

Our two legged companions are living longer and healthier lives thanks to the advances in nutrition and supplements available for pets today. Good nutrition includes supplements added in the right quantity at the right time. Are supplements for all pets?

For the average dog or cat that is in good health and is being fed a complete and balanced commercial diet, there is no need for supplementation. These diets have all the food groups in the right balance, and adding supplements may disturb that balance. However, pets with special needs - due to disease or ailments, pets on home cooked food or older pets may need supplements.

Here's a lowdown on some of the supplements for pets

Glucosamine and Chondroitin: these substances are useful for the formation of collagen and matrix, the substance which joints are made of, and are a boon for older pets with stiff joints, as well as for dogs with hip dysplasia. Several commercial formulations are available with various combinations of glucosamine, chondroitin, Vitamin C, MSM and hyaluronic acid, and your Vet will guide you to the right one for your pet.

Vitamins and minerals: Pets on home cooked food may lack certain Vitamins, as well as Calcium and phosphorus, and may need to take a multivitamin tablet to complete their diet.

Biotin: this is a useful ingredient for a healthy skin and coat and also for heart health.

Essential fatty acids: (EFAs)

Supplements that are made for healing dry, flaking skin and dry hair coats include ingredients that add essential fatty acids like fish oil or flax seed oil to increase moisture in the skin and hair. EFAs are also useful for patients with kidney and heart disease.

Vitamins C and E, both well known for their antioxidant properties, can be used to reduce inflammation and may even help to maintain cognitive function in older animal.

Extracts of medium chain triglycerides found in coconut oil are also very useful in pets with cognitive decline as well as seizures.

Carnitine and Taurine: these amino acids are used in pets with heart disease along with Coenzyme Q 10 to improve myocardial function.

Tryptophan: this is a supplement given to aggressive dogs due to its calming effect, although studies are divided about its efficacy.

Silybin and S Adenosine Methionine: (SAmE)

These are supplements given to support liver function in dogs with liver disease. Recent studies have shown that SAmE is also useful in reversing signs of arthritis.

Finally, it must be remembered that too much of anything is harmful, and these supplements need to be given in the right proportion.

There may also be ingredients that are added to human grade supplements that are not harmful to humans but are harmful for cats and dogs. Some examples are garlic and some types of roots and herbs, so do not give human supplements to your pets. Some products may even have a toxic effect on your pet, despite their being labeled "all natural." This is because not everything in nature is safe, so make sure the supplements are given as prescribed by your Vet.