3 Must-Haves for a Pet Probiotic

The GI tract of dogs and cats is much different from yours, so one of the biggest mistakes you can make when choosing a pet probiotic is to assume human probiotics will work just fine. Here's what to look for when selecting an effective high-quality probiotic for your cat or dog.

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Pet probiotics may be beneficial for GI issues, allergies, diabetes, obesity, liver disease, mood support and more
- Avoid commercial pet foods fortified with probiotics and choose regular or soil-based products formulated for pets
- Look for pet probiotics with more bacteria strains, i.e., greater diversity; research suggests that 10 or more bacteria strains are optimal
- Many products on the market contain between 1 million and 3 million beneficial bacteria per serving; the ideal amount for optimal pet health is 40 million or more
- Look for a product manufactured in a GMP (Good Manufacturing Practice)-certified facility to ensure the probiotics are safe, potent and pure

Imbalances in these organisms may lead to inflammatory and other diseases, while the use of probiotics may be beneficial for GI issues, allergies, diabetes, obesity, liver disease, mood support and more.[2]

Why Might Your Pet Need Probiotics?

Your pet's microflora can be altered by stress, illness, use of veterinary medications, including antibiotics, anti-inflammatories (steroidal and nonsteroidal drugs), and flea and tick chemicals, as well as changes in their diet and environment. For instance, eating nonfood item — known as pica — can influence your pet's gut microbiome, as can ingesting fertilizers or pesticides, eating biologically inappropriate foods or getting **vaccinations**.

When physical or emotional stress upsets the bacterial balance in your dog's digestive tract, it can trigger a cascade of nutritional problems, including poor nutrient absorption and intermittent or chronic diarrhea.

It also opens the door to leaky gut syndrome (dysbiosis) in which partially digested amino acids and allergens escape from the GI tract and enter the bloodstream, which can trigger further health problems, including autoimmune disease. If your pet has recently taken antibiotics, you can also assume their microbiome has been disrupted.

In this case, notes Dr. Emily Gould, a clinical assistant professor at the Texas A&M School of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences' Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital, "The purpose of administering a probiotic would be to replenish 'good bacteria' in the pet's gut in order to restore a healthier intestinal gut ecosystem, correcting the

imbalance."[3]

What to Look for in Pet Probiotics

When researching supplements for your pet, avoid commercial pet food with added probiotics, as well as human probiotics, since they were developed specifically to fortify the bacterial species found in the human GI tract. Dogs and cats have specific strains of bacteria unique to them, so they do best with a customized probiotic.

In general, look for probiotics with greater diversity, or multiple strains, to provide better balance. Gould explained:

> *"There are a few products that either have studies to show it benefits our veterinary patients, or veterinarians have enough experience with them to know they provide benefits. For example, we think of probiotics with more different types of bacteria as being more balanced and in general 'better' probiotics to give. Increased diversity of good bacteria is associated with a better product."*

Also, watch out for additives or poor manufacturing processes. If you're using probiotics in a pet with allergies, and in the midst of an elimination diet trial, you'll want to be particularly careful to choose a probiotic without any additions. As Gould noted:

> *"Many probiotic products will have animal protein flavoring or just not have good quality control during product manufacturing, which can result in contamination. This can definitely confound the effects of your food trial."*

In some cases, traditional Lactobacillus and Bifidobacterium-based probiotics aren't recommended or beneficial, including when pets have small intestine bacterial overgrowth (SIBO). In these cases, soil-based organisms (SBOs), or spore-forming probiotics, may a better choice.

Three Characteristics of a High-Quality Probiotic

A high-quality pet probiotic can improve your pet's GI function and help with chronic conditions in puppies and senior pets alike. It can even boost nutrient absorption and overall immunity. Here are three important characteristics to look for when choosing a probiotic for your pet:

- **10 or more bacteria strains —** Research suggests that 10 or more bacteria strains are optimal, so while probiotic with one or two strains may be OK, a probiotic with 10 or more strains will be better able to respond to a wide variety of stressors.
- **Potency of at least 40 million —** Many products on the market contain between 1 million and 3 million beneficial bacteria per serving. The ideal amount for optimal pet health is 40 million or more beneficial bacteria per serving.
- **Manufactured in a GMP-certified facility —** Look for a product manufactured in a GMP (Good Manufacturing Practice)-certified facility to ensure viability, or the ability to survive the acidic environment of your pet's stomach. You'll also want a probiotic that has undergone independent testing to ensure the beneficial bacteria listed on the product label are actually in the product, at the levels claimed.

  Testing should also be done to ensure the probiotics make it to your pet's small intestine for optimal absorption. GMP regulations are put in place to ensure the product is safe, potent and pure. GMP certification isn't always

listed on product labels, so you may need to call the manufacturer to be sure.

Keep in mind, too, that probiotics aren't the only way to improve your pet's GI microbiome. Adding fermented vegetables, which are naturally rich in beneficial bacteria, to your pet's diet is another option — and a great one at that, because they provide a wide variety of bacteria in high amounts, and they're relatively inexpensive, especially if you make them at home.

Sources and References

[1] Vet Rec Open. 2019; 6(1): e000368

[2] Clinician's Brief February 2013. Probiotics

[3, 4, 5] Texas A&M School of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences' Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital January 19, 2023