

If Your Pup Is Over 7, Feed Her This for Mental Alertness

Researchers at Purina discovered this essential for healthy brain function in older pups. It also helps improve memory, attention and trainability. But don't fall for their kibble ad campaign - here's a safer, healthier way to get it into your dog's food supply.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- A new line of heavily marketed processed dry dog food promises to “promote alertness and mental sharpness in dogs 7 and older”
- The added ingredient in the new kibble to improve mental sharpness is medium-chain triglycerides (MCTs). The formulas also list glucosamine derived from poultry by-product meal and fish meal
- A better source of MCTs is organic coconut oil, and high quality glucosamine sulfate supplements are preferable to poultry and fish meal
- Highly processed kibble, regardless of added beneficial ingredients, is not a good choice for dogs (or cats) of any age. A better choice is to feed your pet a fresh, whole food diet and add beneficial supplements at mealtime

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Recently you might have noticed a television ad campaign for a dog food that claims to "promote alertness and mental sharpness in dogs 7 and older." In one commercial, the owners of a 10-year-old dog lament that their pet has lost her "social side." But after 30 days on the advertised dog food, the owners say their pet is much more aware and has a "brighter look to her eyes." A PetfoodIndustry.com article about the new dog food states that:

"After years of research, Purina experts have discovered that fatty acids derived from botanical oils, called medium-chain triglycerides (MCTs), can be used in addition to glucose as an energy source for the brain. As part of an older dog's total nutrition, MCTs have been shown to promote alertness and mental sharpness in older dogs age 7 and up.

When added to the daily diet of dogs age 7 and older, MCTs promoted memory, attention, and trainability. Owners who feed a Purina Pro Plan Bright Mind formula may notice differences in owner-dog interaction, interest in play, and the ability to adapt and cope with change."¹

A Better Source of MCTs: Organic Coconut Oil

Purina's experts were hardly the first scientists to discover the benefits of medium-chain triglycerides (MCTs) in improving brain energy metabolism, though they may have been the first processed pet food producer to add it to a kibble formula.

In the Bright Mind Chicken & Rice Formula, it appears as the 9th item on the ingredient list as "medium-chain triglyceride vegetable oil." MCT oil is a manufactured oil in which the fatty acids are extracted through an industrial process called "fractionation."²

Chances are the oil in the formula is not coconut oil, or it would be named. (Purina refers to "enhanced botanical oils" in its marketing materials for the Bright Mind products.) Natural coconut oil is a rich source of all four MCTs (caproic acid, caprylic acid, capric acid, and lauric acid), and is nature's richest source of lauric acid, which is a powerful antimicrobial agent.

I recommend feeding ¼ teaspoon of 100 percent organic, cold-pressed, and human-grade coconut oil for every 10 pounds of body weight twice daily for basic MCT support, added at mealtime to your pet's fresh homemade or commercial raw diet.

As regular Healthy Pets visitors know, I don't recommend feeding kibble, even brands to which beneficial ingredients have been added. It's impossible to know the quality or source of those ingredients, and in addition, the high heat and extrusion process used to manufacture kibble depletes the nutrients in the food. There's also the potential for **carcinogens in dry dog food**.

A Better Source of Glucosamine: A High-Quality Glucosamine Sulfate Supplement

The marketing materials for the Bright Mind formulas also mention the addition of glucosamine to help support joint health and mobility. Glucosamine (I prefer glucosamine sulfate) is one of several excellent joint support supplements, however, the Bright Mind formulas are delivering it via poultry by-product meal and fish meal, both of which are listed as a "natural source of glucosamine" on the ingredient list.

Glucosamine is found in the shells of marine animals and in animal cartilage, but it doesn't occur naturally in abundance in foods that are commonly eaten in the US.³ It is typically extracted from crab, lobster, or shrimp shells, all of which are potential sources of heavy metal contamination.

Poultry by-product meal may be a natural source of glucosamine, but it's an ingredient I never want to see on pet food ingredient lists. Unfortunately, it appears in the #3 spot on the Bright Mind Chicken & Rice Formula ingredient list. The Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) definition of poultry by-product meal:

"Consists of the ground, rendered, and clean parts of the carcasses of slaughtered poultry, such as necks, feet, undeveloped eggs, and intestines, exclusive of feathers except in such amounts as might occur unavoidably in good processing practices."

