



# Digestive enzymes for inner health



By Ingrid King

I've written several articles on how to choose healthy foods for your pet. In a past article, I said that I was not a proponent of a raw food diet, because I felt that the risks outweighed the benefits. However, I have since come to the conclusion that feeding raw food, with balance, is one of the healthiest ways to feed our pets. We know from human nutrition that the less processed our foods are, the better for us, and the same holds true for our pets. Additionally, cats are carnivores, and as such, they are designed to eat raw meat. That being said, some pets, especially cats, can be difficult to transition to raw food. For those pets, the next best thing for achieving the same results you get from raw feeding may be supplementing your pet's diet with digestive enzymes.

The reason raw food is so good for our pets is because it still contains all the digestive enzymes. When food is processed and cooked, enzymes are destroyed. Enzymes aid in food absorption by breaking food down into simple, soluble substances that the body can absorb. Enzymes are important building blocks for a multitude of metabolic functions and can help the body fight the

degenerative processes that come with aging, aid in better absorption of vitamins and minerals, and help build a healthy immune system. Enzyme deficiency can show itself in poor hair coat, allergies, intestinal problems, and voluminous stools, often with the fat still clearly visible.

If you're not able to feed raw, you may want to consider supplementing your pet's diet with digestive enzymes. There are numerous products on the market. The best find is one that in addition to enzymes also contains probiotics. For cats, anything with a scent or flavour can be an issue; with dogs this is not so important. I found one that my cat Amber readily accepted on the very first try and has been taking it for the last few weeks. The most noticeable difference so far has been a marked decrease in the size and the smell of her stools.

The research and testimonials for the benefits of digestive enzymes are convincing. Like pets on mostly raw diets, enzyme supplementation can help your pets look and feel great. Pets on a raw diet tend to have glossy coats, clear ears and eyes, and better teeth.

They maintain their ideal weight. They're less prone to allergies or intestinal problems. A mostly raw diet isn't the most practical for busy pet owners with busy lives so enzyme supplementation can help you achieve the same results.

As a side note, I wanted to test the benefits of digestive enzymes for myself, so I began taking them right along with Amber (not the feline version, though! I choose a product designed for humans). While I can't say that my coat has become glossier, I've definitely noticed an improvement with my digestion! I've also noticed that I don't get hungry as quickly as I used to in between meals. My – completely unscientific – assumption is that it may be due to the fact that my body is absorbing nutrients better as a result of the added enzymes.

**Please note:** if your cat or dog is diabetic or immuno-suppressed, digestive enzymes may be contra-indicated. Always check with your veterinarian before changing your pet's diet or adding supplements.



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## Probiotics

Many of us think of bacteria as harmful, or even deadly, but did you know that certain bacteria are not only desirable, but necessary for your pet's good health?

'Friendly' bacteria such as Lactobacillus acidophilus, Bifido-bacterium bifidum, and Lactobacillus bulgaricus are just a few of the helpful microorganisms that can reside in your dog or cat's intestinal tract where they play an important role in defending his/her body against disease and illness. These kinds of bacteria are referred to as 'friendly' because, rather than causing illness and disease, they serve to defend your pet from harmful organisms which can invade the body from time to time.

Keeping this complex ecosystem of microorganisms in balance, however, is not always easy. In this ongoing tug of war between friendly and harmful bacteria, sometimes the friendly bacteria get outnumbered due to a number of causes:

- the use of prescription drugs
- the aging process
- an inadequate diet
- a compromised immune system
- fertilizers, pesticides and chemical pollutants in the environment
- stress

## Probiotics and Antibiotics

One of the most common ways that the ratio of friendly-to-harmful bacteria gets nudged out of balance is through the use of antibiotics. Of course, the use of these drugs is not always avoidable, especially if your dog or cat is fighting a serious infection.

Unfortunately, antibiotics are not able to distinguish between friendly and harmful bacteria, so when eradicating the harmful bacteria (the source of many serious infections), they also kill off a large number of friendly bacteria. This leaves your pet with even less of a defence the next time he/she is exposed to harmful microorganisms.

Chemicals in the water supply and soil can have much the same effect. They do eliminate many of the harmful bacteria your pet is exposed to; but they also upset the balance between good and harmful bacteria. In this way, chemicals can also have a negative impact on your pet's health.

Even a natural event such as aging can affect the balance of good and harmful bacteria in your pet's intestinal tract. Regardless of the cause, if your pet shows any of the signs of an unhealthy intestinal tract, this should serve as a red flag: It's time to intervene and help your pet get his/her intestinal ecosystem back on the right track. Some of the most common symptoms of an unhealthy digestive tract are the following:

- flatulence
- constipation
- diarrhea
- sluggishness
- skin problems
- irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)

*“...feeding raw food, with balance, is one of the healthiest ways to feed our pets.”*



#### Probiotic Supplements for Dogs and Cats

One of the simplest and most effective remedies for poor digestion is to administer probiotics to your pet. Probiotics are supplements comprised of different kinds of friendly bacteria. The ingredients in them may vary from brand to brand, as do the methods of delivery. For instance, probiotics may come in capsule, paste, liquid, or tablet form. They may even be included in some brands of premium and super premium commercial pet food. Always look for the amount stated on the labels. If in doubt, supplements added into your pet's diet should be considered.

#### The Right Formula

So what should you look for when shopping around for probiotics? Above all, you want a formula that is comprised of quality ingredients that will help restore the balance of microflora in your pet's intestinal tract. A formula that contains a 1:1:1 ratio of Lactobacillus Casei, Bifidobacterium Thermophilum, Enterococcus Faecium should address this need.

If you are looking for information on how to manage your pet's health with holistic or natural pet care products like nutritional supplements, vitamins, nutraceuticals and other natural medicines, there is a US based site called Holistic Pet Info. They carry more than 100 natural pet products including vitamins and nutritional supplements, nutraceuticals and other natural medicines. Due to import restrictions in Australia, you may not be able to have products sent to you but the site also offers a wide range of well-written and researched articles and other information on animal health issues. There are many quality supplements here in Australia—you just have to do some research as to what is going to be right for your pet.

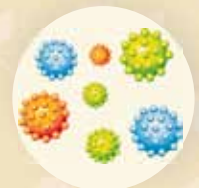


#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Ingrid King is the author of Buckley's Story – Lessons from a Feline Master Teacher. She is a former veterinary hospital manager turned writer. Her online magazine "News for You and Your Pet" goes out to subscribers around the world. Her blog, "The Conscious Cat," has been called "educational cat nip for the cat lover" and is a comprehensive resource for conscious living, health and happiness for pets and their people. For more information about Ingrid and Buckley's Story, please visit [www.ingridking.com](http://www.ingridking.com)*

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