

Digestive Enzymes and Your Pet

Without Enzymes, Digestion Could Not Take Place

Enzymes are an integral part of the digestion system. From the time food enters the mouth, various enzymes break it into smaller units until it can be absorbed through the intestinal wall. These enzymes come from two sources, from the food itself, and from the body's enzyme back-up system.

Different Enzyme for Each Type of Food

All raw food contains the proper types and proportions of enzymes to assist in the process of decomposition. When raw food is eaten, chewing releases these indigenous food enzymes from within the cells, which go to work immediately in the mouth and later in the stomach.

There are four basic types of enzymes. Protease breaks long protein chains into smaller amino acid chains, and then into single amino acids. Amylase reduces large carbohydrates, such as starches into simple sugars that the body can burn for fuel. Lipase digests fats into free fatty acids small enough to pass through the intestinal wall. Cellulase, not naturally produced by dogs or cats, breaks down plant fibers to free the nutrients inside the cell walls of fruits and vegetables.

The Body's Back-up Enzyme System

Cooking destroys enzymes starting at about 104° F. Other types of processing and storage destroy them as well. The body must produce its own replacement enzymes or become malnourished. In response to each batch of undigested food that reaches the small intestine, the pancreas manufactures and delivers the right enzymes to do the job. With cooked and packaged pet food, 100% of the enzymes must be supplied all the time.

Animals, who evolved on raw foods, were not designed to make so many enzymes, and this puts an enormous strain on the system.

By middle age, most dogs and cats experience significant enzyme depletion, resulting in allergies, skin problems, immune system breakdown, premature aging, and a host of other complications.

Supplemental Enzymes to the Rescue

Two simple remedies to this widespread problem are adding supplemental enzymes to cooked or packaged food, and feeding raw food (which has many benefits besides enzyme content). Either solution can bring about dramatic improvements! The best supplemental enzymes come from plant-grown sources. They mimic natural food enzymes by beginning digestion in the stomach, and then continue working in the lower digestive tract like pancreatic enzymes.

Symptoms of Enzyme Deficiencies:

1. Dry, flaky skin and dull coat - frequently due to poor absorption of fatty acids in the diet. Can be helped by giving enzymes and a fatty acid supplement together at each meal.
2. Allergies, rashes, hot spots, flea dermatitis, and food sensitivities - poor protein digestion can trigger a biochemical chain reaction, resulting in inflammation and severe itching. Enzymes can break down proteins to stop the itching and let healing take place.
3. Intestinal gas, diarrhea, undigested food in the stool, stool-eating - slow or incomplete digestion of carbohydrates. In addition to enzymes, probiotic cultures may be needed to repopulate the intestinal tract with beneficial bacteria for complete food breakdown and nutrient absorption.

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