

Detoxification: Does Your Pet Need It?

How can you tell if your pet would benefit from a detoxification protocol? Know the signs that suggest his toxin load is at the breaking point, and the 18 sources of toxins that may be overwhelming his body. Plus, 10 ways to support healthy detox and many natural options that can help.

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Every pet is exposed to toxins because these chemicals are ubiquitous in homes, yards, the general environment, and even the veterinary office
- If your animal companion's accumulation of toxins overwhelms her body's natural detoxification processes, it can compromise her health
- There are several things you can do to minimize your pet's exposure to toxins and support the organs of her body responsible for detoxification
- For many pets, a regular detoxification protocol can also be very beneficial

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When you stop to think about all the different kinds of toxins today's pets are exposed to, it's a little overwhelming. Here's just a partial list:

In the environment and around your home:

- Mold
- Flame-retardants
- Radiation and electromagnetic fields (EMFs)
- Bisphenol A (BPA) and phthalates
- Pesticides
- Hydrocarbons, VOC's
- Household and lawn/garden chemicals
- Heavy metals

In your pet's food and drinking water:

- Synthetic hormones and antibiotic residues in animal meat
- Mycotoxins in grain and legume based diets

- Glyphosate residues
- Advanced glycation end products (AGEs) in processed pet food
- Potentially toxic preservatives
- Fluoride, chlorine, heavy metals

At your veterinarian's office:

- Flea, tick and heartworm pesticides
- Chemical dewormers
- Vaccines
- Antibiotics and steroids

Given the pervasiveness of chemical substances all around us, every animal companion has been exposed by walking through them, sleeping on them, inhaling them, eating and drinking them, and having them prescribed or injected by veterinarians.

How Accumulated Toxins Damage Your Pet's Body

As your pet's body accumulates toxins, it stores them for future elimination. But for many animals, that future opportunity never arrives, and the toxic load they are carrying begins to impede the function of vital organ systems. Ultimately, toxic overload can interfere with the immune system to the point where cellular abnormalities like tumors and cysts can develop.

Other serious diseases may also take hold as cells degrade and organ function is impaired. The kidneys, liver and lymphatic system, including the spleen are most at risk; these are the organs of detoxification that often become overburdened and diseased.

Signs of an accumulating toxin load can show up initially as skin conditions and behavior problems, but over time progress to endocrine disease, autoimmune disease, many forms of cancer and organ failure.

Your pet's body possesses its own detoxification mechanisms, but how well they work depends on toxin load, recurrent exposure to toxins, age, genetics, overall health status, and vitality.

Top 10 Detoxification Recommendations for Pets

The body's ability to rid itself of accumulated toxins is based on the overall functioning of detoxification pathways. If those pathways aren't working as intended, detoxification systems become stressed or completely overwhelmed.

Fortunately, there are many ways you can assist your pet's detoxification mechanisms to help them function optimally, including:

1. **Provide clean, pure, high-quality drinking water** — Your pet's drinking water shouldn't contain fluoride, chlorine, heavy metals or other contaminants. Household tap water typically contains enough toxic minerals,

metals, chemicals, and other unhealthy substances to damage your pet's health long term. Provide filtered water in purity checked stainless steel or glass (Pyrex) bowls.

2. **Feed the highest quality diet you can afford** — This is one of the very best things you can do to improve the well-being and longevity of your pet. If you're feeding a ultraprocessed dry food diet, your pet is getting a dose of chemical additives and carcinogenic by-products like AGEs, heterocyclic amines and acrylamides with every bite.

I recommend switching to a clean, nutritionally optimal, fresh food diet that has not undergone any heat processing. I also recommend rotating protein sources (and brands) and strictly limiting or eliminating grains in the diet.

Remember that grain-free kibble has just as many synthetic nutrients and usually a higher glycemic index than regular kibble, so pets eating grain-free food are really no better off when it comes to dietary stress. Raw (sterile raw, if you have pathogen concerns), freeze dried, dehydrated raw and gently cooked foods are the least toxic and least metabolically stressful foods for dogs and cats.

3. **Make sure your pet gets regular exercise** — Regular exercise provides your dog or cat with countless benefits, including helping the body's detoxification efforts. Physical movement promotes regular elimination, which helps move waste from the body in the form of urine and feces.

