

The Trendy Oil That's Often Misused in Pets

This oil is healthy for pets, but you need to be careful not to make these mistakes when using it. Know when it's taboo for certain pets and the other oil to not overlook if your pet suffers with skin conditions, allergies, vision problems, or joint and heart issues.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Healthy dietary fats are an essential component of your dog's or cat's nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate diet
- Facilitative fats are saturated fats and provide a number of very important benefits to pets; functional fats are typically essential fatty acids — the omega-3 and omega-6 fats
- Omega-3 deficiency is common in dogs and cats today; the reverse is true for omega-6 fatty acids, which are overly abundant in most processed pet food
- Coconut oil is an excellent supplemental fat for most dogs and cats
- Keep in mind that coconut oil is high in calories, so if your pet is already overweight, gains weight easily or metabolizes fat ineffectively, it should be used when calories from other foods have been reduced

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Healthy fats are a vital part of a nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate diet for dogs and cats. Dietary fat contributes to your pet's health and well-being in many ways:

- It's a concentrated energy source
- It makes up part of the membrane of cells and helps transport nutrients and other substances across the cell membrane
- It produces metabolites that help control inflammation
- It contributes to the formation of certain hormones, such as estrogen, testosterone and progesterone, as well as the formation of bile acids that aid in digestion and absorption of nutrients
- It acts as a mechanical barrier, insulating the body against heat loss, protecting internal organs and preventing excess water loss

Facilitative and Functional Fats

The concept of "good" and "bad" fats in the diet is much more relevant to human health than it is to the health of cats and dogs. Whereas certain types of fat are associated with heart disease and stroke in people, the same does not hold true for companion animals.

Your dog's or cat's body is designed to use and process dietary fat differently than yours. Pets naturally have more good cholesterol (HDL) than bad (LDL). Your dog or cat won't develop high blood cholesterol or thickening of the arteries from fat in his diet. It's helpful to think of dietary fats in pet food as either facilitative or functional:

- Facilitative fats are saturated fats and are plentiful in the meat-based diets of dogs and cats. They provide a number of benefits, including improving the taste and texture of food, and converting to energy to fuel metabolic processes.

They also supply high-calorie energy for physical movement, regulation of body temperature, growth and reproduction, and assist in the digestion and absorption of fat-soluble vitamins. These fats are also stored in adipose tissue for future use as energy if needed.

- Functional fats are usually, but not always, essential fatty acids (EFAs). They're "essential" because dogs and cats can't produce them on their own and need to obtain them from the food they eat. EFAs are the omega-6 and omega-3 fats. Pets need a balance of both for good health. Omega-3s, in particular, play a huge role in your pet's well-being.

Omega-3 Fats

Omega-3 deficiency is a very common nutritional deficiency in dogs and cats today, and causes or exacerbates a wide variety of conditions, including allergies, yeast infections, inflammatory skin disease, vision problems, heart issues, kidney disease, cognitive dysfunction and arthritis.

You may have heard that flaxseed oil is a good source of omega-3s, but be aware that this is a plant-based (versus animal-based) form called alpha-linolenic acid (ALA).

Pets lack the enzymes necessary to convert vegetable sources of omega-3 fatty acids (from hemp, chia and flaxseed) into DHA (docosahexaenoic acid), so DHA and EPA (eicosapentanoic acid) need to be supplied directly from food sources. Krill oil is rich in EPA and 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 is not recommended anyway.

You can feed your pet sardines packed in water or wild-caught salmon for valuable omega-3s, or try a krill oil supplement. If your pet is currently in good health, supplement 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

Omega-3s are very sensitive to oxygen and can become rancid quickly, so it's recommended to use oils dispensed from an airless pump or that come in capsules that can be cut and squeezed onto food just prior to feeding. If you buy liquid bottled oils, there is a far greater risk of oxidation over time. 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.

Pet food formulator Steve Brown says, "A dog is the fat she eats," meaning fats are critically important for dogs (and cats). Rancid fats (found in most processed pet foods) are incredibly harmful to pets, while healthy fats can be life-changing when it comes to slowing and preventing many degenerative diseases (from kidney disease to cognitive decline).

Omega-6 Fats

Omega-6 deficiencies are rare in dogs and cats because commercial pet food typically provides too much rather than too little of these fats. A lack of omega-6 fats in your pet's diet can result in poor overall development and a failure to gain weight. It can also compromise your pet's immune system, and cause liver and kidney degeneration, behavioral disturbances and poor wound healing.

If you need to supplement omega-6 fats in your pet's diet (which typically only occurs with some homemade diets), flaxseed, hemp and pumpkin seed oils are much better choices than corn oil, safflower oil or olive oil.

Coconut Oil

Coconut oil is great for pets, but it's important to understand it should never be used in place of the dietary fats discussed above. It's strictly for healthy fat supplementation.

Feed one-quarter teaspoon of 100% organic, cold-pressed, human-grade coconut oil for every 10 pounds of body weight twice daily for dogs and cats. It can be added at mealtime to your pet's fresh, nutritionally balanced, homemade or commercial raw diet.

Coconut oil is a concentrated source of medium-chain triglycerides (MCTs), which may benefit your pet's cognitive function. In addition, coconut oil is a rich source of lauric acid, which is a powerful antimicrobial agent. This makes it 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 treatment of skin conditions.

While coconut oil is generally safe for cats and dogs, some pets may be allergic to it, and while pets with pancreatitis should avoid most types of fat (which require the pancreas to secrete additional lipase, the enzyme needed to break down fat), coconut oil is passively absorbed through the GI tract and does not require lipase for digestion, so it's safe for "sensitive" animals.

Keep in mind that coconut oil is high in calories, so if your pet is already overweight, gains weight easily or metabolizes fat ineffectively, it should be used when calories from other foods have been reduced. It's a good idea to start by offering small amounts and gradually increase the amount once your pet's system is accustomed to it. Doing so may help prevent greasy stools, upset stomach or diarrhea, which are side effects of giving too much all at once.

Sources and References

[dvm360, November 15, 2018](#)