

10 Secrets to Improving Your Pet's Health Naturally



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1. Preventing Dehydration

Dehydration is an imbalance of water and electrolytes in the body. Not only do people have to make sure they properly hydrate, but water is essential for dogs and cats, which depend on daily fluid intake to maintain appropriate health and replace fluids that are routinely lost through urine, feces and respiration. Fluid loss can be due to overheating in hot weather, increased activity or a bout of vomiting and diarrhea. For dogs, symptoms of dehydration are sunken eyes, lethargy, loss of appetite, dry mouth, and depression. For cats, symptoms of dehydration are sunken eyes, lethargy, loss of appetite, depression, dry mouth, elevated heart rate, decreased skin elasticity, and panting.

Dehydration may indicate a serious underlying problem. You may be able to detect dehydration at home by gently lifting the skin on the back of your cat's or dog's neck or between the shoulder blades- unless your pet is seriously overweight or very thin, it should immediately return to a normal position. If he/she is lacking in fluids, the lifted skin may not quickly return to normal. Often, however, the signs of dehydration are not obvious, and only a veterinarian can provide proper diagnosis and treatment.

Prevent dehydration in your pet by following these guidelines:

- Provide clean water at all times, and change it frequently to ensure freshness. Also, don't forget to wash your pet's water bowl every day to prevent bacteria from forming.
- Monitor your dog's water intake. Generally, a dog needs at least one ounce of water for each pound of body weight per day. If your dog is not drinking an adequate amount of water, seek veterinary advice. Monitoring water intake is especially important if he's recovering from diarrhea, vomiting or other illnesses. Purchase a water bowl with a weighted bottom if your dog tends to knock over his/her bowl.
- Bring extra water when you're traveling or exercising with your dog.
- If you notice your pet is drinking less than usual, check his mouth for sores or other foreign objects, such as burrs or sticks.
- Avoid chaining a dog outside, since he may get tangled up, preventing him from accessing his water bowl.
- Keep your toilet lid closed to interrupt your dog's efforts to turn the bowl into a water fountain. The toilet bowl can provide be a source of bacteria.
- If your cat is recovering from a bout diarrhea or vomiting, give him an ice cube to lick initially and provide small amounts of water at regular intervals to avoid overhydrating too quickly.
- If you are traveling with your pets, keep in mind that motion sickness can make some cats nauseated or cause them to vomit, so especially after flying, cats should have regular access to water. Bring extra water if you think access to water may be a problem.
- Observe your cat to determine his preference for obtaining water. Some cats prefer certain bowls, while others like either tap or bottled water. Other cats prefer water fountains that can be found at many pet stores. Try placing multiple bowls of water around the house for easier access.

2. Dog Coat Care

Some dogs are vexed with itchy, flaky skin. What can you do to restore your dog's healthy skin and lustrous fur coat?

Essential Fatty Acids are the Key to a Healthy Coat

Healthy fats play an important role in keeping your dog's coat in good condition. Wendy Brooks of American Board of Veterinary Practitioners notes that veterinarians see nutritional deficiencies causing dogs develop dull coats on the occasion. Fortunately for dogs, the easiness of access to quality pet foods makes it difficult for a pet to have a nutritional deficiency. In a normal, healthy dog, balance is the key. A complete and balanced diet, rich in essential amino acids and other key nutrients is the basis for good health and a beautiful coat.

Omega-6 Fatty Acids for Dog Coat Care

Omega-6 fatty acids, in themselves can be helpful just to give a shine to the coat, add some luster back, and help replace the oils in the skin. Coats that become dandruffy and dull may indicate an omega 6 nutrient deficiency, the common result of extremely low fat diet. If your dog is overweight, use meal portioning with reputable dog food rather than adhering your dog to a strict low-fat diet. Puppies that eat very low-fat diets develop coarse, dry hair and skin lesions that become prone to infection. Reputable commercial dog foods typically contain enough nutrients, including essential fatty acids, to maintain healthy skin and a shiny coat. It's the low-quality commercial dog foods or improperly balanced homemade diets (i.e. a dog that is feed mostly chicken) that lead to deprivation of specific nutrients, as well as excess levels of specific nutrients that can be detrimental to a dog's coat health.

