



## Probiotics for Pets

By Rose DiLeva VMD, MS, CVCP, CVA

Many of you have probably heard about probiotics at some time. Probiotics are basically the “good” bacteria that reside in the digestive tract. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), probiotics are defined as “living microorganisms which, when administered in adequate amounts, confers a health benefit on the host.” Some of these bacteria are from the Genus Lactobacillus, Bifidobacterium, Streptococcus, and Enterococcus. Lactobacillus tends to live in the small intestine, while Bifidobacterium tend to live in the large intestine and colon. A healthy intestinal tract is extremely important as approximately 70% of the immune system is associated with the gut. Millions of beneficial bacteria reside in the intestinal tract in normal, healthy animals and people. These beneficial bacteria play a significant role in maintaining the health of the gastrointestinal tract. It provides an optimal environment for the bacteria to live in and allows the intestinal defenses to cope with foreign substances and pathogens that may come along.

Probiotics are beneficial in a number of situations. I, for one, recommend that any dog or cat that is taking antibiotics, add probiotics to their pet’s food. Antibiotics destroy much of the beneficial bacteria in the intestines causing your dog to become

deficient in probiotics. Additionally, dogs fed dry kibble are susceptible to reduced numbers of healthy gut bacteria. Remember, kibble is so highly processed (it is heated FOUR times in processing), that barely any nourishment, let alone healthy bacteria, exist in the end product. Manufacturers label the ingredients in the kibble PRIOR to heating. Heating dry kibble kills what little nutrients are present. So what the label says is nourishing prior to processing is not the same at the end of processing. Probiotics replace the beneficial bacteria and promote bowel recolonization. Elderly dogs require additional probiotics because they tend to decline as the pet ages. Signs of probiotic deficiency include, but are not limited to, diarrhea, a compromised, less efficient, immune system, constipation, and even allergies and pruritis (itching).

Probiotics have many benefits. They aid in the digestive process, help resolve acute and chronic diarrhea, modulates the immune system, aids in chronic intestinal infections, inhibits the growth and activity of harmful bacteria, helps treat inflammatory bowel disease and intestinal inflammation, can reduce allergic reactions, and helps treat the gastrointestinal side effects that results from chemotherapy. Probiotics also provide nutritional co-factors that improve the digestive process and help repair any compromised intestinal mucosa. It is the intestinal mucosa that plays the biggest role in blocking pathogenic bacteria from gaining entrance into the body. That same mucosa permits beneficial nutrients to be absorbed into the body. The significance of probiotics should not be underestimated. Sometimes that is all that is needed to resolve a diarrhea problem in pets that have been on a course of antibiotics. Probiotics can control diarrhea that is caused by bacterial overgrowth and even parasitic infections. Most pathogens enter the body via the mouth and, therefore, must transit through the gastrointestinal tract. If intestinal defenses are compromised, illness can result. It is best to purchase probiotics specifically formulated for pets.

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