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**Q: I've always assumed that my dogs and cat can take leftover foods from my dinner table. But recently, a vet told me that spicy foods like chicken or mutton curry are bad for pets. So far, my pets have not suffered from any discomfort after eating leftover meat from curry dishes. Should I be concerned?**

A: Spicy foods like chicken and mutton curry contain high levels of spices and salt that makes them irresistibly flavorful to us humans, similar to our pet dogs and cats. However, dogs and cats should rein off spices as animals do not need spices in their everyday diet. By constantly exposing your pet to flavorsome foods may in turn encourage fussy or choosy behaviors, thus making it harder for you to introduce other nutritional options. You might also find it challenging to introduce commercial pet foods after. Spicy foods are highly unlikely to provide them with the long-term nutritional values they require. This will pose a problem in ensuring that they receive a well-balanced diet to provide them a healthy and fulfilling life.

A bigger concern when choosing to feed these foods is the likely danger to upset your pets' stomach that may lead to future health threatening conditions. Your pet may not immediately experience health problems, but in the long term may suffer from stomach distress and potentially lead to diarrhea, vomiting or other gastrointestinal diseases. On the other hand, over-consuming salty foods like curries can invite kidney problems along with other health diseases in dogs, similar to us humans. Like humans, pets need to have a balanced diet for their well-being. A balanced diet for your pets can be obtained either from commercial pet food alone, or through a combination of commercial food and home-cooked food.

Majority of pet owners today choose to feed commercial foods that are simple to prepare, serve and store. When selecting commercial pet food, check to ensure that the food meets AAFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials) standards. This will mean that the food has met the nutrient profile and contains the appropriate amount of protein, fats, vitamins and minerals for healthy growth of your pets. Top quality pet food brands do not contain artificial fillers, harmful by-products and artificial preservatives, flavors and colors. They use premium proteins which come from higher biological value sources like salmon, venison and lamb. Such brands thus have greater nutritional value and digestibility so that your pet gains more while eating less. You can also supplement fry pet foods with fruits and vegetables like carrots and apples as an added source of vitamins. All these mean a healthier pet with lesser risk of diseases in future.

However, if you choose to feed your pet home cooked meals, I strongly recommend that you be well equipped with proper dietary knowledge which you may attain online through nutritionist columns. Similarly to humans, pets will require a good balance of proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins and minerals. Alternatively, you may like to consider introducing the increasingly popular dietary approach of Biologically Appropriate Raw Food (BARF) Diets, going back to the basics of feeding your pet a balanced raw diet according to what nature has intended to achieve optimum health. Nevertheless, I advise that you consult your veterinarian to work out together an appropriate diet for your pet as different breeds at its various life stages have different nutritional requirements.