

# your common pet health woes—solved!

Whether your furry friend has achy joints, an upset tummy, or misses you a little too when you're gone, a natural solution just might be the answer for what ails him. by [Marygrace Taylor](#)

## ARTHRITIS

When the smooth cartilage surrounding joints starts to wear down, the result is arthritis: painful inflammation, swelling, and stiffness of those joints. One in five dogs will get arthritis, particularly large-breed and overweight pups, and one in three older cats will face the same issue.

**Symptoms:** Difficulty walking, running, or jumping; favoring one side or limb; and decreased activity and interest in playing can all be signs of arthritis..

**Treatments:** The natural joint supplement glucosamine

is a common arthritis treatment that many vets try first—but it isn't for every pet. "About half of animals will benefit," says Nancy Scanlan, D.V.M., a holistic veterinarian and executive director of the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association. Dosages depend on an animal's size, and your vet can prescribe glucosamine in liquid or pill form.

If glucosamine doesn't help after two months, another option is acupuncture, which has been shown to ease symptoms in up to 85 percent of dogs and cats, says Phillip Raclyn, D.V.M., director of the Riverside Veterinary Group in Manhattan. Acupuncture requires more time and money than

supplements—several 15- to 30-minute sessions are usually needed and prices can vary from under \$100 to several hundred dollars per session—but most pet insurance policies cover it, says Scanlan. Choose a veterinary acupuncturist who's certified through the American Academy of Veterinary Acupuncture or the Chi Institute, which provides training in traditional Chinese veterinary medicine; find one near you at [aava.org](#) or [tcvm.com](#).

Chinese herbal formulas can also complement other treatments by further reducing arthritis symptoms. Scanlan recommends Shu Jing Huo Xue Tang and Wan Du Hua Yu Tang, two blends of Chinese herbs known to ease inflammation and joint pain. Both are available from holistic veterinarians who use Chinese herbs (search for one near you at [holisticvetlist.com](#)).

## SEPARATION ANXIETY

One of the most common issues pet owners face is having a pet that's destructive when left alone. Separation anxiety is triggered when animals become anxious or upset due to their guardians' leaving.

**Symptoms:** Most people assume their pets miss them when they're gone, but if your dog destroys things (read: tearing a hole through the garage door or chewing up the couch), or barks incessantly, you're likely dealing with separation anxiety.

**Treatments:** Knowing what sets off your pet's anxiety—like seeing you grab your shoes for work—can help you desensitize her to the event. "The key is to go gradually," says Scanlan. For instance, leave your pet in the house alone for just a minute, then come back in. Slowly work up to longer gaps of time until your pet is no longer afraid to be by herself for extended periods.

## Beware of these natural ingredients

Mother Nature knows best—most of the time. "There are many natural substances that can be lethal for pets," says Phillip Raclyn, D.V.M., director of the Riverside Veterinary Group in Manhattan. Be very careful with these around your fuzzy companions:

- **Xylitol** This natural, sugar-free sweetener, often found in gum and vitamins, can cause liver failure and a bleeding disorder in dogs. Eating less than .5 grams per kilogram (about the amount in one piece of gum) can be toxic, and is typically marked by vomiting, lethargy, and seizure. If you suspect your dog has ingested xylitol, call your vet ASAP.
- **Tea tree oil** When applied topically in premade formulas (like natural flea shampoos), small amounts can help keep pets flea-free—but too much of the essential oil by itself can be toxic. Tea tree oil can be absorbed through the skin, and too much can cause hypothermia, lack of coordination, and trembling. "Premade shampoos and similar products are safe, but talk with your vet before using tea tree essential oil by itself," Raclyn says.
- **Pennyroyal oil** Safe in the small, concentrated amounts in premade flea shampoos, pennyroyal oil on its own can be lethal for dogs and cats. Pennyroyal oil poisoning symptoms include vomiting, difficulty breathing, and seizures; if your pet exhibits these signs, call your vet immediately.

Anxiety-reducing herbs like valerian root, as well as Chinese formulas such as *Chi Hu Mu Li Long Gu Tang* and *Ding Xin Wan* (available from holistic vets), can help aid desensitization efforts, but a dose is more effective if given before your dog or cat becomes nervous, Scanlan says. One over-the-counter option is Bach Rescue Remedy Pet, which contains anxiety-easing herbs like rock rose and clematis (\$15 for 10 milliliters, [rescuemedypet.com](#)).

Environmental enrichment—interesting toys, plus more playtime and attention—can be a big help for pets. "It gives animals more to do, more to think about, and a way to burn off excess energy," Scanlan says. Some ideas: Stuffed treat toys provide hours of problem-solving distractions for dogs, while cats can be challenged by jumping, climbing, and perching on cat trees.

