

Q. Why do these articles always talk about gut health?

Good question!

Recent advances in nutritional science have resulted in the greatest expansion of knowledge in more than fifty years, and that knowledge growth is the development of an understanding as to the role of the microbial population that inhabits the dog, or any super organism (animal) for that matter. It was previously believed the microbial population that inhabits the animal simply assisted in the digestion of the food, and when that population became compromised by pathogens, the animal became sick. However, thanks to the development of rapid, low-cost gene sequencing technology, researchers have discovered the microbial residents in the body play a far more important role in the health and wellbeing of the host animal.

It is now believed the microbial population contains around 150 times as much genetic material as the animal itself, and that about 30% of those microbial genes either control or significantly influence metabolic outcomes in the body. In other words, the animal's genes are responsible for the physical characteristics of the animal, whereas the microbial genes are strongly responsible for the performance or function of the animal.

It is the significance of the microbial contribution to metabolic outcomes that makes the microbial population so important to the day-to-day wellbeing of the host animal. In the same way the animal itself requires specific nutrients to function efficiently, so too does the microbial population require specific foods to maintain the health and robustness of their community. It is this specific requirement for microbial nutrition that has placed such a high level of significance on diet design, and the reason any discussion about nutrition must include a full consideration of the microbiota's requirements.

The most common microbial influences we see in domestic canines relate to the dog's susceptibility to skin and gut sensitivities. In all but a very few cases, skin sensitivities or allergies are caused by a reduction in the species diversity of the microbial population. The same is true of gut sensitivities, many behavioural issues, liver disease, many cancers, heart disease, obesity and diabetes to name a few.

To make matters worse, the age and severity of many of these disorders, commonly lumped under the heading of metabolic syndrome, is not only increasing in severity, but is appearing at an increasingly earlier age. Where we were treating animals with skin disorders twenty years ago, the average age of the dogs was around four years. Ten years ago, this average age had fallen to two years of age, whereas these days we constantly see pups as young as five months, and even as young as three months of age, suffering the same disorders.

But here's the rub. Metabolic syndrome is caused by poor diet design. So, if we are to provide the animals in our care with the quality of life they deserve, and which we have a moral obligation to supply, it's past time to improve our approach to diet design. And that is why gut health always features prominently in these articles!

*About the author... Bill Wiadrowski is a consulting nutritionist who has worked in the field of performance animal nutrition for over 50 years. His latest development is the LifeWise range of next generation foods that are rapidly gaining acclaim for their ability to repair common gut and skin sensitivities issues in domestic canines.*

