

Review of 31 studies finds vegan and vegetarian pet diets are generally as digestible as meat-based diets

LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM, July 30, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Dogs and cats can generally digest nutritionally sound vegan and vegetarian diets just as effectively as conventional meat-based diets, according to a new review of 31 scientific studies published in the journal [Animals](#).

The review assessed research investigating the digestibility of vegan, vegetarian and plant-based diets and ingredients fed to companion animals. Of the 31 studies included, 22 examined dogs, two focused on cats and seven included both species.



Across the available evidence, vegan and vegetarian diets consistently demonstrated high digestibility and were generally not significantly less digestible than conventional meat-based diets, despite differences in study design, dietary ingredients and methods used to measure digestibility.

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Vegan and vegetarian pet foods are not inherently less digestible than conventional meat-based diets”

Prof. Andrew Knight

Digestibility is a key indicator of nutritional quality because it reflects how efficiently nutrients can be absorbed and used by the body. Even when a pet food contains all essential nutrients, poor digestibility may limit the amount ultimately available to the animal.

Study author Andrew Knight, an Adjunct Professor at Murdoch University veterinary school in Australia, said the findings challenge a common assumption about plant-based nutrition for companion animals.

“The available scientific evidence shows that well-formulated vegan and vegetarian diets, together with their principal protein ingredients, are generally digested efficiently by both dogs and cats,” Professor Knight said.

The studies covered a broad range of ingredients commonly used in plant-based pet foods, including wheat gluten, rice protein, soy-derived ingredients, peas, lentils, chickpeas, potato protein, quinoa and proteins produced through microbial fermentation.

Also evaluated were commercially available vegan dog foods containing ingredients such as peas, barley, oats, sunflower oil and lentils. Although a small number of plant-derived nutrients were found to be less digestible than comparable animal-derived ingredients in some studies, overall digestibility remained high.

The global vegan and plant-based pet food market was valued at USD 26.9 billion in 2024 and is expected to grow by 7.8% annually. Rising interest in pet health, environmental sustainability and farmed animal welfare has fueled demand, but uncertainty about the ability of dogs and cats to digest and utilise plant proteins continues to deter some pet owners.

Professor Knight said the review provides reassuring evidence for owners considering nutritionally sound vegan diets for their pets.

“These studies indicate that carefully formulated vegan and vegetarian pet foods are not inherently less digestible than conventional meat-based diets, and support their use where they are nutritionally complete,” he said.

“When choosing a diet, pet carers should look for a clear statement on the packaging confirming that it is nutritionally complete. They should also select products from reputable manufacturers that can explain the measures they take to ensure nutritional adequacy, such as consultation with veterinary nutritional specialists.”

The review also highlighted several areas where additional research would be valuable. Most published studies have involved dogs, with comparatively little research on cats. Many investigations have also assessed pets living under normal household conditions through surveys, rather than animals confined within laboratory environments.

Further studies are needed to improve understanding of the digestibility of vegan and vegetarian diets in cats, as well as in kittens, senior animals and pets with existing health conditions.

About the study

The Digestibility of Vegan and Vegetarian Diets for Dogs and Cats is a review of 31 scientific studies published in the peer-reviewed journal *Animals*. It evaluated the available evidence on the digestibility of vegan and vegetarian diets and ingredients in dogs and cats, concluding that modern, nutritionally sound vegan and vegetarian pet diets are generally well digested by both

species.

Study: <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/16/10/1454>.

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