

Supplements for Senior Dogs

Investigate dog supplements to see what they can offer your senior dog.

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Experts agree that while giving senior dogs proper nutrients is vital, this may be easier than you think. Sometimes a quality dog food contains the right mix of vitamins and supplements. So before you buy a slew of pills and oils, learn about the ingredients in popular supplements, what they're used for, and when to give them.

Anything that's strong enough to help is strong enough to hurt, says Sean Delaney, DVM, of the University of California, Davis, School of Veterinary Medicine and an American College of Veterinary Nutrition diplomate.

J. Michael Walters, DVM, resident of emergency and critical care at Colorado State University's James L. Voss Veterinary Teaching Hospital in Fort Collins, agrees. A lot is not always better and sometimes it's worse.

Jump-start your knowledge of supplements with this look at some common ingredients:

Glucosamine and chondroitin: These purportedly ease arthritic and painful joints. This duo works best together, helping support cartilage structure and joint functions and increasing mobility and flexibility. Dogs not already plagued by a host of arthritic issues seem to benefit most, Walters says.

Many dog foods contain significant levels of chondroitin since it is found naturally in the bones of chicken and other meat. But in homemade canine diets that don't contain bones, this substance might be missing, Delaney says.

A popular way that many people, like Killion, add these supplements is through treat-like tablets and food-additive powders.

Vitamin B-12: This vitamin, also known as cobalamin, is crucial for energy and metabolism. The family of B vitamins in general helps maintain a healthy coat. Plants are poor sources of B-12, but milk and meat products are ideal. Most pet foods contain plenty of B-12, and a deficiency is rare, Walters says. Vegetarian diets may need supplementation.

Vitamin E: This antioxidant (also known as alpha, gamma, or delta tocopherol) protects cells from damage and injury. The gamma form of vitamin E often prevents rancidity in pet food. One of the least toxic vitamins, Vitamin E still should not be overused, Delaney cautions. High levels can result in impaired bone mineralization and coagulation problems, Walters says.

Since plants synthesize vitamin E, the richest sources are vegetable oils, followed at a distance by seeds and cereal grains.