

# Are These Additives Helping or Harming Your Pet?

Discover the truth behind popular nutraceuticals and what they really do to your pet's health. Take advantage of these findings that could change the way you feed your furry friend!

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## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Nutraceuticals and other types of dietary supplements are increasingly included in ultraprocessed pet foods and treats, but the quality and potency of those add-ins can be questionable
- My recommendation is to leave those products on store shelves and instead, add fresh, high-quality supplements to your pet's healthy meals or treats as you feed them
- Four nutraceuticals that are frequently added to processed commercial pet food include yucca schidigera, collagen, green tea extract, and turmeric
- Each of these nutrients can be helpful for certain pets; however, it's important to talk with your integrative veterinarian about which would be most beneficial for your dog's or cat's individual needs

Nutraceutical ingredients, including the four I'm about to discuss, are appearing more often these days on pet food labels.<sup>1</sup> Now, I'm all for high-quality supplements for dogs and cats who can benefit from them, but there are an increasing number of ultraprocessed pet foods and **treats** on the market that claim to contain popular supplements baked right into the mix.

My first concern is the quality of these supplement add-ins. Since the quality of many processed pet food ingredients is poor, I can't imagine the quality of their feed-grade nutraceuticals and supplements is much better.

Secondly, it's extremely difficult to maintain the potency and effectiveness of dietary supplements exposed to high heat processing and extrusion, in the case of kibble. That's why I always recommend adding fresh, high-quality supplements to your pet's healthy meals or treats as you feed them.

Four nutraceuticals that are increasingly being added to processed commercial pet food include Yucca schidigera, collagen, green tea extract, and turmeric. Let's take a look at each of these and see what, if any benefit they might provide for your dog or cat.

## Yucca Schidigera

Yucca schidigera is a flowering desert shrub-tree in the lily family that is native to the deserts of southeastern California, Baja California, New Mexico, southern Nevada and Arizona.

Oddly, it seems the use of this nutraceutical seems to primarily revolve around the quest for odorless pet poop. According to a pet food industry journal:

*“Research is constantly being conducted to determine the best ways to balance pet health and wellness and consumer desire to keep their furry friends from smelling up their homes.”<sup>2</sup>*

Obviously, cats and dogs have no qualms about “smelling up the house,” so this is a good example of how pet food producers use human desires to create formulas that may not be of much benefit to the animals eating them.

*Yucca schidigera* is thought to be “capable of reducing waste odor in dogs and cats.” According to one report:

*“Yucca ingestion generally improves the character and intensity of canine and feline aroma. The overall decrease in fecal offensiveness is 26% ...*

*Owners are able to detect the effect of yucca on a group level, but it is unknown whether the degree of odor amelioration can be considered relevant in practice. In any event, a material portion of pet owners will not experience a beneficial impact of yucca.*

*The 12 studies indicate that a dose of 125 mg yucca preparation/kg dry food generally is effective, but higher doses might have more impact.”<sup>3</sup>*

I’m not a fan of dietary additives that are marketed to do things like “decrease fecal offensiveness.” For starters, poop is a waste product — it isn’t supposed to smell like roses, but it shouldn’t be a near-death experience, either. Secondly, anything that works from the inside out to change the smell of normal feces in a healthy animal is by necessity interfering in some way with the metabolic process.

A better approach is to figure out why your pet’s poop is that obnoxiously stinky. Usually the culprit is a biologically inappropriate diet loaded with species-inappropriate ingredients.

In addition, yucca extract contains soap-like components called saponins, which are antinutrients that interfere with absorption of essential nutrients. Yucca fed short term is fine. Yucca fed indefinitely isn’t a wise idea.

If your pet’s poop seems fouler smelling than it should, my first recommendation is to transition your dog or cat to a nutritionally optimal, species-specific, fresh food diet. This should minimize fecal odor, and as a bonus, there will also be a smaller volume of poop. However, if your pet is eating an excellent quality species-appropriate diet and his poop still seems malodorous, a visit to your veterinarian is in order to check for a possible underlying health problem.

