

## **Use Caution When Buying Supplements for Your Pet**

As pets age, they deal with stiffness and pain, just like people. Naturally, we want to help them, but there are important differences between animals and people, so it is best to consult your veterinarian first. For years we have treated arthritis with aspirin and similar drugs. These medications can cause bleeding ulcers, so proper dosages are crucial. Similar drugs like Tylenol and Advil are not well tolerated by dogs and cats, and can damage the liver, kidneys, and even cause death.

"Nutraceutical" (a term that is a combination of the words "nutrition" and "pharmaceutical") are believed to have health benefits, but, again, dosage is very important. Too little is a waste of your money and too much can cause severe problems. Every animal is different, and what works for your neighbor's pet may not work for your pet. Supplements, vitamins, herbs, antioxidants, glucosamine, chondroitin and other nutraceuticals should ALWAYS be discussed with your veterinarian first. Many can be purchased over the counter; however, there may be side effects of which you are unaware. For instance, Vitamin E is an antioxidant that relieves inflammation, but too much Vitamin E can lead to inflammation. Similarly, Vitamin C is taken by millions, including myself, but high doses of Vitamin C can cause diarrhea and even bladder stones. Glucosamine helps with arthritis, but can also reduce the body's ability to clot blood. It also contains a lot of salt and cannot be taken by pets with heart disease.

### **Straight to the Source**

It is critical to consider the source of supplements. Human supplements purchased over the counter at drugstores may not be as similar-or beneficial-as you think. They are available in

varying strengths or in different formulations that aren't absorbed well in pets. I would rather put my pet on a veterinary preparation that has proven research and quality control behind it than to try a potentially harmful product that could have come from an unknown or disreputable source.

## Buyer Beware!

Because the FDA does not regulate supplement and nutraceutical manufacturers, there are many unscrupulous companies that sell products that do not contain the ingredients that are listed on the label. I recently heard about a study that was conducted by the FDA several years ago in which approximately 300 different glucosamine products bought in different locations from all over the country were tested. Only one of the products contained 100 percent of the ingredients that were listed on the label. Only four products contained 95 percent of the labeled ingredients, and the worst offender only contained 14 percent of the ingredients that were listed on the label. Your veterinarian has access to studies and reports that include this relevant information and can make the best recommendations for you and your pet.

## Health Matters

It is wise to consider the overall health status of your pet before giving them any supplements. Usually your veterinarian will suggest a blood profile and an overall checkup before ANYTHING is given. Remember too, that it can take several months for a supplement to work, or the effect can be so subtle that you don't realize it was working until you quit using it and your pet begins to experience soreness or other symptoms again. Follow-up examinations by your veterinarian will allow him or her to gauge your pet's response and to determine all of your options. There are definite advantages to some supplements that can improve the quality of life for your pet. Use your veterinarian as a

resource to get more information if you think your pet might benefit from taking a supplement.