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We personally use a variety of dried chicken buttons, liver-coated chicken necks, dried hoki fish, dried tuna, shark cartilage, pig ears, roo discs, vegetable-based non-meat pigs ears, liver pieces in either shaved or flat-pressed versions. But in addition to these handy dried treats, we also use raw meaty bones, marrow bones and even fresh fish and chicken parts.

The truth be told, we buy most dried treats from a wholesaler who also has a stand at a growers market but we will often pick up from a large pet store that specialises in exotic pet treats—if you think that shark cartilage, liver cookies and dried tendons are unusual. The pig ears are Australian, and run \$3.00 each for large ones almost double the price of five years ago. The chicken buttons and roo discs work out to be less than \$40 a kilo. The liver coated dried chicken necks that drive my dogs nuts are only \$15 a kilo.

And we don't get these prices because we run a pet magazine, we just buy away from supermarket brands that have been heavily advertised and marketed. We tend to buy in bulk, often splitting an order of 100 ears and a couple of kilos of liver and chicken buttons with dog walking friends and dog trainers. The bulk treats are stored in airtight containers and then vacuum packaged to seal in freshness and keep out bug-nasties. Kinda like a canine co-op!

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**new**

# Liver krisps

All Natural Ingredients.  
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 ✓ packaged in australia  
 ✓ ingredients from australia



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But the real advantage we have is that we've done our homework and know what to avoid, how to judge product by its look, feel, smell and how it's been prepared. We have talked to meat processors, importers, wholesalers, distributors and individual manufacturers, so prepare yourself for a ride through the world of pet treats.

There are a few key facts to deal with. There is no law that requires pet treats to be labelled by country of origin, unlike the fish sold in the supermarket for humans for example. No laws govern the labelling of ingredients in smoked, dried or dehydrated treats, though reputable suppliers provide this information. Pet treats generally have no use-by dates when you see them in bulk and they may be spoiled or rancid due to poor storage, being in the sun or having poorly dried product in bags sweat.

One of the oldest and most popular treats was rawhide strips followed by pig ears. In the case of the latter, they've become so popular that local supply is hard to source with the present drought conditions. The best ones are being exported to China while many of the ones locally available are imported.

You would think that rawhide is made in a food factory as a pet food when in fact it's a by-product of the tanning business. There are almost no Australian natural rawhide treat manufacturers due to high labour costs. Most of it is imported from countries with cheap labour and less stringent food standards.

Sharyn Johnston who operates Australian Pet Essentials, a Melbourne manufacturer educated me on this point. "The process involves pressing and rolling the skins, twisting them into shapes or rolls and then drying them in oven or sun. There is also crushed and powdered rawhide which is pressed into shapes (this does not last as long) and is very cheap to produce."

"Most rawhide is soaked in a bleaching solution to whiten them or sprayed with food grade colours to resemble pork, beef etc. To bring them into Australia, they must reach a certain ph level and there must be accompanying documentation to support the fact that they have been heated to 85 degrees C for 6 hours." She explains, "The document must all also state that the product has been soaked in a lime solution with a PH14 level for 8 hours, that the product contains hide and skin only and contains no cartilage."





The tale of how rawhide chews are made is not tasty. From slaughter of a cow in a US abattoir—which is the biggest producer of raw skins yet with only 30 rawhide plants compared to 3000 over the border in Mexico and several thousand in China—the hides are cured in a highly concentrated salt solution and shipped in brine to their processor. Often decomposing to a great degree with long ocean shipping times, they can arrive in China black and smelly.

There they are soaked, treated with lime to strip fat from the hide, dehaired physically and chemically and then rinsed several times to get rid of the lime. After those processes, they are often bleached to get rid of the discoloration and smell as well as having titanium dioxide added to give them a white appearance.

In simple terms, the rawhide is washed; sanitized; formed, cut, rolled, and/or shredded and pressed into its final shapes; dried; packaged; and shipped for sale. And it's long way from China to Australia by boat again. As is the case in other foodstuffs, Chinese manufactured goods can often be exposed to toxic chemicals or ones that are illegal in other countries. Lead, chromium, arsenic and other heavy metals as well as formaldehyde are often used in the tanning process. And just because it has an Australian flag on the packaging does not mean it's been made here. Look carefully for the country of manufacture if it is packaged and be suspicious of bulk containers of rawhide chews or those that are simply wrapped in plastic with no identification.

As Zia Ahmed of Veterinary Companies of Australia adds, “The days of rawhide are not only numbered but we expect it to decline further. Sure, there are still some that cater to the ‘lower dollar spend’ market which needs a treat that can keep the dog occupied for longer, however there are now alternatives available in the way of food based toys, puzzles and boredom busters.”



“Due to various reasons, the demand of rawhide cannot be met by Australian suppliers so a lot is being imported. If the rawhide does not contain cartilage then there is a chemical process the product goes through and if it does contain cartilage—as ears and snouts do—then the irradiation process at high levels of 50k Gray as required by AQIS is also a concern. This is something most consumers are unaware of.”

“Once the drying and/or smoking process is completed, the nutritional benefits are questionable anyway so why use these treats at all?” Zia concludes.

If you want to use rawhide chews for your dog, first try to source locally made product. Avoid overly white products and ones that are wrapped around scraps of hide which may be sharp and puncture the mouth or digestive tract or be swallowed whole and cause choking. The thicker the hide the better as it takes longer to chew. ‘Basted’, ‘Smoked’ or unnaturally coloured hide can hide any number of sins under the coating. Totally avoid the gaudy ground sticks of hide pieces which fall apart easily, and though often cheap, offer poor quality.

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