

This month's client question: What is the best supplement for my pet?

By law, commercial pet foods are required to contain all the vitamins and minerals pets need. In fact, adding more of certain vitamins to the diet can do more harm than good. So unless your pet has a specific medical condition, for which your veterinarian has prescribed dietary supplements, multivitamins and other nutrition products are unnecessary.

One notable exception: omega-3 fatty acids. The benefits are so impressive, I not only give it to my pets, I also take it myself. When I mention omega-3 to clients, many already have some at home because it was recommended by a physician.

What is omega-3 fatty acid?

Omega-3 is a category of essential fats that aid in healthy body functions. Our bodies don't produce these nutrients, so we need to add them into our diets.

Fatty fish is one rich source of omega-3. But since most humans and pets aren't eating fish daily, supplements can help.

Omega-3 is most effective when consumed in proportion with another essential fatty acid, omega-6. Typical human diets and pet foods are very rich in omega-6 fatty acids already, so you don't need to worry about supplementing that category.

What are the benefits associated with an ideal ratio of omega-3 and omega-6?

Most of the benefits come from reduced inflammation. Skin is calmer and better protected from allergens and infections. The liver is more efficient in processing daily toxins. The kidneys are better protected from blood pressure damage and daily stress. The joints are less inflamed and less prone to degeneration from arthritis. Omega-3 has also been linked to improved cognitive function and anti-aging effects in the brain. And this is just a simplified list! Medical and veterinary researchers are constantly releasing new studies that find added benefits.

How do I choose the right omega-3 product for my pet?

Your veterinarian would be happy to help you find the ideal omega-3 supplement for your pet. Small animals do best on pet-designed supplements, while big dogs may be suited to human products. The label on quality fish oil supplements will list the EPA, DHA, and sometimes GLA in the product. Dogs and cats should get 15-25 mg EPA per pound of body weight.

Supplements should be taken daily, with food. Some health benefits take time to achieve, but most owners will notice pets have a shinier coat within the first few weeks. This lets you know that your pet is already healthier on the inside.

