



## FOOD & NUTRACEUTICAL SOURCES

Nutraceutical therapy is growing again in popularity. The rise of pharmaceutical prices and concerns about over-medicating are just two of the fundamental reasons people are reaching for something different.

I think there's something else contributing to this fundamental shift. Over the last decade especially, the investment people make in the animals they share their life with has increased emotionally and compassionately. Just as they can offer their human family members over-the-counter (OTC) medications where possible, people want to be able to help their non-human family members as readily for minor ailments. But Big Pharma just isn't facilitating this. The cost of being able to label a medication safe for each specific species is admittedly tediously beyond practicality.

There is a growing understanding among pet owners of how differently various species (especially cats) process medications such that most human OTC medications are toxic to pets. Rather than reach for OTC medications, people reach for nutraceuticals such as herbs, supplements, etc.

### **SAFETY FIRST - Source**

The unfortunate aspect of nutraceutical therapy is that it is not regulated in any fashion. This includes marketing and labeling requirements. The only 2 labels that are regulated; the US Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) "Organic" label and US Pharmacopeia's (USP's) Verified labels. Other than these 2 labels, manufacturers can make *any* statement on their label. This includes *not* telling you what is in the supplement or herbal treatment. Even the "non-GMO" (non-Genetically Modified Organisms) label is under challenge. An important label in pet food and animal feed is the "AAFCO Statement" (Association of American Feed Control Officials), though AAFCO does not test or regulate pet food. However, their statement on the label tells a lot about pet food quality.

**Verified contents by USP** is very helpful for understanding exactly what is or is *not* in the supplement or herb of interest. It does not speak to nutritional value at all. It does verify that the claimed ingredients and amounts are actually what you get in the supplement. Importantly, **USP Verified** also allows you to know that there are no additional harmful contents (e.g., melamine) in the supplements you decide to use. **I always highly recommend using USP verified supplements and herbs since you know exactly what you are getting.**

The **Organic label** requires USDA approved standards for growth and/or feeding among others and approval/**certification by the USDA to use the label**. This speaks to the source of food contents where appropriate. It does not speak to nutritional value for any species.

The **non-GMO label** is challenging. "Because technically it is the plant that is genetically engineered rather than the food, for simplicity we use the term 'food derived from genetically engineered plants' in this guidance to refer to products that are derived from genetically engineered plants. (For reasons discussed in more detail later in this guidance, FDA does not use the terms 'genetically modified' or 'genetically modified organism' (GMO) when referring to foods derived from genetically engineered



plants.) Because section 201(f)(1) of the FD&C Act defines “food” in relevant part as “articles used for food or drink for man or other animals,” the food derived from genetically engineered plants addressed in this guidance include plant-derived foods for animals as well as such foods for humans.

**FDA’s guidance documents**, including this guidance, **do not establish legally enforceable responsibilities.**

(<https://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/GuidanceDocumentsRegulatoryInformation/LabelingNutrition/ucm059098.htm>).

The **AAFCO statement** is usually located just under the nutrition label. Having this statement on animal feed/pet food states that the food has been tested to AAFCO standards. These standards include 8 categories (e.g., Nutritional label, Manufacturer information, Species appropriate). Having food tested to meet these standards can be challenging to manufacturers. **When the AAFCO statement is present on a label, you know the manufacturer is very invested in making quality pet food that is appropriate for the species indicated and does not contain any toxic materials (e.g., melamine).** These standards are set by contributing feed regulating organizations such as the FDA, the USDA, Canadian Food Inspection Agency, etc. AAFCO also provides standards for feed laboratories.

AAFCO does not regulate, test, approve or certify pet foods in any way. AAFCO establishes the nutritional standards for complete and balanced pet foods, and it is the pet food company's responsibility to formulate their products according to the appropriate AAFCO standard. It is the state feed control official's responsibility in regulating pet food to ensure that the laws and rules established for the protection of companion animals and their custodians are complied with so that only unadulterated, correctly and uniformly labeled pet food products are distributed in the marketplace and a structure for orderly commerce." (<https://petfood.aafco.org/>)

### ***SAFETY FIRST - Interactions & Contraindications***

Another very important consideration with nutraceutical therapy is interactions with anything used or consumed, including but not limited to other medications, supplements and herbs or contra-indications for its use (e.g., medical conditions). For example, many of my veterinary patients are on anti-inflammatory medications (e.g., NSAIDs, steroids). These medications can lead to ulcerations in the gastro-intestinal (GI) tract. Because these medications are often prescribed for painful patients, owners sometimes reach for turmeric/curcumin to assist with pain relief. However, turmeric/curcumin should not be used with blood thinners as it can exacerbate bleeding. I caution pet owners wanting to add turmeric/curcumin as an herbal supplement for treating pain as if ulcers form, it could create trouble clotting. If an ulcer develops and a patient is also on turmeric/curcumin, this may lead to your pet being unable to clot the bleeding ulcer. Clotting disorders are life threatening.

Remember, the source of the information you get is the most critical element when determining validity and reliability of information. The only central source of information (other than primary refereed scientific research) I recommend for nutraceuticals is the **About Herbs** site put together by Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (<https://www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/diagnosis-treatment/symptom-management/integrative-medicine/herbs/search>). This site (and app) is easy to use for anyone and serves as a central clearing-house of researched information about the use of nutraceuticals in medicine.



**CONCLUSION**

I find great advantage to both clinical medicine and to pet owners with the ubiquitous access and often success of nutraceutical therapy. I highly encourage a carefully researched (e.g., evidence-based, science-based) and collaborated (with your veterinarian) decision regarding what nutraceuticals are appropriate to use in your non-human family member.

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