Interestingly, *yucca schidigera* does have application in certain situations. According to master herbalist Greg Tilford in his book “Herbs for Pets: The Natural Way to Enhance Your Pet’s Life,” yucca may be of help to dogs suffering from joint problems, arthritis, or hip dysplasia. It can act as a sort of natural steroid to help stimulate the body to make and use its own corticosteroids and related hormones.<sup>4</sup>

However, yucca must be used in moderation and should be given to treat a specific condition rather than for everyday, forever use. Too much yucca over long periods of time can irritate the digestive tract, causing loose stools and reversing its benefits.

My recommendation is to avoid feeding commercial pet foods containing yucca on a regular basis, and instead address the real reason your pet has malodorous stools, which is usually the diet. If you're interested in exploring yucca's use for a specific health concern, do so under the guidance of an integrative veterinarian or herbalist who can offer dosing guidelines appropriate for your pet's medical condition.

## Collagen

Collagen is a fibrous protein that supports cartilage and connective tissue strength and elasticity. It can be beneficial in helping to maintain flexibility and joint integrity in pets.

In my experience, one of the best ways to supplement your dog's or cat's diet with collagen is bone broth, which is inexpensive to make, easy to prepare and, best of all, incredibly nutritious. When you simmer bones in water overnight (or longer), it allows all the minerals and marrow to leach out into the water, providing your pet with a variety of nutrients in an easily absorbable form, including:

- Calcium, phosphorus and other minerals
- Components of collagen and cartilage
- Silicon and other trace minerals
- Components of bone and bone marrow
- **Glucosamine and chondroitin sulfate**
- The "conditionally essential" amino acids proline, glycine and glutamine

The boiled down cartilage and collagen in the broth is excellent for animals with achy joints and may help reduce joint pain and inflammation. Cartilage is also known to support immune system health while the amino acids in bone broth (such as glycine, proline and arginine) fight inflammation.

The minerals in the broth help support bone health, as does the collagen. The gelatin in bone broth may also support muscle growth, making it useful for athletic as well as elderly pets.

Bone broth is also easy to digest and provides excellent support for the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. In fact, bone broth provides a highly concentrated source of nutrition for pets that have recently been sick, are elderly or have become finicky eaters.

It's not a balanced diet, but it works well for a snack or for pets who are refusing to eat. You can also add the broth to your dog's or cat's regular meals for added flavor, **moisture** and nutrition. Freeze it in ice cube trays to make a perfect summer cool-down treat.

## Green Tea Extract

Green tea is an excellent source of antioxidants and alkaloids, and is an excellent source of vitamins A, D, E, C, B, B5, H, and K, manganese and other beneficial minerals such as zinc, chromium, and selenium. Fresh tea leaves contain powerful antioxidants called polyphenols (essentially a series of chemicals called catechins).

Studies have shown that epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG) is the most powerful catechin found in green tea, supplying 20 to 35 mg in a single cup. In one study, scientists found EGCG to be 25 to 100 times more potent than vitamins C and E. Another reported that one cup offers antioxidant effects greater than a serving of broccoli, spinach, carrots, or strawberries.<sup>5</sup>

According to information provided by veterinarians Steve Marsden, Shawn Messonnier, and Cheryl Yuill:

*“Green tea might be beneficial in any condition calling for the use of antioxidants. In humans, green tea is indicated as an antioxidant, an anticancer agent, and to lower blood cholesterol. Several tumor types are inhibited by green tea, including cancers of the stomach, gall bladder, prostate, uterus, lung, intestine, colon, rectum and pancreas.*

*Green tea also inhibits breast cancer by binding to estrogen receptors, making it of potential value in the treatment of mammary gland cancer in small animals. Its comprehensive action against a variety of tumors in humans suggests green tea may provide the same benefits in animals.*

*Although they are absorbed into all body tissues, green tea catechins concentrate in the liver and digestive tract of dogs and laboratory animals, making it more likely they will be protective to these body regions.”<sup>6</sup>*

While there have been no clinical trials of green tea to treat cancer in pets, in humans, regular consumption seems to reduce the incidence of stomach, colon, and pancreatic cancer. It's reasonable to assume it may provide similar protective benefits for dogs and cats. If your furry family member has been diagnosed with cancer, be sure to talk with your veterinarian first before adding green tea (or any supplement) to your pet's treatment protocol.