It's also important to know that "poultry" is a broad category, and "poultry meal" often contains more than one type of poultry. It might contain chicken and/or turkey, geese, buzzard, seagull, or unidentifiable roadkill with wings.

My recommendation is to skip the kibble with added glucosamine from "natural sources" and offer your dog a high-quality glucosamine sulfate supplement.

In addition, there are many other supplements and therapies available to help pets stay comfortable and mobile as they get older. Some chews, such as beef tracheas, can also be a natural food source of glucosamine.

I also recommend avoiding fishmeal altogether in pet food. The vast majority of fishmeal is preserved with ethoxyquin, a toxic preservative. And because it's added at the time the fishmeal is produced, pet food companies that buy prepared meal from suppliers don't have to list ethoxyquin on the label, even though it's in the food.

A Better Source of Nutrition for Your Pet: A Fresh Food Diet

Overall, the new Purina Bright Mind dry food formulas are lacking in the kind of high quality nutrition I recommend for every pet, including older dogs. The top half of the ingredient list for the Chicken & Rice Formula includes:⁴

1. Chicken
2. Brewer's rice
3. Poultry by-product meal
4. Corn gluten meal
5. Whole grain wheat
6. Whole grain corn
7. Oat meal
8. Fish meal
9. MCT vegetable oil
10. Pea fiber
11. Barley
12. Animal digest
13. Fish oil
14. Wheat bran
15. Dried egg product
16. Salt
17. Potassium chloride
18. Potassium citrate
19. Mono and dicalcium phosphate
20. Vitamin E supplement

While chicken is the first ingredient in the list, things go downhill quickly from there. Lots of grains, corn products, and animal digest. The AAFCO definition of animal digest:

"A material which results from chemical and/or enzymatic hydrolysis of clean and undecomposed animal tissue. The animal tissues used shall be exclusive of hair, horns, teeth, hooves, and feathers, except in such trace amounts as might occur unavoidably in good factory practice and shall be suitable for animal feed. If it bears a name descriptive of its kind or flavor(s), it must correspond thereto."

The Dog Food Project definition of animal digest:

*"A cooked-down broth made from unspecified parts of unspecified animals. The animals used can be obtained from any source, so there is no control over quality or contamination. Any kind of animal can be included: '4-D animals' (dead, diseased, disabled, or dying prior to slaughter), goats, pigs, horses, rats, misc. roadkill, animals euthanized at shelters, restaurant, and supermarket refuse and so on."*⁵

My recommendation is to avoid commercial pet foods containing dubious ingredients like animal digest, and instead feed your pet a balanced, fresh, and whole food diet, preferably raw, made with organic, and non-GMO ingredients.

Another Ingredient to Avoid: Menadione (Synthetic Vitamin K)

The Bright Mind Chicken & Rice Formula also contains "menadione sodium bisulfite complex (source of Vitamin K activity)." Menadione is a synthetic version of vitamin K. Vitamin K is an important factor in blood clotting. It also drives minerals to certain organs of the body like the teeth and bones, to help them heal and support connective tissue.

There's a great deal of controversy and growing concern about the use of menadione in pet food (and some human foods as well). As with many questionable ingredients in the food supply, there is an ongoing debate over whether or not menadione is safe.

Natural vitamin K is a fat-soluble vitamin that is absorbed through fat metabolism. Menadione is a water-soluble form of vitamin K that works very differently. It is presumably absorbed by bacteria in the gut and converted to forms of vitamin K the body can use.

There are very significant limitations to menadione vs. natural vitamin K. For example, it doesn't support blood clotting. So there are important properties of natural vitamin K that synthetic vitamin K lacks.

Another significant and growing concern about menadione is that it may cause liver toxicity. Studies from other countries show that menadione causes toxicity to liver cells and red blood cells. There are material safety data sheets (MSDS) that list menadione as a substance that is toxic to the liver, kidneys, lungs, mucous membranes, and other tissues. Obviously, it's a concern when a toxin is being added to foods that pets are eating every day.

For a full discussion of the menadione controversy, see my interview with Dr. Tom Cameron: **[Does Your Pet's Food Contain This Toxic Synthetic Vitamin?](#)**

Sources and References

¹ [PetfoodIndustry.com, March 6, 2015](#)

² [Health Impact News](#)

³ [DrWeil.com](#)

⁴ [ProPlan.com](#)

⁵ [Dog Food Project](#)
