

FATTY ACID SUPPLEMENTATION IN CATS

We've been touting the benefits of supplements for years now, including fatty acids, glucosamine and probiotics, but there has been controversy and confusion about the quality of supplements and the amounts needed for various problems. As research results have accumulated we have a more scientific basis for using them and are finally able to put together some firm recommendations for our clients.

Omega 3 fatty acids reduce inflammation and can treat, prevent or delay the onset of inflammatory diseases, including arthritis, allergies, cancer, kidney disease and heart disease. **We highly recommend supplementing these for all pets at all ages.** The specific Omega 3 fatty acids that dogs and cats benefit from are EPA and DHA. The recommended amounts are 40 mg/kg of body weight of EPA daily and 25-30 mg/kg of DHA daily for dogs and the other way around for cats – they do best with more DHA than EPA. A 10 lb cat needs about 200 mg of DHA per day.

We highly recommend supplements to prevent or delay the onset of diseases for pets of all ages

The standard amount of Omega 3 fatty acids in a 1000 mg fish oil capsule for humans is about 180 mg. this is a good amount of EPA for a cat but large human fish oil capsules have a lot more of the other fatty acids that work well in humans that cats don't really need. With human doses a cat would get more fat and calories than it needs, and possibly diarrhea. Most supplements made for pets are formulated for dogs, with more EPA than DHA but that isn't ideal for cats. So, it's best to buy a fatty acid supplement from a reputable company and made specifically for cats. There are some products that are low quality or are contaminated; most notably, OM 3 capsules for cats from 1-800-PetMeds contain dioxin-like PCBs – toxins you don't want your cat ingesting!

If you feed a pet food that contains EPA or DHA you can count the amount in the food toward the total needed. For example, Hill's J/D, a diet made for arthritis, contains 390 mg of DHA per cup of food. A cat eating 1/2 cup of food a day would be getting about 200 mg of DHA and wouldn't need a supplement at all. Pet food companies are not required to list specific amounts of ingredients on the label but you can often find the fatty acid content of the food on-line, or ask us.

Many companies do not have their diets analyzed and tested or they may make ingredient substitutions that change the food from batch to batch – if you can't get an accurate number it's best to assume the food has no EPA or DHA. It is not harmful to give extra. (Pet food manufacturers who make high quality diets know exactly what is in them, do not make ingredient substitutions and have done feeding trials on their foods. Fancy labels and expensive brands don't always mean the food in the bag is above average. Visit our website, www.bestfriendsvet.com, to view our videos on pet nutrition.)

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Just because a food has fish in it does not mean it has large amounts of Omega 3 fatty acids. Salmon steak contains almost none – the fatty acids are in the fatty parts of the fish, not the muscle. No one seems to know the fatty acid content of a sardine, so if you want to give your cat sardines to provide fish oils we can't tell you if that works or how well. You may have heard that flax seed contains fatty acids – it does, but dogs and cats cannot digest flax seed to get the oils out of it, so for pets it's not beneficial at all.

In summary, if your pet is getting plenty of fatty acids, either in the diet or as a supplement, he or she is likely to be healthier and live longer!