As previously mentioned, most quality and reputable dog foods are very high in omega-6 fatty acids. Vegetable oils are also a source of omega-6 fatty acids. Pet stores sell omega-6 supplements, but sunflower oil or safflower oil works comparably as well. For a small dog, stir in one teaspoon of oil per meal. For a large dog, give one tablespoon per meal. Just be sure that the oil is fresh, because oils that are kept too long can go rancid and become less effective. The same goes for dog food that contains essential fatty acids that oxidize when exposed to air. Make sure that the dog food is properly sealed after opened.

A deficiency of any sort -- whether it is certain vitamins, minerals, amino acids, or fatty acids -- can result in canine skin problems. But diet isn't the only culprit when it comes to irritated skin and dull coat. Dogs that are bathed too often or that scratch themselves frequently can lose oil from their skin. Once your dog begins to itch and scratch, the coat damaging itch/scratch cycle begins. After an extended period of time, hair becomes lackluster, breaks, and thins.

3. Cat Coat Care.

If your kitty's coat is dry and dull, the following are things you can do to help:

Boost nutrition for a shiny coat. When the fur becomes dull or the skin dry, the first thing veterinarians look at is the diet. Cats are carnivorous! They require much more protein than dogs; they also need complex carbohydrates, and healthy fats to help them maintain a healthy body and shiny coat. A low-fat diet or a diet that consists mostly of generic, poor-quality foods will cause a poor-quality coat.¹

- Try switching to a premium brand of cat food. If you are already using a premium brand, try switching to another high-quality cat food, one with completely different ingredients made by a different company since companies may have different philosophies. Perhaps another company's philosophy to nutrition will work better for your cat.
- You can also try supplementing the cat's food with fish oil --fatty acids like those found in salmon or other fish oils—and expect to wait 4 to 6 weeks to see results.

Deal with weight problems for a healthier cat and coat. Its estimated 57% of cats in the US are overweight or obese. If your cat has dandruff down the center of its back or around the base of its tail, this could be a sign that your cat can't reach these spots for cleaning because he/she is overweight or obese. Being overweight doesn't just lead to a less flexible feline with a dull, unkempt coat. Extra weight also puts your cat at risk for many of the same chronic health problems as overweight humans, including high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, osteoarthritis, and cancer. If you think your cat is obese, talk with your veterinarian. Your vet can calculate the right amount of calories your cat should eat per day and recommend a proper weight loss diet. Cats need to lose weight slowly and carefully. A serious liver disease called hepatic lipidosis can result if your overweight cat loses weight too fast.

Brush your elderly cat. When cats get old they can become less flexible or arthritic. Without being able to twist and turn the way they used to, your elderly cat may be unable to clean properly, and the result may be a dull coat or dry skin. Brushing your elderly cat using a fine-toothed comb can help. Use a fine-toothed comb that can catch the dull, dead hairs that a brush may not reach.

Skip the bath to preserve the cat's coat. If you've been bathing your cat in an effort to control your allergy to cat dander, you're not really helping yourself -- or your cat. It's more helpful to wash your hands, take allergy medication, and clean the house often since the effects of bathing on dander are ephermal. Bath your cat only when her coat is extra dirty (i.e. grease, something sticky, or other grime that's hard for a cat to groom away). When you do bathe your cat, choose a conditioning rinse made designed for cats.

Other more serious issues can be responsible dull coat and dry skin. These conditions include but are not limited to diabetes, parasites, skin infections, allergies, autoimmune diseases, dry winter air. To get behind the reason for your cat's skin or fur problems or before starting any supplement, have your kitty checked out by a veterinarian.

4. Nutrition for your Dog

What dogs can eat:

- Thoroughly Cooked Lean Meats** with the bones removed and fat trimmed off
- Some Fresh Fruits** are OK but remove the seeds, stems, and leaves.
- Some Vegetables** (no raw potatoes)
- Cooked White Rice and Pasta**

What dogs should not be feed:

Avocados contain a substance called persin which damages the heart muscle. Persin is in the leaves, bark, as well as in the fruit. Large amounts might be toxic to dogs. It causes diarrhea and vomiting.

