

A Comparison of Herbs & Vitamin/Mineral Supplements

by Patrick J. McDonald

Dog and cat owners often ask the question: "How do herbal supplements compare to vitamin/mineral supplements?" When specific herbs are correctly blended and added to the diet they detoxify, stimulate and rejuvenate damaged or stressed organs and muscles. All vitamins and minerals found in herbs are naturally occurring and bio-available, meaning the body takes what it needs and discards the rest. This is one of the safer aspects of herbs. On the other hand certain herbs can be very potent and their use should be approached with caution. There is a large body of research available on the use of herbs.

The herbal source is very important. Poor quality or low potency can cause poor results or no results at all. A brief initial testing period should be observed when first introducing herbs to determine if there is any type of allergic reaction. Loosening of the stool is a very common side effect when herbs are first introduced as well as with vitamin/mineral supplements. This is usually a stimulation of the bowel by the herbs or minerals creating peristaltic movement (the cleansing effect of minerals). This condition should correct in a few days as the body adjusts.

Herbs, unlike vitamins, can often be used in homeopathic doses with very effective results. Herbs that are considered dangerous in their natural state, such as Arnica can have a beneficial effect when used as a homeopathic remedy.

Vitamin-mineral supplements will be effective in many cases. Any animal that is being fed a completely processed diet will more than likely benefit from a well balanced supplement. The ingredients in these supplements should also come from natural sources and should be bio-available. Fat soluble vitamins from a synthetic source can lead to problems when used over a long period of time. These type of vitamins are often stored by the body leading to a condition known as vitaminosis. Any condition brought on by the lack of a certain vitamin can be produced by too much of the same vitamin. Excessive feeding of a diet rich in organ meats that contain high doses of fat soluble vitamins may also lead to this condition. Fresh organ meats are of great value when used correctly, but too much of a good thing can create problems. Owners that start to use a vitamin/mineral supplement may see a very quick surge of improvement at first. Then, after a period of time, the good results obtained initially will slowly decline and the animal will be back where they started. Water soluble vitamins like C & B are considered quite safe when used with common sense. Caution should be taken with A, D, E, etc. Chelation (the bonding of vitamins or minerals to a protein) is always a plus. This will allow the body to maintain higher blood serum levels through slow release, making these products more effective, while buffering the effects that may cause any discomfort during their initial use.

Dogs internal organs have many functions not limited to just the processing of food and the filtering of toxins. They are also responsible for the production of enzymes, steroids, hormones, DNA, blood cell production and the conversion and use of various vitamins, minerals, amino acids, fats, complex and simple carbohydrates and sugars. When toxins build up and reach a critical point a metabolic imbalance occurs in the animal causing the normal function of the affected organ to cease performing its task at an optimum level. The effects usually manifest as ailments such as arthritis, digestive problems, liver malfunction, etc., leading to the complete or partial degeneration of the organ or organs involved. This sets the stage for the invasion of free radicals, parasites, or some other form of

dis-ease usually resulting in premature aging, illness or death. A weakened host will always attract parasites and disease.

This brings us to one of the primary benefits of herbs, the detoxification of various internal organs such as the liver, pancreas, kidneys, bladder, spleen, large/small intestines and stomach. Herbs trigger biochemical responses to deal with various dysfunction throughout the body. These responses often continue even after the use of the particular herb has stopped. When detoxification occurs, the body acquires, through these biochemical responses, the ability to shed toxic buildups. Herbs give the body the ability to help itself. It should be remembered that therapeutic doses of herbs or nutritional supplements may require larger doses in the beginning. After the desired results are obtained dosages should be cut back to a maintenance level and periodic breaks should be given. It is always wise to consult with a health care professional familiar with these conditions to determine dosages and frequency of use.

Dog owners have credited herbs with the alleviation of subluxation problems, arthritis, reproductive problems, immune system and digestive disorders, skin problems, constipation and the regeneration of injured muscles and ligaments. Herbs should not be considered a total nutritional supplement for every condition that adversely affects dogs, as no supplement should. If such a supplement was available all of our problems would be solved. *A magic bullet does not exist.* Every symptom needs to be looked at and evaluated to determine the source of the animal's problem. Symptoms are the keys to unlock the medical mystery; treating only the symptoms simply delays the inevitable greater problem yet to come. Many times the problem may be just a dietary deficiency. For these conditions the recommendation may be amino acid complexes, specific digestive or pancreatic enzymes, or probiotics (lactic acid producing or friendly bacteria).

Since it is impossible to exist in a totally toxic-free environment, herbs should be considered an essential natural feed additive. Internal cleansing should be considered when evaluating a complete health/nutritional program. Herbs and herbal combinations can help achieve this goal. Your animals will benefit by using natural products that deal with the source of the problem rather than addressing only the symptoms. The solution may be closer than you think.