle for time, or are not great at remembering to brush, giving your dog a chicken foot will help you feel a little less guilty about it.

Nutrition & Compounds

Nutrition

Protein

45-50%

Fat

20-25%

Compounds

Glucosamine

Chondroitin

Feeding Guide

A small dog can have one a day, and a larger dog can have two. Don't expect them to hang around long! While it might take a smaller dog up to 15 minutes to crunch their way through it, a larger dog is likely to finish it rather quickly.

Approx 75 Calories per Foot

Chicken feet are mainly composed of skin, tendons, cartilage and tiny bones, which means they contain very few calories compared to processed commercial or meaty treats.

Remember, though, that even healthy treats count as food going into your dog. So if you give them a treat, remove a little food from their daily meals to account for it.

Are Chicken Feet Safe for Dogs?

A Very Safe Treat

So long as they aren't cooked, chicken feet present very few risks. The nails can be sharp, so if they haven't been trimmed you may want to do that. I have removed them prior to dehydrating. But if your dog is fit and healthy, these treats should not cause any problems.

Beware Cooked Chicken Feet

Most dog owners have heard the advice ‘NEVER give a dog cooked chicken bones’, and so understandably, chicken feet might make you feel nervous. Cooked chicken bones are prone to splintering and causing blockages, which can lead to life-threatening gastrointestinal complications.

However, chicken feet are not cooked. They are either raw, dehydrated or puffed. This means the bones are crunchy and crumbly, and as a result, as your dog munches through the treat, the bones crush rather than break or splinter.

Watch Out for the Nails

The only part of the chicken feet which might cause a problem is the nails. They can be sharp and harder to digest than the other parts of the foot. I remove the nails prior to dehydrating.

Unsuitable for Some Dogs

Naturally, obese dogs on a diet should not be fed treats, as even though chicken feet are healthy, a dieting dog should stick to their diet alone.

In addition to this, dogs who are prone to pancreatitis may want to avoid chicken feet, as fat can cause a flare-up of the condition, which is highly unpleasant for your dog.

Finally, some dogs are allergic to chicken. For these dogs, chicken feet will not be suitable. Similar alternatives are available though, and so fear not, there is a solution. Refer below.

Chicken Feet for Puppies

Since chicken feet require some ability to crunch through them, it is advised that young puppies are not given chicken feet. This will help prevent damage to their developing teeth and the risk of unchewed food being swallowed.

Some people suggest that puppies can start having chicken feet from four months old when they begin losing their baby teeth and their adult teeth make an appearance. While chomping on a chicken foot will help with the discomfort of teething, it is better to wait until their adult teeth have fully come through, which is around the age of seven months. This prevents accidental, permanent damage to the teeth.

Alternatives to Chicken Feet

Do you like the idea of chicken feet, but not quite sold? There are several other treats which may do the job which you might want to consider.

- **Dental chews:** If you're interested in chicken feet to help improve your dog's dental hygiene, but can't stomach something so real-looking, dental chews might be a viable option. They are specially shaped to clean your dog's teeth and achieve fresh breath. The downside is that they are not natural products and often are high in calories.
- **Duck feet:** Duck feet are a wonderful alternative to chicken feet if your dog is allergic to chicken, yet you still want the benefits of the high glucosamine and chondroitin for joints. Duck is a novel protein and it's often the case that dogs with food allergies can manage it very well with no reactions. However, unfortunately they can be much harder to source, and are also higher in fat, which means dogs who are overweight or struggle with bouts of pancreatitis should avoid them.
- **[Chicken necks:](#)** Much like chicken feet, chicken necks can be bought raw or dehydrated, and are made up of a similar nutritional composition too. This includes the high levels of glucosamine and chondroitin. So, they are an excellent alternative. The only downside is that the bones are a little more prominent in chicken necks, so if you worry about your dog forgetting to chew and

running into complications, these might not be for him. Another alternative would be turkey necks.

- **Rabbit ears:** If natural is what you're after, rabbit ears are a great alternative. They are excellent for your dog's teeth, and don't smell or leave greasy stains. They can be found dehydrated or air-dried to preserve the nutrients. They are also a little lower in fat than chicken feet, and supposedly take longer for a dog to finish too. They often come with hair on though, which some people praise as a natural dewormer, but for many people, it can be a little creepy.

FAQs

ARE CHICKEN FEET GOOD FOR DOGS?

Chicken feet are highly nutritious for dogs. They have two main health draws to them; they help manage joint conditions, and they help maintain dental hygiene.

ARE CHICKEN FEET SAFE FOR DOGS?

The only part of the chicken feet which might cause a problem is the nails. They can be sharp and harder to digest than the other parts of the foot. Dogs who are prone to pancreatitis or that are allergic to chicken should probably avoid chicken feet.

CAN PUPPIES HAVE CHICKEN FEET?

Although some people give chicken feet to teething puppies, it is better to wait until their adult teeth have fully come through (around the age of seven months). This prevents accidental, permanent damage to the teeth.

CAN CHICKEN FEET CAUSE DIARRHOEA IN DOGS?

Chicken feet are generally not associated with diarrhoea in dogs who have healthy guts, as they are not overly rich or meaty. However, any new treat should be introduced gradually, especially for dogs with sensitive guts. It is worth noting that salmonella can be an issue when animals have been reared or processed in unsanitary conditions. If you always wash fresh chicken feet before feeding them and source them from places you trust, diarrhoea is highly unlikely to be an issue.

CAN CHICKEN FEET CAUSE A BLOCKAGE?

Chicken feet tend to crumble and crush when they are chewed, so they are no more likely to cause a blockage than normal dog kibble. The fact they contain bones may be off-putting, however the bones are tiny, and since they are never subjected to a cooking process, they do not become hard or brittle.

HOW ARE CHICKEN FEET HARVESTED?

Chicken feet are not directly harvested for the purpose of treats. They are simply an off-cut from the chicken meat industry. They are usually destined for dog food, or disposable waste. You can even buy a 'bin bag' from your butcher, which often contains chicken feet that would have otherwise been thrown away. It is important to do your research when buying chicken feet though, as not all chicken feet will have come from free-range or ethically farmed chickens.

HOW DO YOU STORE CHICKEN FEET?

Once opened, dehydrated and puffed chicken feet can be stored in an airtight container in a cool cupboard. They will then last approximately six months. Fresh chicken feet need to remain in the fridge or freezer, and used within the time frame you would cook fresh or frozen chicken for yourself.

HOW MANY CHICKEN FEET CAN MY DOG HAVE?

So long as you decrease the amount you feed your dog, you can give chicken feet to them every day if you want. Don't feed a small dog more than one a day though (two per day for a larger dog).

HOW LONG DO CHICKEN FEET FOR DOGS LAST?

Chicken feet are not a long lasting treat for dogs. They're more like a snack. Don't expect them to last more than a few minutes (probably 15 at the most).