

Hey there, welcome to Lesson Seven, supplements for your pet, and how to help your pet thrive.

In the last lesson, in Lesson Six we talked a lot about nutrition, and we talked about specific pet foods. You'll recall that the overarching recommendation from that section was to feed your dog or your cat a fresh, whole food diet. Whether or not that is raw food, cooked food, freeze dried food, et cetera, what we're trying to get away from are highly processed foods like canned food, like kibble, these sorts of things.

Now, it's important to realize that for various reasons, it may not always be possible for everybody to get their pet on a fresh whole food diet. These diets tend to be a little bit on the more costly side, so maybe financially it's difficult, maybe for other reasons it's just problematic and you're just having a hard time doing it. I just want you to realize that even if for whatever reason it's not possible for you to use a fresh wholefood diet for your pet, please don't feel bad. Don't feel like you're a bad pet owner. There's lots of things that we can still do to kind of up level their nutrition, and get them feeling better.

I really want to take the next logical step beyond food itself, and talk about nutritional supplements, vitamins, minerals, certain types of natural supplements that can benefit your pet. Let's go ahead and talk about that. From the get go, I want to talk about vitamin and mineral supplements specifically. First of all, realize that if you are feeding your dog or your cat a commercially produced pet food, then you are giving them the vitamins and minerals that they need just for sort of general life and living, if you will. One thing that it is important to realize is that, when the sort of nutrient requirements for pet foods were developed, the levels that were developed were created at a level as such so that animals did not get say, a nutrient deficiency. So they didn't wind up, for example, with too little vitamin D in their diet, and they have a vitamin D deficiency, et cetera.

There is a difference between sort of acceptable or necessary levels of nutrients, and what I would describe as optimal levels of nutrients. While you can be assured that if you're feeding your dog or your cat a commercially prepared diet that they're not going to get, say a vitamin deficiency. There may still be room to kind of up level their nutrition a little bit.

I want to talk a little bit about kind of some dos and don'ts as far as supplementing. When it comes to vitamins and minerals, the thing to realize is, is it absolutely is, it is possible to over supplement, to overdo it, and to actually cause medical problems.

Number one is, if you're going to use a vitamin and mineral supplement to add to an already balanced diet. Unless you get direct guidance from a Veterinarian, or a Veterinarian Nutritionist, I would suggest that you only use vitamin and mineral supplements that are made specifically for animals, so for your dog or for your cat. And, follow the directions on the package exactly.

You don't want to use, say like a human multivitamin to add to your dog or your cats food. That is a recipe for over supplementing, and potentially causing toxicity. If you use products that are made specifically for dogs or cats and you use them as directed, you're not going to get into too much trouble there.

As far as other supplements go, two supplements that I always say are pretty much a kind of no brainer, if you will. So, always a positive for dogs and cats are prebiotics and probiotics, and omega fatty acids, or fish oil. Prebiotics and probiotics as you're probably aware, probiotics is when you are supplementing beneficial bacteria that can help with the gut flora, so the spectrum of bacteria that live in the gastrointestinal tract. You'll remember I've mentioned before that 70% of your immune system, or your dog or your cats immune system, lives in their GI tract. So, having the appropriate balance of bacteria in the GI tract not only helps with GI upset, but is important for overall health, overall immunity, and adding in a probiotic can be really a very beneficial, and a very benign way to help maintain an appropriate balance, and to keep your pet healthy.

Now, prebiotics, prebiotics are frequently given along with probiotics, and all prebiotics really are is they're actually food for the probiotics. They're food for the bacteria that you're giving, just to make sure that those bacteria have a substrate with which to live off of as they're moving through the gastrointestinal tract. Prebiotics and probiotics for the most part across the board, are a plus for all dogs and cats, unless your individual dog or cat has a specific sensitivity and they have a hard time with them.

Now, the second thing I mentioned, omega fatty acids, or fish oil. Fish oil generally contains two particular types of omega fatty acids, EPA and DHA, both of which are vital to good health. Even if your pet is eating a food where the protein is fish, like it's salmon or something and they are thus getting some degree of omega fatty acids in their food, it's still a good idea to supplement on top of that. There are people out there who, their preference is to use something like flax oil, or hemp seed oil, or something like that because there are omega fatty acids in those oils as well. The problem is, is that the omega fatty acid that tends to be in plant based oils is what's

called ALA, and ALA needs to be converted in the body to EPA and DHA in order for it to sort of achieve its full benefit, the full health effects.

As a person, that conversion of ALA to EPA and DHA is actually something that we do fairly efficiently, which is why things like flax seeds, and flax oil are really good for us as people. The problem is, is dogs and cats are not particularly good at making that conversion. They do it a little bit, but they don't do it particularly efficiently. It's a much more effective, and a much more direct route if you give a fish oil type product to your pet. Now, it can be fish oil, it can be krill oil, it can be muscle oil. There's even what's called algal DHA now, so basically this is DHA that is grown on land, it's grown in a vat from algae. If you're concerned about either the environmental or the ethical issues associated with overfishing, you can look at DHA or algal DHA as an alternative for your pet.

Now, one thing to remember if you are using a fish based or marine based product, unfortunately our oceans are not as clean as they used to be, not as clean as we would like them to be. It's very, very important if you're going to use an omega fatty acid like a marine oil, that you get a reputable brand that does third-party testing to make sure that it's free of pesticides, heavy metals, et cetera. If you do a little research about any of the sort of mainstream or high quality brands, those are the kinds of things that they are happy to provide you with, frequently on their website they'll tell you that it's independent third-party tested to make sure that there's no impurities there.