Alcohol depresses the nervous system. Just a little can cause vomiting, diarrhea, central nervous system depression, problems with coordination, difficulty breathing, coma, even death. And the smaller the dog, the greater the effect!

Onions and Garlic in all forms (powdered, raw, cooked, or dehydrated) can destroy a dog's red blood cells, leading to anemia. An occasional small dose is probably ok but just eating a large quantity once or eating smaller amounts regularly can cause poisoning.

Caffeine in large enough quantities can be fatal for a dog. In addition to tea and coffee - including beans and grounds -- caffeine can be found in cocoa, chocolate, colas, and stimulant drinks such as Red Bull. It's also in some cold medicines and pain killers

Grapes and raisins can cause kidney failure. Just a small amount can make a dog ill. Repeated vomiting is an early sign. Within a day, the dog will become lethargic and depressed.

Milk and Dairy Products can cause diarrhea, and set up food allergies (i.e. itchiness)

Raw or Roasted Macadamia Nuts (as few as six) cause muscle and nervous-system problems. Symptoms of poisoning include muscle tremors, weakness or paralysis of the hindquarters, vomiting, elevated body temperature, and rapid heart rate.

Xylitol causes increased insulin secretion through your dog's body that result in lower blood sugar levels that can lead to liver failure. Candy, gum, toothpaste, baked goods, and some diet foods are sweetened with xylitol.

Chocolate contains a toxic agent called theobromine that's in all kinds of chocolate, even white chocolate. The most dangerous kinds are dark chocolate, chocolate mulch, and unsweetened baking chocolate. Eating chocolate, even just licking the icing bowl, can cause a dog to vomit, diarrhea, abnormal heart rhythm, tremors, seizures, and death.

Fat Trimming and Bones. Table scraps often contain meat fat that a human didn't eat and bones. Both are dangerous for dogs. Fat trimmed from meat, both cooked and uncooked, can cause pancreatitis in dogs. And, although it seems natural to give a dog a bone, a dog can choke on it. Bones can also splinter and cause an obstruction or lacerations of your dog's digestive system. It's best to just forget about the doggie bag

Persimmons, Peaches, and Plums. The problem with these fruits is the seeds or pits. The seeds from persimmons can cause inflammation of the small intestine in dogs. They can also cause intestinal obstruction. Obstruction is also a possibility if a dog eats the pit from a peach or plum. Plus, peach and plum pits contain cyanide, which is poisonous to both humans and dogs

Raw Eggs. An enzyme in raw eggs interferes with the absorption of a particular B vitamin. This can cause skin problems as well as problems with your dog's coat if raw eggs are fed for a long time. And don't forget about possibility of food poisoning from Salmonella or E. coli.

Raw Meat, Raw Fish

Raw Yeast, Bread Dough forms gas in the digestive track and fermentation of yeast in your dog's stomach causes alcohol poisonings

Spoiled Food may contain toxic mold, which can cause vomiting, severe tremors, seizures, and death. Dogs that eat garbage are at risk for bacterial food poisoning or irritation of the pancreas.

5. Nutrition for your Cat

What cats can eat:

-Lean Meat. Cats are carnivores and need meat!

-Dry and wet foods. Cats have a low thirst drive by nature, so they may not drink enough to stay well hydrated. Feeding them only dry food compounds the problem and can put them at risk for urinary tract disorders. To promote a healthy bladder, some vets recommend canned foods, which are about 78 percent water. A fluid-rich diet is particularly important for cats with a history of urinary tract problems

What cats should not be feed:

Milk and other dairy products. The idea that cats thrive on milk is a myth. In fact, the opposite is often true. Most cats are lactose intolerant, meaning that they can't properly digest the sugars in milk. This can result in diarrhea. Although kittens are able to tolerate milk, many adult cats cannot. Their digestive system cannot process dairy foods, and the result can be digestive upset with diarrhea.

