

## No Wonder Your Pets Love It So Much When You Do This

They not only give a big boost to your pet's longevity. But they can give your pet a new lease on life by nixing some of the pain and symptoms related to aging and diseases. Perhaps even preventing issues from developing in the first place. Do you do this for your pet?

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Dietary supplements for dogs and cats are becoming increasingly popular with pet parents
- Supplement categories include those for GI tract, liver and kidney, heart, joint and skin and coat health
- High-quality dietary supplements can be extremely beneficial to your pet's health and longevity; work with your veterinarian to determine what types supplements are best for your dog or cat
- When researching supplements for your pet, you'll want to avoid human probiotics, and probiotics added to commercial pet food
- As always, talk with your holistic veterinarian about your pet's individual needs

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More and more pet parents are learning about the potential benefits of nutritional and issue-targeted dietary supplements. In an interview with a veterinary magazine, Bill Bookout, president and founding member of the **National Animal Supplement Council** (NASC) observed:

*“There aren't any magic bullets out there, but I think supplements are becoming more and more recognized and substantiated as a valuable component of a comprehensive care program where we either try to maintain general health and wellness, or manage health as a result of the aging process or some health challenge.”<sup>1</sup>*

The most popular categories of pet supplements include those for gastrointestinal (GI) tract health, liver and kidney health, heart health, joint health and skin and coat health.

### Supplements for a Healthy GI Tract

Two exceptionally beneficial supplements to promote healthy digestion in pets are probiotics and digestive enzymes. **Probiotics** are friendly strains of bacteria that promote healthy levels of good bacteria in your pet's GI tract and defend against pathogenic bacteria.

The digestive tract is the largest immune organ in your pet's body. Your dog or cat has even more intestinal bacteria than you do, despite her much smaller size. The GI tracts of companion animals are designed to handle a tremendous bacterial load — bacteria that could quickly develop into a life-threatening infection if found elsewhere in your pet's

body.

A healthy population of friendly bacteria keeps your pet's immune system in good working order. If the balance of bad-to-good intestinal bugs gets out of whack, your pet will eventually develop GI symptoms and an increased susceptibility to illness. Studies show that animals raised without friendly bacteria in the gut, or with a poor balance of good-to-bad gut bacteria, are at dramatically increased risk for disease.

When researching supplements for your pet, you'll want to avoid human probiotics, and probiotics added to commercial pet food. Probiotic formulas used by humans were developed specifically to fortify the bacterial species found in the human GI tract. Pets have specific strains of bacteria unique to them, so they need a unique probiotic.

The bacteria in a probiotic must be live and able to reproduce in order for it to be beneficial. Tests on dog foods claiming to contain probiotic microorganisms showed the manufacturing process kills too many of the live bacteria, rendering the probiotic effect useless by the time the food is packaged and shipped.

Look for a pet probiotic that can survive the acidic environment of your dog's or cat's stomach, contains enough live organisms to colonize the intestines and the correct strains of bacteria beneficial for pets (not people). It should also remain stable under normal storage conditions and be easy to give to your pet.

High-quality digestive enzymes for pets should be sourced from animals (not plants or fungi), and should ideally contain some or all of these ingredients: betaine HCl, ox bile extract, bromelain, papain, pancreatin, protease, amylase and lipase.

## Supplements for Liver and Kidney Support

There are a number of wonderful supplements to support your pet's organs of detoxification. Liver and kidney support agents include milk thistle, SAMe, L-glycine, phosphatidylcholine, curcumin, taurine, N-acetyl L-cysteine, resveratrol, schisandra extract, green tea leaf extract (decaffeinated), L-glutathione, chlorella, superoxide dismutase, dandelion leaf and silica.

As always, talk with your **holistic veterinarian** about your pet's individual needs. Since kidney disease is epidemic in kitties today, to help your cat avoid kidney and urinary tract disease, be sure to feed a moisture-rich, species-appropriate diet to minimize stress on her vital organs.

## Supplements for a Healthy Heart

A very important supplement for pet heart health is CoQ10, or more specifically, ubiquinol, the reduced form of CoQ10. (As pets get older their bodies have less ability to convert CoQ10 to its active form, ubiquinol.) CoQ10 is a coenzyme that nearly every one of your pet's body functions depends on, every cell, every organ, and every tissue.

CoQ10 is a compound produced naturally in the liver. It does its work deep down in the mitochondria of cells. Cells use CoQ10 to support their energy and growth. And cells with the fastest turnover, including heart cells, mouth tissue cells, intestinal mucosal cells and immune system cells, demand high levels of CoQ10.

Coenzyme Q10 also contributes to healthy circulation, promotes optimal immune function, supports the healthy presence of oxygen in tissues and supports cardiovascular health. Pets who can most benefit from ubiquinol supplementation include those who need additional cardiovascular support, all pets aged 7 and older that can benefit from mitochondrial support and competitive athletes.

## **Joint Health Supplements**

Studies show that about 1 in 3 cats over the age of 8 can benefit from support for joint function and comfort. And for 1 in 5 dogs, especially large and giant breeds, support for optimal hip and joint help can be of tremendous benefit. In fact, we now know that dogs may need support long before they enter their senior years.

To enhance the comfort and function of your pet's joints, the first thing you should do is to feed a natural, species-appropriate, home-prepared diet. It's also critical to maintain your pet at a healthy body weight to take excess stress off her joints.

Appropriate exercise will help maintain your pet's healthy muscle mass and joint flexibility, along with providing healthy cartilage-supporting supplements to promote and protect hip and joint function. Supplements for joint health typically contain glycosaminoglycans (GAGs). GAGs promote the health of cartilage, which is the strong, elastic tissue lining the bone surfaces in joints.

Cartilage cells naturally produce glycosaminoglycans, which when combined with water provide cushioning to help protect your pet's skeletal structure during movement and exercise.

A very important component of an effective joint health supplement for pets is natural eggshell membrane, which is a source of elastin, collagens and glycosaminoglycans, such as chondroitin sulfate and glucosamine that supports the stability and flexibility of your pet's joints. Other excellent joint support agents include cetyl myristoleate (CMO for short), collagen type II, green-lipped mussel and methylsulfonylmethane (MSM).

## **Skin and Coat Supplements**

Dietary supplements for your pet's skin and coat health typically contain essential fatty acids, often a blend of omega-3s, -6s and -9s. The problem with many of these blended supplements is that most dogs and cats today, especially those eating processed pet food, get an overabundance of omega-6s and not enough omega-3s.

A combination of inexpensive grain and corn-based ingredients, vegetable oils (corn, soy, safflower, canola, most of them genetically modified) and fats from chicken and meat create pet food packed with omega-6 fats. In addition, the omega-3 fats used in most commercial pet foods come from plant or vegetable sources, and the manufacturing process typically destroys what value these ingredients have.

So the best essential fatty acid supplement for the vast majority of today's dogs and cats is an omega-3 supplement made from marine oils, including krill oil or fish oil, including salmon, sardine, squid and anchovy. Vegetable-derived oils, including flax and olive oil, do not contain EPA and DHA, but rather the less bioavailable, inactive precursor form, ALA.

If you're thinking about dietary supplements for your dog or cat, as always, talk with your integrative or holistic veterinarian about what products would be most beneficial for your pet's individual needs.

## Sources and References

[dvm360 June 16, 2017](#)

<sup>1</sup> [Veterinary Practice News September 27, 2012](#)

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