

Caring for Pet Companions

Three Essential Tips for Healthy Skin and Coat

by JEAN HOFVE, DVM

From dogs that constantly scratch, to cats with dandruff—skin and coat problems are some of the most uncomfortable issues your pet can face.

But these problems are frequently an indication of your pet's overall health, as the skin is often the first place that systemic problems manifest externally. Skin and coat health is also a great way to monitor results when you make changes to your pet's daily routine.

Your pet relies on you for everything. Consistently investing in their nutrition and hygiene will help to ensure a healthy, vibrant future. These essential tips are the basic building blocks for the foundation of your pet companion's health and wellness.

Essential Tip #1: Nutrition

Eating right is the key to good health and longevity for people, and it's the same for your dog and cat companions. Vitality, contentment, and zest for life come from within. They spring from a body and brain that are fully supplied with essential nutrients in the right form to ensure healthy digestion, absorption, and elimination. The best nutrition provides your pet companion's body with what it needs, not just to survive but to thrive, without burdening the body with indigestible waste, chemical additives, or other harmful substances.

Poor nutrition is reflected in dull, greasy coats; dandruff; and dry, itchy skin. Do your best to provide quality, wholesome nutrition, with foods that are meat based and that don't rely

*"What's essential to me is giving my best friend
as much love as he gives me."*

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on grain proteins such as corn gluten, or on generic animal fat. Look for whole meats and high-quality fats from chicken and fish. For cats, canned food is essential for both the moisture, which promotes kidney and bladder health, and the high protein and fat levels they need for optimal health.

Essential Tip #2: Omega-3 Essential Fatty Acids

The health of the skin depends on having the right kinds of fats in the diet. The fatty layers and skin-cleansing secretions are fat based.

The optimal diet for our carnivorous companions is a high-protein, high-fat diet. Before dogs and cats were domesticated, their ancestors obtained essential omega-3 fatty acids (including EPA and DHA) from their prey, such as rodents, birds, and elk.

Today, our pet companions depend on their human caregivers to meet their nutritional needs. Most dogs and cats are fed commercial pet food. While these pet foods are convenient,



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they often contain primarily omega-6 fatty acids from animal fats and vegetables, and omega-3s from plants and seeds. However, commercial pet foods may not contain optimal amounts of the crucially important omega-3s EPA and DHA to ensure optimal health and wellness. In fact, even the best commercial, raw, and homemade diets will benefit from omega-3 fatty acid supplementation.

According to John E. Bauer D.V.M., Ph.D., Dipl. ACVN, the specific ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 fatty acids in the total diet of dogs and cats may be important in certain cases. However, what is more important to consider is the individual amounts of EPA and DHA in the total diet, as well as the source of these important fatty acids.¹

Fish oil provides dog and cat companions with a direct source of bioavailable omega-3 fatty acids EPA and DHA. Adding a fish oil supplement is the best way to provide your pet with the healthy fats that support skin, joint, and immune health. Omega-3s play a huge role in skin health, due to their powerful anti-inflammatory properties, which keeps overall inflammation—a major cause of itching—in check. Choose a high-quality fish oil that is

made from wild, sustainably sourced fish, and is molecularly distilled for purity.



"What's essential to me is the love and hilarious antics of my dog and cats. They give me joy on a daily basis, and giving them the best attention and health is what's essential to me."

—Erin H., Pet Sales Representative,
Nordic Naturals

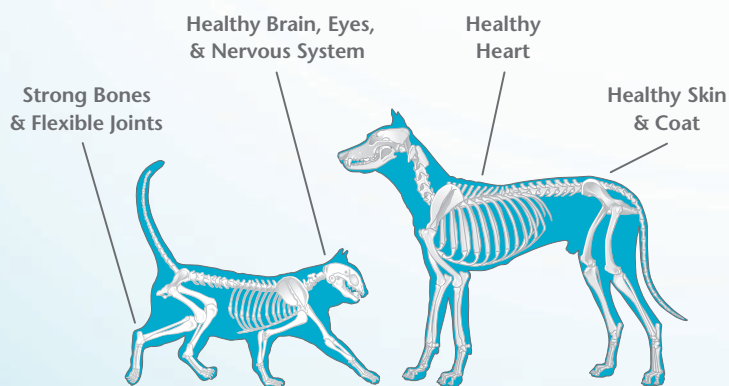
Essential Tip #3: Exercise

We know that exercise is vital to overall health. But exercise is especially important for skin and coat health! The skin is the largest organ in the body, and carries out many functions. Just under the skin, the dermis carries a massive network of blood vessels and lymph channels that help transport oxygen and vital nutrients, as well as excrete wastes. Exercise actually cleanses the skin from within. The glands in the skin also need excellent circulation of blood and lymph to function at an optimal level, in order to keep the skin supple and fresh. Additionally, the stress hormone cortisol breaks down the elasticity and thickness of the skin, and even inhibits wound healing. But there's no better stress reliever than exercise!

It's obvious and fairly simple to exercise dogs; they can accompany you on walks and hikes, and can also benefit from spirited play. It's a little more challenging to exercise a cat; but daily, vigorous, interactive play sessions will keep kitty healthy, both emotionally and physically.

The eyes may be the windows to the soul, but the skin and coat are the windows to your pet's internal health. Unfortunately, skin problems (including ear infections) are among the most common reasons for veterinary visits. If you make these changes and your pet is still having skin and coat problems, be sure to have your veterinarian investigate, as persistent problems can be a sign of something more serious.

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Your pet companions' skin and coat are a reflection of their overall health.

1. Stanley JC, Elsom RL, Ccler PC, Griffin BA, Harris WS, Jebb SA, Lovegrove JA, Moore CS, Riemersma RA, and Sander TAB. UK Food Standards Agency Workshop Report: the effects of the dietary n-6:n-3 fatty acid ratio on cardiovascular health. *Brit J Nutr* 2007;98:1305–1310.