Tuna. Cats can be addicted to tuna! Some tuna now and then probably won't hurt but a regular tuna diet prepared for humans can lead to malnutrition because it won't have all the nutrients a cat needs. And, too much tuna can cause mercury poisoning.

Dog food. An occasional bite of dog food won't hurt your cat. But dog food is not a substitute for cat food. They do have many of the same ingredients. But cat food is specially formulated for a cat's needs, which include more protein as well as certain vitamins and fatty acids. A steady diet of dog food can cause your cat to be severely malnourished

Liver. Small amounts of liver are OK, but eating too much can cause vitamin A toxicity, a serious condition that can affect your cat's bones.

Cats cannot eat the following for similar reasons dogs cannot:

Raw eggs

Fat trimmings and bones

Xylitol (found in gum, candy)

Alcohol,

Grapes and raisons,

Caffeine,

Chocolate,

Yeast Dough,

Your medicine,

Onions and Garlic in all forms (powdered, raw, cooked, or dehydrated) and Chives

If your pet eats what it shouldn't

If you think your dog or cat has consumed something that's toxic, call the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center -- (888) 426-4435. Put the number of your local vet and the closest emergency clinic in a place you can find in case of an emergency.

6. Obesity and your pets

The 5th annual veterinary survey found 53 % of adult dogs and 55 % of cats to be classified as overweight or obese by their veterinarian, meaning that 88.4 million pets that are too heavy. The most distressing finding in this year's study was the fact that more pet owners are unaware their pet is overweight. 22 % of dog owners and 15 % of cat owners characterized their pet as normal weight when it was actually overweight or obese. The normalization of obesity by pet parents, referred to as the "fat pet gap", is a problem that needs to be addressed. In simplest terms, fat pets have become the norm. Obesity in pets, like in humans, is an underlying cause of many serious health conditions such as osteoarthritis, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, breathing problems, kidney disease, and shortened life expectancy. Obesity can be treated! Exercise and proper diet are central! Give your pet the amount of food that your vet recommends for weight loss. The following are exercise tips for your pet.

- 1) For Dogs: After your vet gives your dog the ok, start your dog on suitable exercise plan for beginners. Like people who aren't used to exercise, dogs should start off slow. A daily 10-15-minute moderately-paced walking or swimming session is a good start and as they build their cardiovascular and muscle strength, you may be able to increase the time to an hour a day if your pet seems up to it. You want to try to build their conditioning without putting undue stress on their joints. If, after a few months your pet can handle long, fast walks without fatigue, he could graduate to jogging with you. On walks or jogs, keep a close eye on your dog: watch for any unusual signs of fatigue or trouble breathing. If your pet wants to stop, let them. Dogs that overdo it can suffer strained tendons or ligaments or other orthopedic problems. Also try to run on dirt paths or grass as much as possible. Gravel, concrete, asphalt, cinders and road salt can irritate your pets paws.
- 2) For Cats: Some cats can be trained to walk outside on a leash but cats are a little bit different than dogs. They're designed for short, frequent periods of intense activity, rather than longer, slower-paced exercise sessions. There are wide selection of toys you can buy to get your cat active, including "kitty trees" that will let your pet climb to the ceiling and mechanical animals that can be chased around the room. You can entice your pet into activity with things that can be hit, chased, climbed into, and scratched.²

Here are some tips on how to get your cat moving!

Use light objects that move easily across the floor that your cat can chase (i.e. balled up paper), use the end of a moving string to bring out the predator in your cat, and even empty boxes and paper bags, but not plastic bags because they cause suffocation. Make sure the object is nothing your kitty can chew or swallow. Scratching stretches and tones the muscles in your cat's shoulders and back. A scratching post--or even a piece of cardboard or carpet--can keep your pet active without your furniture the hit. Don't use your hand or fingers as "bait" or as the object of teasing. This teaches your pet that it is all right to scratch and bite your hands.

7. Keep your pet healthy with proper attention and interaction

Leaving a dog alone too long

Leaving a dog alone too long can be detrimental to your dog's health and social skills. Spending 8-10 hours alone in a crate, tiny laundry closet or even outdoors is too much for most dogs. It can lead to separation anxiety and destructive behaviors including chewing, soiling, digging, and nonstop barking or howling -- even depression in a timid dog.