Exercise stimulates blood circulation and the lymphatic system, so toxins are moved efficiently to the liver and kidneys for processing. Physical activity also improves respiration and helps your pet eliminate mucus from the respiratory tract. If you exercise on chemically treated grass, rinse your dog's paws afterwards.

4. **Minimize exposure to outdoor pollutants and chemicals** — Try to keep your pet away from outdoor areas that are heavily laden with pesticides, herbicides, or fertilizers. If your dog likes to eat grass or other outdoor greenery, make sure she's not grazing where chemicals have been sprayed.

I also recommend adding organic sunflower sprouts to her diet to help reduce her need to forage outside. If you have an indoor cat, you can consider growing wheat grass to satisfy his need to nibble as well.

If you're not sure what your pet may have been exposed to or you suspect something outside is causing skin irritation, do a simple foot soak when you bring her home. It can make a dramatic difference in reducing you're her overall chemical burden. Switch to natural lawn care for your own home.

5. **Brush and bathe your pet regularly** — Your animal companion eliminates toxins through his skin, and regularly brushing or combing will remove loose fur and debris and help his skin breathe via exfoliation. Brushing also helps remove toxic residues from the coat, which means he won't be ingesting them when he grooms.

Don't hesitate to rinse or bathe your dog regularly, especially if he's been exposed to chemicals or has irritated skin. Bathing washes allergens away, along with any chemicals and other foreign molecules that might be riding around on his fur. Make sure to use an **all-natural, nontoxic shampoo and conditioner** specifically designed for pets.

6. **Improve your pet's indoor air quality** — Forbid smoking in your home and use only nontoxic cleaning products. Consider investing in an air purifier to control dust mites.

Avoid polluting your pet's indoor air quality air-scenting products. These products are heavily laden with

chemicals and are known to cause or worsen respiratory conditions like asthma in both people and pets.

Toxins in the air also come from the off gassing of chemicals from new synthetic household items like flooring, carpeting, furniture, drapes, and even pet beds. Unless you're providing an organic, chemical-free pet bed that specifically says that it contains all-natural fibers and hasn't been chemically treated, you should assume it has been treated with flame retardants.

7. **Keep veterinary drugs, including unnecessary vaccines, to an absolute minimum** — Don't subject your pet to unnecessary yearly re-vaccinations; most pets are protected for many years (or for life) after core vaccines. Ask for a titer test to ensure your pet is protected prior to allowing additional vaccines.

Also decline the automatic prescribing of two of the most overprescribed drugs in veterinary medicine, antibiotics and steroids (prednisone). Veterinarians often send clients home with these two drugs because they don't know what else to do. We weren't taught in veterinary school to address the root cause of disease, so the alternative is to hand out pharmaceuticals that will hopefully ease the pet's symptoms.

Many veterinarians don't have enough tools in their toolbox to help pets with certain disorders, for example, dogs with recurrent skin conditions, so the fallback is usually a vicious cycle of antibiotics and steroids.

My recommendation is to accept antibiotic therapy for your pet only if your vet can demonstrate they are the best choice for an identified strain of bacteria. If the offending organism isn't identified, it's bad medicine to simply guess at which antibiotic may work.

I also recommend that you refuse annual deworming of your pet "just because." Complete an annual fecal exam instead. If your dog or cat is diagnosed with a specific parasite, your vet will recommend the appropriate dewormer. There is no one universal dewormer for all parasites and deworming an animal that doesn't have parasites is not only pointless but adds additional chemicals for the body to metabolize.

Just say no to chemicals given once a month on a schedule without discussion (e.g., year round flea, tick and heartworm pesticides that may be unnecessary), or twice a year in the case of most general dewormers. Just say no, and you can reduce your pet's chemical burden and support his or her detoxification mechanisms. Say yes to routine tick-borne disease screening tests and fecal exams.

Use **chemical pest and parasite preventives** only when absolutely necessary, and for the minimum time necessary to protect your pet. Look for safe, natural alternatives to monthly chemical preventives. Very few areas in the U.S. have flea and tick or heartworm problems year-round. You can ask your veterinarian or do your own research and learn the minimum dose needed to effectively protect your pet during pest season in your area.

