

## Go for the Gleam in Your Dog's Coat

**Omega fatty acids hold the key to glossy dog coats.**

*Joanne Healey Howl, DVM*

Reducing inflammation is important to coat health. Inflammation increases allergies, resulting in a scruffy-looking coat. Inflammation is also conducive to arthritis, so a diet with a proper fatty acid ratio may help decrease joint pain. Omega fatty acids act on the body in other ways, too. They can decrease the risk of blood clots, help maintain the health of brain cells and have been shown to inhibit the growth of certain types of cancer. By decreasing the amount of water lost through the skin, they keep the skin supple and soft, and promote shiny, healthy hair.

Omega 6 fatty acids are fairly easy to get in a diet. They abound in the plant kingdom, especially in sunflower and safflower oil. Dogs can also create their own from a metabolic precursor called linoleic acid, found in almost every dog food. Deficiencies of omega 6 fatty acids are uncommon, except when dogs eat generic food from manufacturers who cut corners or when dogs consume a high-fiber diet such as a weight reduction plan.

It's more difficult to get a diet rich in omega 3 fatty acids, even in good quality dog foods, because today's meat and cereal grains are poor sources. "Omega 3s were probably prevalent in a dog's natural diet hundreds of years ago," Carey said. "We've found good levels in some wild animals, and even pasture-fed lamb from certain parts of Australia have high omega 3s in their meat. But not American-raised meats or common cereals."

The best sources of omega 3the anti-inflammatory fatty acid is in marine fish oil and whole ground flaxseed. Many nutritionists now consider the omega 3 a conditionally essential food. This means that under conditions of unavailable natural sources, a dog needs omega 3 fatty acids added to its food each day. Several manufacturers offer products that feature a coat-enhancing balance of omega 3 and omega 6 fatty acids.