Garlic

What is garlic?

Garlic, the bulb of the plant *Allium sativum,* is a well-known herb and food flavoring substance. It is supplied in raw form as the fresh bulb; as a liquid alcohol extract; or in gelatin capsules.

Why recommend administration of garlic to my pet?

In people, garlic is used as an antibacterial, antifungal, and to lower blood lipids and cholesterol. It is also used in an attempt to lower blood pressure and inhibit tumor formation. Many of these uses are not substantiated in clinical testing.

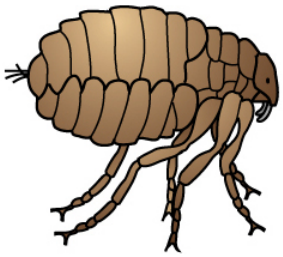
In pets, garlic is mainly used to decrease internal and external parasites. Flea control products for dogs and cats that utilize garlic are abound on pet supply store shelves.

How much experience is there with the use of garlic in pets?

Garlic has been used in products for flea control in dogs and cats for many years.

How much research has been conducted on this supplement?

Despite the abundance of products that utilize garlic as a method of flea control in dogs and cats, research supporting its efficacy is lacking. Anecdotal reports of an anti-parasitic effect of garlic in dogs and cats exist.



Garlic is used in many over the counter flea products despite lack of evidence of its efficacy.

A minimal amount of research indicates that garlic may be effective in killing giardia (an intestinal protozoan parasite) and dermatophytes (e.g. ringworm fungus) in dogs and cats. It also appears that garlic may reduce blood pressure in dogs and help minimize aminoglycoside (a particular type of antibiotic) toxicity in many species. Laboratory studies have illustrated an ability of garlic to inhibit tumor formation and lower blood pressure.

All of these effects must be considered marginal, and weighed against the potential for garlic to damage the red blood cells of dogs and cats.

How safe is garlic?

Garlic may increase insulin secretion in type I diabetes and should probably be researched for potential benefits to diabetic dogs. Meanwhile, it should be used carefully in diabetic animals receiving insulin therapy. Garlic also may delay blood clotting and enhance the action of anticoagulant medication. It should not be used in animals with bleeding disorders.

The most important concern surrounding the use of garlic in dogs and cats is its ability to induce oxidative stress, resulting in damage to red blood cells, placing the animal at risk for anemia. Larger doses are likely required for this effect, and garlic can probably be used safely at low levels provided red blood cell parameters are routinely evaluated. Concurrent administration of anti-oxidants may also protect against the red blood cell damaging effects of garlic.

Where do I obtain garlic 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, as supplements are not highly regulated and some supplements may not contain the labelled amount of ingredients. A prescription is not needed for garlic.

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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