When dogs become adolescents, their behavioral inconsistencies can frustrate owners. One day, your dog seems all grown up; and the next day, he/she has managed to decimate your shoe wardrobe. Sometimes, pet owners react to these dog upheavals by putting their dogs into the fenced outdoor abyss, the backyard. Yet, a dog that is kept outside too often may experience social isolation. He/she may engage in excessive barking and howling in an attempt to return to the family. Over time, an isolated outdoor dog will become exceedingly independent and difficult to train. Whatever desire he/she had to please will be gone, replaced by the need to occupy his/her time in any way possible. That may be why some dogs engage in digging and soiling activities. Without human feedback to the contrary, these are all rewarding activities for a backyard dog.

There is nothing wrong with letting a well-mannered dog spend a lazy day lying in the grass, soaking up the sun, or playing in the fallen leaves. But when the yard takes the place of teaching your dog appropriate house manners, you need to step back and examine why you have a dog. Rather than leaving your dog in a crate or outside for extended periods of time, better choices are doggie day care, a mid-day visit from a pet sitter, or a canine companion. Adult dogs can go 4-5 hours in a crate but need exercise before and after.

Providing attention

Just like children, your pets will get bored if you don't play with them. And boredom can lead to troublesome behaviors like chewing, digging, barking, and whining. Bored cats may resort to scratching and excessive meowing. Fight boredom by hiding treats for your pets to find around the house. Provide toys your cat can chase. Teach dogs to play fetch, tug-of-war, or hide-and-seek.

Socializing young pets

It's important to provide puppies and kittens with positive human interaction during their first seven weeks of life. This includes handling and play that fosters trust in people. Reputable breeders will begin this interaction, and you can continue the process when you bring your pet home. To develop a strong bond, play with your new puppy or kitten every day.

8. Alternative natural treatments for itchy pets

Anti-itch medications that come with unwanted side effects aren't the only solution for itchy pets. Here are some natural alternative ways to relieve itch.

- **Shampoos.** Shampoos are an easy and effective option. But there are different pet shampoos available for specific skin conditions, like bacterial or yeast infections. So get your vet's recommendation on a shampoo that can help clear up the cause of your pet's itching without drying out the skin too much. When you do shampoo, shampoo with cool water to assist the itchiest skin. Leave the shampoo on for 10 minutes then rinse well. With the most severe allergies, bathe your pet twice weekly.
- **Fish oil supplements.** These are another option to help replenish the skin's natural oils and combat inflammation. Fatty Acid supplements are very helpful in decreasing the level of inflammation. Omega 3 fatty acids are most important. They have few side effects, although they can cause upset stomach in some pets. A great, affordable source is ground Flax Seeds; I give 1 tsp per cup of dog food. Cats are unable to metabolize Flax, so I only advocate the liquid supplement for them. Other sources include fish oil, primrose oil and specific veterinary supplements.
- **Probiotics.** Just as with people, probiotics can help boost an animal's digestive health and they can be helpful for itch control. In addition to probiotics -- for a pet with a longstanding case of skin inflammation -- specific vitamin supplements could also help replenish the body's ability to fight skin infection. But again, ask your vet which vitamins he or she would recommend. There are many good alternative product brands, Jones tells one pet owner. But the brand name is less important than making sure that the supplement or oil is made for pets, not humans. So don't just slip your own probiotics or vitamins into your pet's food.
- **Calendula ointment.** Calendula ointment is an herbal medication that has been successfully used to relieve the itch Applying a thin coat of calendula ointment twice regular to affected areas is a topical remedy to sooth itch.³

9. How to prolong the life of your pet

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), fifty percent of dogs over the age of 10 are going to die of cancer. That's from the AVMA (American Veterinary Medical Association). Other common problems are renal and kidney disease, heart failure, diabetes. Look for increased or decreased thirst.