As far as dosage goes when it comes to omega fatty acids, there are varying dosages depending on whether you're using products like this as just a general health and wellness supplement, or you're trying to treat something. For example, fish oil has some very good antiinflammatory properties, so sometimes it can be beneficial for animals that have, say, arthritis or pain. You do need to use higher dosages of a product like that if you're going to be say, treating pain and inflammation.

My suggestion to you would be, if you get an omega fatty acid product that is made for animals, you can just follow the dosing instructions on the package for general health and wellness. If you need to use that product at a higher dose for some medical condition, that's probably when you want to have a conversation with your Veterinarian about what an appropriate dose would be. Similarly as it pertains to probiotics, the dosing on probiotics is, it's a pretty wide range and it's really quite safe.

If you use a probiotic that is made specifically for dogs, then you can just use it as directed. You can actually use probiotics for humans in dogs and cats, and generally speaking it works fine. The dosing is going to be somewhat variable depending on the size of the dog, or if it's a cat, I may not always suggest using a full adult human dose for say, a small dog or a cat. But, you can play with the dosage a little bit and see what feels right to you. Like I say, probiotics as a general rule are extremely safe, so there's really not too much to worry about there.

As you are probably aware, there are a myriad of other types of nutritional and herbal supplements out there, and far too many for us to go into within the scope of this lesson. Especially because many of these supplements and herbs are used to treat specific medical conditions, but I want to go over just a couple that you've probably heard of, and that can be beneficial for a lot of animals out there, and I think it's just good to know about.

The first one that most people have heard about, glucosamine and then other things that come with it, chondroitin, MSM, these sorts of things. Glucosamine and chondroitin is a supplement that helps support the joints. Basically what it is, is it's the building blocks of cartilage. When an animal has arthritis and joint pain, frequently what's happened is the cartilage in the joint has worn down, and bone is rubbing on bone, and that causes pain and inflammation. Sometimes if you give an animal the nutritional components they need to make new cartilage, they actually can. That can make joints glide easier, and make them move smoother with less pain. I mean, if you have a dog or a cat that's experiencing some chronic soreness, particularly if you know that they're arthritic, or maybe they're a little older, glucosamine may be a good thing to try.

At the outset, you can either get a product that is specifically designed for pets, or have a consultation with your Veterinarian about what would be the best product to use. One good thing to remember about glucosamine, and frankly this is really true for all supplementation, is it's really important to get a high quality brand. The thing to remember about supplements is there's no government oversight when it comes to supplements as far as somebody making sure that what it says on the label is actually in the bottle. Supplements, both for animals or for people are very frequently a situation of you get what you pay for. If you buy cheap, you get cheap. If you go and you try and buy a really discount brand glucosamine, it's questionable whether you're actually giving glucosamine at all. Get a reputable brand, get a brand that's recommended by your Veterinarian, or you know somebody that's used that brand with good success. That's always a good plan.

A couple of other supplements that are worth mentioning, you may be aware of the spiced turmeric. It's used very commonly in Indian food. Within turmeric is an herbal compound curcumin. Curcumin is a very, very effective anti inflammatory, and pain reliever. It can also be beneficial for other body systems. It may even have anti cancer properties, so a lot of people who have pets that have pain and soreness will use products that have turmeric or curcumin in them. Some other herbs that can be used in that regards as well, boswellia is another commonly used herb in that regard. These things can be used very effectively, and very safely for animals that have pain, and soreness, and inflammation.

As I said before, there are so many, there are so many different supplements out there. We can't possibly go through all of them. What I would suggest is, is if your pet has a specific medical problem, so they have chronic gastrointestinal issues, or they're itchy, or they have pain and soreness, or if unfortunately they have cancer. There are definitely things out there that you can use that can be beneficial. You really just have to find the right resources to go to figure out what you need to use, so I would say check with your Veterinarian. If they have that information, that would be great. If you happen to have a holistic or an integrative Veterinarian in your area, that's a really good person to talk to. If you're not sure if there's one in your area, you can go to the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association website. That website is AHVMA.org. There's a, "Find a Veterinarian tab," on that website and you can search and see if there's someone in your area.

Alternatively, if you're just striking out all around, there's literature out there. There's books. There's a lot of information in my book, *The Ultimate Pet Health Guide*, about herbal therapy for various medical conditions. My book is certainly not the only book out there. Find a book that's written by a qualified Veterinarian or herbalist, specifically about animals and you may be able to get some guidance in that regard as well.

One last thing that I want to talk about as it pertains to supplements. I was mentioning earlier that there's really no oversight as it pertains to supplements, and you have to be very careful about what you buy. In the animal supplement world there is an organization called the National Animal Supplement Council, or NASC. NASC is a private organization, and what they do is they look at animal supplements on a voluntary basis, so people or companies that make animal supplements will basically bring their supplement to NASC to have it analyzed, for NASC to look at what's claimed on the label, make sure what's in the bottle is what it says on the label, make

sure that there's no inappropriate or unrealistic claims being used in the marketing, et cetera, et cetera.

If that product sort of passes muster with NASC, they will receive the NASC seal. If you pick up a bottle of supplement for an animal and you see NASC in a little sort of circle on the label, National Animal Supplement Council, you can be assured that you're holding a good supplement. That's really a good way for a consumer to know that they're picking up a good supplement.

Now, to be clear, if a supplement does not have the NASC seal on it, by no means does that make it a bad supplement. There are sometimes reasons why products do not qualify for NASC certification that have nothing to do with the quality of the product. But like I say, if you find one that does have the seal on it, then you know for sure that you're going to be okay.

That's really kind of the overview of supplements, food, nutrition, et cetera. Thanks so much for joining us in Lesson Seven. We look forward to seeing you again in upcoming Lesson Eight. Thanks so much.