Inactivation and excretion of carcinogens plays a big role in keeping your pet's body cancer-free. Since the catechins found in green tea dramatically modify cancer-causing molecules that damage cellular DNA, I often recommend decaffeinated green tea extract as part of a **detoxification protocol** to support liver and kidney function.

Green tea infusion (using tea that has been cooled) is also one of my favorite cleaning agents for dirty pet ears. It can also be used to soothe hot spots and mouth sores. Recipe for organic decaf green tea for pets:

**Directions:**

1. Combine 1 liter (about 4 cups) of purified water and 1 tea bag or 1 tablespoon of loose tea leaves
2. Steep for 15 minutes
3. Remove the tea bag or use a strainer to remove the tea leaves
4. Store the tea in a covered, preferably glass pitcher in the fridge for up to 3 days

Add the following amounts of green tea to your pet's morning and evening meal:

- **Cats** — 1 tablespoon
- **Small dogs** — 1/8th cup
- **Medium dogs** — 1/4 to 1/2 cup
- **Large dogs** — 1/2 to 1 cup

Green tea also comes in supplement form, but if you choose to use a supplement instead of tea, I recommend finding a product specifically blended and dosed for pets.

## Turmeric

The active ingredient in turmeric is curcumin, found in the roots and bulbs, which is composed of a variety of phenolic compounds and terpenoids. The most active are described as the curcuminoids, which include curcumin, demethoxycurcumin and bisdemethoxycurcumin. Curcumin possesses antioxidant properties, comprises about 2% - 8% of the turmeric and is responsible for the yellow color and flavor.<sup>7</sup>

Turmeric has been used for thousands of years in Ayurvedic and Traditional Chinese Medicine as a safe, powerful, inflammation-fighting agent. More recently, Western and holistic medicine evidence points to the benefits of turmeric in supporting healthy organ function in humans and animals due to its antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, antiviral, antibacterial, antifungal and anticancer properties.

Scientists believe curcumin may have a very significant potential effect against a variety of malignant diseases, diabetes, allergies, arthritis and other chronic conditions. In both humans and animals, turmeric has been shown to:

- Maintain healthy blood sugar levels within range
- Encourage healthy **liver function**
- Improve stress tolerance
- Promote joint health
- Maintain normal cholesterol levels
- Provide and support a healthy immune system
- Promote healthy blood and circulation
- Promote healthy skin and eyes
- Balance the digestive tract
- Enhance antioxidant protection against free radicals

Most dogs and cats readily accept a little turmeric seasoning from your spice drawer on their meals, as the flavor is mild and nonaversive. I've also found most pets, including birds, do fine with the fresh root grated over their food. Organic turmeric is readily available in most spice isles, opt for it to avoid contaminants.

If you want to increase the amount of biologically available curcumin in your pet's diet, you'll need to go with a supplement. I recommend you look for a human grade, high-quality **organic turmeric** product, given as follows:

- **Cats** — 100 milligrams twice a day
- **Small to medium-sized dogs** — 250 milligrams twice a day
- **Large to giant breeds** — 500 milligrams two to three times a day

Another option for adding turmeric to your pet's diet is **golden paste**. If you're thinking about nutraceuticals/dietary supplements for your dog or cat, as always, I recommend you talk with your integrative veterinarian about what products would be most beneficial for your pet's individual needs. I also recommend purchasing supplements that are

made with human-grade raw materials in a GMP-certified facility, or that are third party tested by the **National Animal Supplement Council** (NASC).

## Sources and References

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