How to prolong your dog's life

- A pet buddy. Dogs in multiple-pet households are sick less often, live longer, and generally are happier.
- Social interaction and exercise are so important. Not only do the excess pounds melt away, so do a lot of the behavior problems that can cause emotional stress on your dog (and you!).
- Don't keep your dog in a crate or tied up all day long. If you don't have the time to walk your dog, just let him/her around in a safe space, even for an hour, where he/she can stretch, walk and run around, but leave him/her no more than 4-5 hours alone!
- Don't overfeed your dog. Pampering is not overfeeding!

How to prolong your cat's life

Most cats live 10 years before serious age-related medical issues seem to most affect them. To prolong your cat's life:

- Keep your cat lean. Obese cats tend to not live as long as non-obese cats.
- Indoor cats live a lot longer than outdoor cats. There was a study done at Purdue a few years ago that said indoor-only cats live 2.5 times longer than outdoor cats or indoor/outdoor cats.
- Encourage your cat to drink more water as he/she ages. If you've been using dry food, you may have to go to canned or semi-moist food. The American Association of Feline Practitioners currently recommends feeding cats wet food throughout their lives.

Things you can do to make life easier for your senior dog or senior cat

- Ramps and steps are a big help to get up on the couch or on the bed. Carpet runners are good if you have hardwood floors, stairs, or tile, so they don't slip.
- Have real soft bedding. A lot of people use heated orthopedic beds.
- Use drinking fountains. A lot of older pets get chronically dehydrated. Fountains keep water aerated and cooler, plus pets love the sound of running water.
- Heat their food up. Their sense of smell and sense of taste don't work as well as they used to. If you're still using dry food, put a little water on it or mix a little canned on it and put it in the microwave for 10 seconds to release that aroma.

10. How to keep the aging dog's mind sharp

Helping older dogs learn new tricks

The results of a study that appear in the January issue of *Neurobiology of Aging* two-year study in which 48 beagles were apart of demonstrated that the combination of the physical activity, antioxidants, and stimulation keep dog's mind sharp. Older dogs were actually able to learn new tricks.

Researchers found that older dogs that were fed a diet rich in antioxidants from fruits and vegetables, exercised daily, interacted with others, and played with stimulating toys were more likely to learn new tasks easily as well as score better on learning skills tests.

As the study progressed, researchers tested the dogs with progressively more difficult learning skills tests, such as hiding a treat under a black or white block and then reversing the task so the dog would have to relearn where the treat was hidden.

The results showed that older dogs that ate the antioxidant-fortified diet and lived in an active, stimulating environment did the best on the learning skill tasks and outperformed the dogs in the other groups. The older beagles that received at least one of the interventions, such as diet or exercise, also did better than the group that received standard care and a regular diet. Researchers also found that the dietary intervention seemed to have no effect on the younger dogs.

How can you keep your aging dog's mind sharp?

Following the results of the groundbreaking study, incorporating an antioxidant diet with lots of cognitive stimulation could improve brain function in your dog. The antioxidant-fortified diet used in the study was the equivalent of increasing intake from three servings of fruits and vegetables to five or six servings of fruits and vegetables daily.

If you have an aging dog and you want to offset the kind of mental declines that are normally expected in older canines, a simple way to slow the deterioration of his mind, and perhaps offset the effects of aging, involves simply clipping a leash onto your dog's collar and taking a walk. The more frequently you walk and the longer the walks, the slower the mental decline with age.

Walking seems to be especially good for the brain, not just for dogs but for humans too! It increases blood circulation and the oxygen and glucose that reach the brain, and like other forms of exercise, walking increases breathing and heart rate enhancing blood circulation to the brain, energy production and waste removal. And the good thing is that walking is not strenuous, so the leg muscles don't take up extra oxygen and glucose like they do during other forms of exercise.

¹Cat Nutrition for a Healthy Coat <http://pets.webmd.com/cats/guide/cat-nutrition-for-a-healthy-coat?page=2>

² <http://www.petobesityprevention.com/big-pets-get-bigger-latest-survey-shows-dog-and-cat-obesity-epidemic-expanding/>

³ <http://www.indonaturalhealth.com/2010/08/natural-treatments-for-dog-itching-and-cat-bladder-infections/>