8. **Support your pet's liver** — The liver is the primary organ of detoxification in your pet's body. There are many herbs that assist liver function and detoxification, including burdock root, dandelion root, licorice, Oregon grape root, yellow dock, and milk thistle.

Milk thistle not only helps detoxify the liver, but it is proven to help stimulate regeneration of liver cells. Another vital liver detoxifier that also supports methylation is SAME (S-adenosylmethionine).

9. **Support your pet's kidneys** — Make sure your pet is getting plenty of clean, pure water each day — both in her diet and at the water bowl. Toxins that travel through the kidneys can become highly concentrated in chronically dehydrated pets and can damage the tiny structures in the kidneys' filtration system.

Also, mineral particles can form when urine is highly concentrated, which may result in crystals or stones that can cause blockages and/or irritation to urinary tract structures, as well as infections.

Herbs that help support kidney detoxification include dandelion, parsley, cranberry, corn silk and marshmallow. Curcumin has been shown to protect kidney tissue against environmental pollutants.

Poria mushrooms have particularly beneficial effects on kidney detoxification and are a natural source of glutathione, which also enhances detox pathways. Supplying your pet with hydrogen-rich water provides an additional way to support internal detoxification by clearing reactive oxygen species (ROS).¹

10. **Support your pet's lymphatic and immune systems** — The lymph and immune systems are also toxin-removal organs. Red clover and cleavers help your pet's lymphatic system remove toxins from the tissues of the body.

Chlorella also binds blood borne toxins that can end up burdening the lymphatic system. In my opinion, this is one of the most important supplements to reduce a dog's risk of hemangiosarcoma. You can supercharge chlorella's powerful effects by combining it with cilantro.

Garlic and other sulfur-rich veggies protect the body from heavy metal damage and turmeric has been shown to protect the gut lining from oxidative damage.

Natural Detoxification Agents

The goal of natural detoxification agents is to support and promote healthy functioning of your pet's toxin-removal organs, including the liver, kidneys, lymphatic system and immune system. I recommend you talk with your integrative veterinarian about what detoxifiers are appropriate for your pet's individual needs, and in what doses. Here are some of my favorites:

- **Resveratrol** is the active ingredient in the plant known as Japanese knotweed. Resveratrol controls liver enzyme elevations by reducing lipid peroxidation in the liver. It helps the liver clean house by flushing accumulations of fat so the organ can function optimally.
- The catechins found in **green tea** dramatically modify cancer-causing molecules that damage cellular DNA. Inactivation and excretion of carcinogens is a big part of keeping your pet's body cancer-free for a lifetime. Green tea extract (decaffeinated, of course) can be very beneficial for your pet.
- **Phosphatidylserine** is critical for a detoxification process known as methylation. Pets' bodies are wired with very potent hormones (e.g., adrenaline and cortisol) needed for emergencies, but these hormones can be very damaging to body tissues with chronic exposure. The faster your pet's body can get rid of these hormones once they're no longer needed, the less damage is done. The process of getting rid of these hormones is called methylation and depending on your dog's genetics and nutrition status, methylation pathways may be compromised.
- **Glutathione (GSH)** is cellular super-antioxidant that is necessary for healthy methylation and preventing reactive oxygen species (ROS), which are internal threats to the health of organ systems. Animals with a genetic mutation or who lack specific nutrients in the diet won't make enough GSH, so supplementation can be beneficial, especially if a pet has been exposed to BPA (ditch those plastic food and water bowls) or heavy metals in processed pet food.

- **Activated charcoal** (I also use coconut as a natural binder that helps remove contaminants from the body, including the hard-to-clear mycotoxins found in many ultra-processed pet foods. Mold (and accompanying mycotoxins) can also be present in water-damaged homes and can bioaccumulate in animals' bodies until they are specifically removed through effective detoxification.
- **Superoxide dismutase**, also called SOD, is a potent enzyme that the body naturally produces to clear some of the most damaging toxic metabolites from the system but is often in short supply. SOD is responsible for the removal of free radicals from your pet's body, which helps the lymphatic system work optimally.

Sources and References

¹ [Sim, M. et al. Scientific Reports volume 10, Article number: 12130 \(2020\).](#)
