

Flax Seed oil

What is Flax Seed oil?

Also called linseed oil, flax seed oil is derived from the seeds of the flax plant and has been proposed as a more aesthetically pleasing alternative to fish oil supplements. Flax Seed oil contains higher levels of alpha-linolenic acid (ALA) than fish oil, and also contains omega-6 fatty acids. ALA is an omega-3 fatty acid that is ultimately converted to eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) in some species. EPA and DHA are of significant benefit in the management of chronic inflammatory and immune disorders. When acted upon by cyclooxygenase, they give rise to the series 3 prostaglandins, which are notable in their anti-inflammatory effects.



Why recommend administration of flax seed oil to my pet?

Like fish oil, flax seed oil is used to treat chronic inflammatory disorders. Fish oil is a direct source of EPA and DHA whereas the ALA within flax seed oil must be converted into DHA and EPA. However, many species of animals (probably including dogs and cats) and some people cannot efficiently convert ALA to the more active non-inflammatory omega-3 fatty acids (EPA and DHA). As a result, the anti-inflammatory effects of flax seed oil may not be as strong as the anti-inflammatory effects of fish oil.

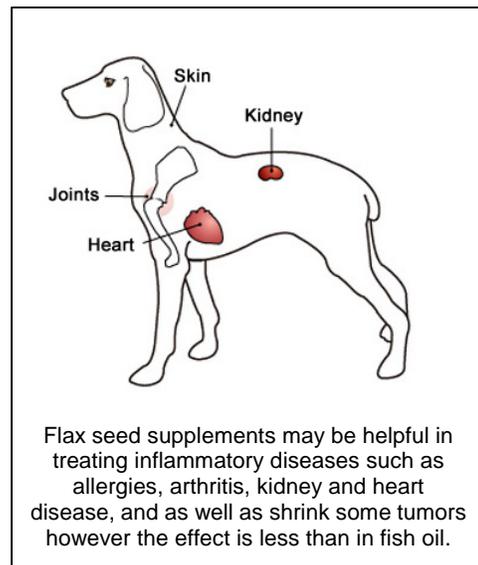
The use of flax seed oil unrelated to its anti-inflammatory effects is as a dietary source of soluble fiber. Increasing soluble fiber in the diet can help counter tendencies to constipation.

How much experience is there with the use of flax seed oil in pets?

Flax seed oil has been used for years to maintain a healthy skin and coat in pets. In ongoing research studies, it does not appear as effective as fish oil in treating the inflammation associated with diseases such as allergies, arthritis, kidney disease, and heart disease.

What species of animals are being treated regularly with flax seed oil?

Dogs and cats are the animals most commonly treated with flax seed oil. It is also used as a supplement in the feed of poultry and pigs. Pigs, like most humans, are able to convert ALA in flax into EPA and DHA. In poultry, specific concentrations of flax seed oil have been found to reduce the rate of infection and symptoms associated with intestinal parasitism. These effects do not require conversion of ALA to DHA and EPA, suggesting a similar potential benefit in small animals.



How can my pet benefit from flax seed oil?

Flax seed oil can be helpful in improving skin and coat in many pets. To the extent that they are capable of metabolizing ALA to EPA and DHA, some pets with mild allergies or arthritis may also show improvement when supplemented with flax seed oil. Flax seed oil supplements may reduce tendencies to intestinal parasitism and help prevent constipation.

How safe is flax seed oil?

Given its status as a food stuff, flax seed oil is very safe. Toxicity has not been reported. Some animals will develop seborrhoea oleosa, characterized by large flakes of dandruff and an oily coat, in response to fatty acid supplementation. In these cases, flax seed oil supplements should be withdrawn from the diet. Flax seed oil should be refrigerated to prevent rancidity. Ground flax may be used in place of flax seed oil and has higher palatability.



Where do I get flax seed oil and do I need a prescription?

Your veterinarian may have preferred supplements that he or she will recommend. Pet owners are cautioned against buying supplements without knowledge of the manufacturer. A prescription is not needed for flax seed oil.

This client information sheet is based on material written by Steve Marsden, DVM ND MSOM LAc DiplCH AHG, Shawn Messonnier, DVM and Cheryl Yuill, DVM, MSc, CVH.

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