

## Three of the Healthiest Oils for Your Pet

Many pets lack a good source of omega-3s, and omega-3 deficiencies are the most common nutritional deficiency I see in my practice.

**Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker**

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Many dogs' diets are lacking in healthy fats to support their health and prevent skin, heart and other health conditions
- Krill oil, rich in omega-3 fats, and coconut oil are beneficial additions to most dogs' diets
- Some dogs may also benefit from the addition of flaxseed or hemp oils, particularly if they're deficient in omega-6 fats (which is uncommon)

***Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published June 10, 2016.***

Many dogs' diets are lacking in healthy fats to support their health. This is especially true if they eat a primarily canned or dry food-diet.

Why does your dog need healthy dietary fats? They provide a concentrated source of energy and make up cell membranes. In addition, certain fats have anti-inflammatory benefits and play a role in the formation of hormones.

Healthy fats are also necessary for your pet to produce bile acids that will help him to digest and absorb nutrients. A simple way to significantly increase the healthy fats in your dog's diet is to add healthy, high-quality oils to his meals.

### Three Healthy Oils for Your Dog

1. **Krill oil** — Krill oil is rich in the omega-3 fats eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). These anti-inflammatory fats are found naturally in seafood, but don't expect to get meaningful amounts in fish meal-based pet foods, which I don't recommend.

You can feed your pet sardines packed in water or wild-caught salmon for valuable omega-3s, or try a krill oil supplement. I recommend all marine oils be verified to be sustainably sourced and toxin-free.

Omega-3s are very sensitive to oxygen and can become rancid quickly, so I prefer oils dispensed from an airless pump or that come in capsules that can be cut and squeezed onto food just prior to feeding.

My last choice is to buy liquid, bottled oils, because there is a far greater risk of oxidation over time. You should also be wary of omega-3 fats added to commercial pet food, as they're likely to be inactivated, rancid, or can become rancid over time.

Omega-3 deficiency is the most common nutritional deficiency I see in my practice. The symptoms I encounter on a daily basis include cats with dry skin and chronic oral inflammation, and dogs with recurrent skin and ear infections.

Supplementing your dog's (and cat's) diet with nontoxic marine oils, such as krill oil, is important for overall health for virtually all pets, but may offer particular benefits for pets with the following conditions:

- Allergies
- Yeast infections
- Certain types of cancer
- Vision problems
- Heart disorders
- Cognitive issues
- Inflammatory skin disease
- Kidney disease
- Osteoarthritis

How much krill oil does your pet need? If your pet is currently in good health, I recommend supplementing with krill oil as follows:

- 250 milligrams (mg) daily for toy breeds and cats (1 to 14 pounds)
- 500 mg daily for small dogs (15 to 29 pounds)
- 1,000 mg daily for medium dogs (30 to 49 pounds)
- 1,500 mg daily for large dogs (5 to 79 pounds)
- 2,000 mg daily for dogs 80 pounds and above

2. **Coconut oil** — I recommend feeding one-quarter teaspoon of **100% organic, cold-pressed, and human-grade coconut oil** for every 10 pounds of body weight twice daily for dogs (and cats). This can be added at meal time to your pet's fresh homemade or commercial raw diet.

Coconut oil is a concentrated source of medium-chain triglycerides (MCTs), which may benefit your dog's cognitive function. In one study, senior beagles fed a diet supplemented with MCTs had significant improvements in brain function.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, coconut oil is a rich source of lauric acid, which is a powerful antimicrobial agent. This makes coconut oil an especially good choice for pets with **yeast infections** or **allergies**. It may also help with hairballs in cats and can be used topically for skin conditions.

Coconut oil can be beneficial both orally and topically. In the video below, you can see the coconut oil treatments I give to my senior dog Rosco, who struggles with flaky and sometimes itchy skin.

3. **Flaxseed, hemp, and pumpkin seed oils** — If you should have a need to supplement omega-6 fats in your pet's diet (usually people who feed a homemade diet), plant oils like flaxseed, hemp and pumpkin seeds are much preferred over sources like corn oil, safflower oil or olive oil. A lack of omega-6 fats in your pet's diet will

result in poor overall development and a failure to gain weight.

An omega-6 deficiency can also compromise your pet's immune system and cause liver and kidney degeneration. Other signs of omega-6 deficiency include:

- Behavioral disturbances
- Poor wound healing
- Miscarriage
- Sterility in male pets

That being said, omega-6 deficiencies are rare in dogs and cats because commercial pet food diets typically provide too much rather than too little of these fats. You may have heard that flaxseed oil is a good source of omega-3s, but be aware that this is a plant-based form called alpha-linolenic acid (ALA).

Dogs and cats cannot efficiently convert plant sources of omega-3 fats into appropriate amounts of DHA and EPA, so the best option for omega-3 fats is to use an animal-based source such as krill oil or sardines.

## **Add Healthy Oils to Your Pet's Food at Mealtime**

When feeding your pet healthy oils like krill oil, flaxseed oil or hemp oil, add them to your pet's food at meal time. This will ensure the oil stays fresh and is not oxidized or rancid by the time your pet consumes it (assuming it was fresh to begin with). As mentioned, I recommend using krill oil from an airless pump or in capsule form for this very reason (if your pet won't eat the whole capsule or you need a smaller amount, pierce the capsule and squeeze it onto your pet's food).

If you feed your pet a homemade fresh or raw diet, you'll want to be sure you have included the appropriate amounts of essential fatty acids. However, even if you feed a commercially prepared diet, it's most likely to be lacking in enough beneficial omega-3s due to the heat required for processing, which is why I often recommend adding an additional source to your pet's meals.

For a guide on how to prepare nutritionally balanced, fresh-food meals for your pets, refer to my book of homemade pet food recipes, "Real Food for Healthy Dogs & Cats."

The recipes in this book are not only AAFCO (The Association of American Feed Control Officials)-compliant, they also meet the nutritional requirements for biologically appropriate, healthy diets for all stages of a pet's life as outlined by the National Research Council (NRC) and the ancestral diet for dogs and cats. The recipes make it easy to feed your pet the best diet, full of species-appropriate healthy fats and oils, possible.

## **Sources and References**

[PetMD](#)

<sup>1</sup> [Br J Nutr. 2010 Jun;103\(12\):1746-54](#)

---