

This Little Spoonful Could Surprise Your Pet's Health

A staple in cooking, this healthy oil is becoming more popular for pets thanks to its numerous applications as well. Learn how you can utilize it for your pet.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker



STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Coconut oil contains medium-chain triglycerides (MCTs), which are healthy fats that have therapeutic and topical applications
- Coconut oil may promote better cognitive function and brain energy metabolism, as well as help manage common skin conditions in household pets
- In one study, epileptic dogs that received higher intake of MCTs experienced improved cognition
- Aside from therapeutic applications, coconut oil may be administered topically to help manage certain canine skin conditions
- The best coconut oil to use for your pet is 100% organic, cold-pressed and human-grade that is sustainably sourced

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published October 2, 2018.

Coconut oil's popularity as a natural remedy has grown exponentially in recent years because of its versatility in addressing various health conditions. Additionally, research surrounding coconut oil's therapeutic application in companion animals is increasing. If you're planning to use coconut oil for your pet, learn about the health benefits first, as well as how much coconut oil you can safely feed to your pet. You'll be pleased to know the many ways you can use coconut oil topically, too.



Coconut Fun Fact

Coconut is considered to be the Swiss Army knife of the plant kingdom. Aside from the nutritious fruit, other parts of the tree can be fashioned into different products depending on need. For example, the fiber can be weaved into rope, and the shell can be turned into charcoal.¹



The Secret of Coconut Oil — Healthy Fats

The majority of coconut oil's therapeutic properties come from its generous amounts of medium-chain triglycerides (MCTs), particularly lauric, capric and caprylic acids.² One of the most notable benefits of coconut oil for pet health is its role in cognition. According to a 2010 study published in the British Journal of Nutrition, massive improvements in brain function were seen in senior beagles that were given MCT supplements.³

In another study, epileptic dogs that received higher intake of MCTs experienced improved cognition.⁴ Epileptic dogs that received MCT also exhibited lower seizure frequency compared to dogs who didn't receive it. If you know someone who has an epileptic dog that has been resistant to conventional medicine, MCT may be a viable alternative, according to a 2020 study.⁵

For pets that need low-fat diets, such as those with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) or protein-losing enteropathy (PLE), you can use coconut oil as their source of therapeutic fats to help manage their medical condition.



Did You Know?

The origin of coconut isn't clear, but historians believe that the Southeast Asian variety comes from the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia. As for the Indo-Atlantic variety, it may have originated from Sri Lanka, the Maldives and the Laccadive Islands.⁶



Coconut Oil Is More Than Just a Healthy Food

Aside from therapeutic applications, coconut oil may be administered topically to help manage certain canine skin conditions. It contains antibacterial capabilities, according to a 2019 study published in *Heliyon*.⁷ Some handy uses include:

- **Helping relieve hot spots** — Combine 5 teaspoons of coconut oil with 5 drops of oregano oil to make a salve or cream and apply this once a day.⁸ Aside from promoting healing, this oil mixture may combat the bacterial infection that may be responsible for hot spots.
- **Soothing allergic reactions, abrasions and cracked paws** — Apply coconut oil on your dog's paws to help ease sores, cracks or abrasions caused by excessive chewing.^{9,10}
- **Eliminating ear mites and infections** — Coconut oil can be applied to your dog's ears to help ease yeast and ear infections, target ear mites and lessen swelling.¹¹
- **Minimizing ear wax buildup** — Clean your dog's ears thoroughly daily with coconut oil to help avoid ear wax buildup that may lead to the ear conditions mentioned above.¹² You can try mixing a drop of tea tree oil with a tablespoon of coconut oil, or you can dab the coconut oil onto a cotton round, add a few drops of hydrogen peroxide afterward and apply on your dog's ear (not suitable for cats).
- **Boosting dental health** — Brush your dog's teeth with coconut oil daily for optimal dental health. Holistic veterinarian Dr. Ihor Basko suggests using a soft baby toothbrush dipped in coconut oil. If your dog has bad breath, you can mix 1 to 2 drops of parsley oil.¹³

Cats Can Benefit from Coconut Oil, Too

Cat lovers, don't worry! Your feline friends can also utilize coconut oil to their advantage; this oil can work for them by:¹⁴

- **Helping cough up hairballs** — Coconut oil can be effective for cats coughing up hairballs by providing lubrication to the digestive tract and lowering the risk for hairball formation itself. This is important for kibble-fed cats, as they need increased moisture and lubrication to allow the hairball to smoothly move through the digestive tract.

- **Helping address constipation and promoting regular bowel movements** — Coconut oil assists in softening stool,¹⁵ to help ease constipation.

