

Flax Seed Benefits for Dogs

By Judy Wolfe

According to Andi Brown, author of *The Whole Pet Diet*, huskies used as sled dogs get flax seed oil to strengthen their bones, heal their paws, and maintain their energy. Flax seed also plays a significant role in canine cardiovascular health and skin and coat health. Flax seed is an important source of fiber and antioxidants, and it may have anti-tumor properties as well.

Linolenic Acid Benefits

1. Flax seed is an excellent source of alpha-linolenic acid, a type of Omega-3 fatty acid. Omega-3 fatty acids are critical for your pet's skin and coat health. They can prevent dry, itchy skin, shedding, and hot spots. Omega-3 fatty acids may reduce or stop the need for cortisone shots or steroids in dogs suffering from allergies. They can also heal cracked paws and nails.

Flax Seed and Arthritis

2. Natural Pet Care names flax seed as an anti-inflammatory useful in treating arthritis. However, the Flax Seed Oil informational brochure says that dogs may not efficiently convert the alpha-linolenic acid in flax seed oil to the DHA and EPA forms of Omega-3 fatty acid with the strongest anti-inflammatory properties. Even so, the brochure suggests that flax seed oil may provide relief to dogs with mild cases of arthritis.

Flax Seed and Cancer

3. The Colorado State University presentation *Nutrition and Cancer: New Keys for Cure and Control 2003* suggests that Omega-3 fatty acids may help stop tumor growth in dogs with cancer. Malignant tumors can't use fats to fuel their growth. Dr. Gregory Ogilvie, who gave the presentation, concluded that dogs on high n-3 fatty acid diets which contained few simple carbohydrates had improved chemotherapy responses, fewer negative radiation side effects, and less severe metabolic cancer-related changes.

Fiber Benefits

4. Flax seeds contains both soluble and insoluble fiber. According to the Mayo Clinic, soluble fiber absorbs water to form a gel which can decrease blood sugar and cholesterol. Flax seed has 12 percent soluble fiber. The insoluble fiber in flax seed speeds the passage of food through the digestive system. It also builds stool volume, preventing constipation. Many vets recommend the addition of ground flax seed to a dog's regular food for these benefits, and also because heavier stools will help evacuate the dog's anal sacs, preventing impaction.

Lignan Benefits

5. Lignans are plant estrogens found in the hulls of flax seeds. The digestive process converts flax seed lignans from plant to mammalian forms, called enterodiols and enterolactone. A 1998 study by Saskatoon's College of Medicine's Toxicology Group established that flax seed lignans effectively lowered the oxygen free radical levels in dogs experiencing endotoxemia. This indicates the lignans have significant antioxidant properties.