

Warding off the Winter Woes

Try these supplements to keep your dog healthy this season

When the temperatures drop, dogs, like people, experience a new set of health concerns. The bugs and fleas might have left the scene, but dogs might be feeling the cold in other ways. More time spent inside, for instance, often leads to weight gain, and cold weather can affect canines' joints, skin and coats. *Doggie Aficionado* spoke to some experts about what supplements can help prevent and treat these common winter health woes.

You know that the cold weather makes it less appealing to head outdoors—which means less time for Fido to take a walk, run in the park and play with other pups. Inactivity often leads to weight gain for canines, just like humans. Martha Smith, managing editor for Love Dogs, Inc., an online resource for dog health, says green tea combats that problem effectively, while also offering a boost to the dog's overall immune system. "With the green tea you get the antioxidant support, and it helps maintain digestive health," she says. "A green tea supplement can help them stay on top of their digestion and help control their weight at a time when they might not be as active as usual."

However, Dr. Michele Hoag, an associate veterinarian at Plaza Delamo Animal Hospital in Torrance, Calif., says it's important to feed dogs a bit more during the winter. "When they're outside fighting the cold, it takes more energy from them," she says. "Getting them sort of beefed up for the winter is a good idea, so you kind of put on an extra fat layer, a little more insulation, and that helps protect them from the cold a little more."

If you notice your dog's skin is itchy or flaky during winter's drier months, you might want to consider adding an omega-3 to that green tea supplement. The fish oil base acts as a lubricant to moisten their systems, from the inside out. "Our omega-3 is a powder form that you sprinkle over the dog's food, so as they ingest it, it goes into

their systems and really helps the skin get a lot more supple and clears up dryness, and it also makes the coat a lot more shiny," Smith says. Omega-3s, like glucosamine and chondroitin supplements, can also help achy joints, which can be more painful during the colder months.

Reishi supplements can benefit the immune system too, Smith says. "It's not necessarily if your dog is sick you should start taking this type of thing; it's more for preventive measures," she says. "A dog who's being supplemented with reishi on a daily basis will help build up their immune system, and help them fight off illnesses or colds or anything like that."

And although dogs don't necessarily get colds and flus more often in the winter, they are inside—often with other dogs—more often than they would be during a warmer time of year. If you do notice your dog coughing or discharging from his nose or eyes, it could be the flu. The best thing to do for the flu, says Hoag, is supportive care. "There's no medication to treat that virus," she says. "Supportive care is just keeping them hydrated, antibiotics to fight off secondary infections, pneumonia, nebulization, hot steamy showers." There is a new vaccine out there for the doggie flu, but Hoag is not convinced it is effective enough for people to rush out for.

And although some people give their dogs some of their own supplements, Smith doesn't recommend this practice. "Dog supplements are formulated specifically for dogs, and dogs have different systems and health needs than humans do," she says. Not only are the doses different, but the formulations are as well. "Some of the supplements might sound the same, like humans take omega just like dogs should, an omega formulated specifically for dogs is going to be the right one for them, as opposed to ones for humans."

Before supplementing your dog with any products, make sure to consult with your veterinarian. 🐾

Certain supplements, like Green Tea and Reishi, boost dogs' immunity to ward off illnesses and keep their systems strong.