## UPSET STOMACH

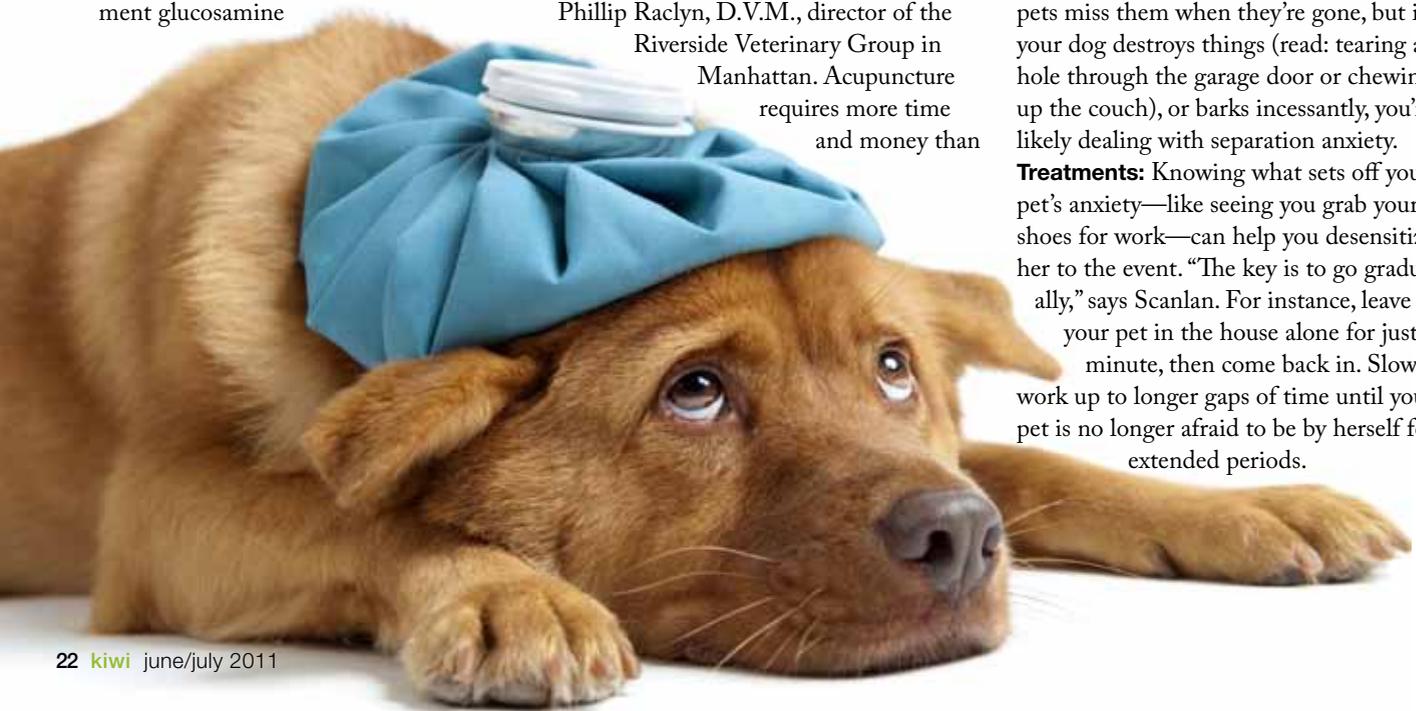
Curious dogs sometimes can't help eating things they shouldn't (sticks, paper, pizza crust on the sidewalk, basically anything you don't want them to eat!), so it's no surprise that what shouldn't go down can come out in unfortunate ways. For cats, the issue is usually a delicate digestive system responding to lots of hair being

swallowed during grooming.

**Symptoms:** Occasional vomiting, diarrhea, or constipation in dogs are clear signs of upset tummies. For cats, frequent vomiting (weekly) is the most common indication of digestive woes.

**Treatments:** You can ease mild vomiting and diarrhea with slippery elm bark, the powdered bark of the slippery elm tree, says Scanlan. When swallowed, it forms a thick gel that coats and soothes stomachs. An over-the-counter brand made for people is fine (about three-quarters of a 150 milligram lozenge for cats and small dogs, and a full capsule for large dogs); try Thayers Original Slippery Elm Lozenges (\$12.50 for 24 lozenges, [thayers.com](#)).

For help with constipation, fiber is key. Scanlan recommends adding canned pumpkin or psyllium, a natural, powdered form of soluble fiber (found at most drugstores) to your pet's food. One half to 1 tablespoon of pumpkin or ½ to 1 teaspoon of psyllium twice a day should do the trick. If vomiting, diarrhea, or constipation lasts longer than two to three days, gets worse instead of better, or if there's any blood in it, contact your vet immediately, as this could be a sign of something more serious, like gastroenteritis or a bowel obstruction. ●



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