MCT oil, by itself, is not palatable to cats,¹⁶ but the good news is many cats learn to accept a dab of coconut oil applied on their paw, and by licking it off, still ingest the health benefits (as well as any supplements you mix with the coconut oil).¹⁷ Meanwhile, applying coconut oil topically can be handy in helping manage feline conditions, such as:

- **Itchy skin** — Coconut oil can be beneficial for cats with dandruff or itchy skin.¹⁸
- **Dry skin**¹⁹ — Moisturize your cat's dry skin with coconut oil²⁰ by feeding it to them or applying it topically to dry patches of skin.
- **Matted cat hair** — Coconut oil may help loosen matted fur by making the strands slippery. Apply some coconut oil to the affected area and brush gently.²¹

Top Producers of Coconuts

If you're wondering where your coconuts come from, they're likely from Southeast Asia. According to Statista, Indonesia is the world's top producer of coconuts with a yield of 17.13 million metric tons in 2019. Second place belongs to the Philippines at 14.77 million metric tons. India takes third place, trailing very closely at 14.68 million metric tons.²²



How to Safely Give Coconut Oil to Pets

"Before utilizing coconut oil for your pets, ensure that you pick 100% organic, cold-pressed and human-grade coconut oil. More importantly, you'll have to control how much coconut oil you use to prevent overfeeding."

Coconut oil is generally safe for pets that do not have a coconut allergy.^{23,24} If you're not sure, consult with your integrative veterinarian before using coconut oil — both topically and orally.

Feed one-quarter teaspoon of 100% organic, cold-pressed, human-grade coconut oil for every 10 pounds of body weight. Give this once or twice daily for dogs and cats, or as needed to manage medical conditions. It can be added at mealtimes to your pet's food.

Owners of pets with pancreatitis will be glad to know that lipase (secreted by the pancreas) is not required to digest coconut oil, so it's safe for their pets. However, if your pet requires a low-fat diet, exercise caution as coconut oil is high in calories. If your pet is overweight, gains weight easily or metabolizes fat ineffectively, use coconut oil sparingly, when calories from other foods have been reduced.^{25,26,27}

As an additional reminder, even though coconut oil is a great source of fats, it should never be used in place of required dietary fats, including essential fatty acids like omega-3s from krill oil or wild-caught salmon, and omega-6 fats from flaxseed, hemp and pumpkin seed oils. It's strictly for healthy fat supplementation. Coconut oil is not a good source of omega-3 or omega-6 fatty acids, so use it in conjunction with other healthy fats that are necessary for health and well-being.

How to Choose a Healthy Coconut Oil

While coconuts are beneficial to your pet's health, the practice of growing them may be harmful to Mother Nature. Due to the increased demand for coconut-related products worldwide, producers are scrambling to keep up, which ends up damaging the environment.

For context, almost three-quarters of the world's coconut supply comes from the Philippines, Indonesia and India. The increased demand forces farmers to implement unsustainable agricultural practices, such as clear-cutting natural habitats to plant coconut trees, as well as monocropping coconut palm trees, which is a method of repeatedly growing only one crop. Monocropping eventually depletes soil minerals, reduces biodiversity, and forces farmers to turn to chemical fertilizers to keep producing crops, which further harms and pollutes the earth.²⁸

To become responsible coconut oil consumers, purchase raw, cold-pressed varieties from certified sustainable sources. Cold-pressed methods are friendlier to the environment because they don't rely on heat-based processes, such as deodorizing and bleaching.²⁹ Moreover, heat extraction methods destroy the natural antioxidants in coconut oil, which is why you're providing it to your animals in the first place.³⁰

Try This Easy Coconut Scones Treat

Here's a recipe that you can try at home if you want to use coconut oil to make appetizing pet treats. Ideally, treats like this should comprise less than 10% of your pet's daily caloric intake. If you're not sure how many calories are in your pet treats, consult with your veterinarian to come up with the best approximation.

Coconut Scones Recipe

Ingredients:

- 3 tablespoons coconut oil, melted
- 6 tablespoons coconut flour
- 1 cup plain organic whey protein
- 1 teaspoon fresh oregano*
- 3 tablespoons local organic honey**

Directions:

1. Mix all ingredients together in a bowl.
2. Grease your hands well with coconut oil and press the dough flat onto a greased cookie sheet. Bake at 375 degrees Fahrenheit for five minutes.
3. Once done, loosen the edges and flip onto a cooling rack. Cut into desired sizes once cooled.

Note: Store in the freezer or refrigerator and consume within one week. If stored in the freezer, this can stay fresh for up to three months.

*Recommended for animals with yeast problems, a common secondary frustration for allergy patients

**Provides immune system support against local allergens

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