

## Apple Cider Vinegar

**This legendary treatment can benefit dogs inside and out, provided you combine it with a dose of sensibility.**

By Cynthia Foley

Browsing through Internet postings about the benefits of apple cider vinegar will likely give you pause. In some places it sounds like a wonder product for everything – including, gulp, curing cancer. Then you find the naysayers, who cite the FDA’s stand that apple cider vinegar has no nutrients. Of course, you already realize the truth is somewhere between.

It won’t cure cancer, but some research shows it shrinking tumors. It won’t prevent cancer either because, well, nothing truly prevents cancer.

The FDA is correct; apple cider vinegar isn’t loaded with vitamins and minerals. It contains only trace amount of a few of these, except potassium. It has 11 grams of potassium in a tablespoon. It does have some strong antioxidant qualities, however.

So, how much can apple cider vinegar benefit your dog? Quite a bit, actually, provided you are sensible about your expectations. Apple cider vinegar may help:

- Flaking skin
- Repel fleas
- Clean ears, lessening the chance of infection
- Aid digestion
- Soothe itchy paws and skin
- Relieve muscle soreness
- Rinse soap residue from your dog’s coat after a bath

- **Improve coat quality**
- **Clear some urinary issues**
- **Fight some minor infections**
- **Dilute pet stains and odors**

Apple cider vinegar will not cure diabetes, although it may help with sugar control. In fact, it doesn't "cure" anything. If apple cider vinegar manufacturers started to use the word "cure," you can bet the FDA would be knocking on their doors. The FDA has strict policies against marketing anything that is not an FDA-approved drug as being able to cure, treat, or even alleviate the effects of diseases. And apple cider vinegar is not a drug. But that fact doesn't stop apple cider vinegar fanatics from stretching the limits of science.

Apple cider vinegar is made from apples/apple pectin. It is slightly acidic, with a pH of 3.1 to 5. Vinegar is made from a liquid containing sugar, so apple vinegar begins as water and apples. When exposed to air, yeasts can grow, which cause the sugar to ferment and become alcohol. As it continues to ferment, natural (or added) acetic acid bacteria turn the alcohol into acetic acid, which is the main component of vinegar. Acetic acid is what gives vinegar its taste, smell and benefits. The word "vinegar" means "sour wine."

## **Apple Cider Vinegar's Effect on Your Dog's Body**

You're familiar with apple cider vinegar as an ingredient in recipes, like salad dressings, dips, and drinks. It's a healthy choice.

Although research on apple cider vinegar's benefits is minimal, the test of time has made it a viable alternative for a number of everyday physical complaints and problems. Most experts agree that its documented human benefits also help dogs.

As is often the case, the exact dosage isn't cast in stone, and you may need to experiment. Some people add it to food, at a rate of one teaspoon to one tablespoon for a 50-pound dog. Never feed straight apple cider vinegar. If you don't see the desired benefit within 30 days of feeding apple cider vinegar, chances are it's not working for that problem.

Many dog owners add it to the dog's water bowl, but start with a small amount – a tablespoon in a big bowl of water, perhaps – and watch to make sure your dog still drinks the water readily before increasing the amount. However, when you add anything to water, be make sure you make a second bowl of plain water available, too. The last thing you want to do is curb your dog's daily water intake.

That said, dogs who are used to the taste of apple cider vinegar in their water often find it easier to adjust to new water tastes, such as when traveling.

Apple cider vinegar helps digestion by increasing the stomach's acid levels, which results in better absorption and fewer gastrointestinal symptoms like burps and gas. Apple cider vinegar

promotes the growth of beneficial bacteria in the dog's digestive tract. Some dog owners mix it into plain yogurt.

Research shows it lowers post-meal glucose levels in humans, and it can relieve constipation - of course, that means overdo it and you may face a messy outcome.

A dose of apple cider vinegar can help with minor bladder inflammation, too, but it won't cure an actual urinary tract infection. That needs immediate veterinary attention.

Since apple cider vinegar has antimicrobial properties, mainly antibacterial, it may interrupt the development of some infections. Feeding it may help combat teary eye stains.

Be careful, though. You can feed too much apple cider vinegar. The first early symptom is usually vomiting. If you ignore that, you may eventually find increased tooth decay and decreased bone health. It can also irritate the mouth and linings of the esophagus.

## **Other Benefits of ACV**

Vinegar is a well-known cleaner and mild disinfectant. (Some people won't use anything but white vinegar to clean their windows.) Apple cider vinegar's cleansing and disinfecting qualities can be good for your dog, too. (If you've never used it before or your dog is the "sensitive" sort, do a 24-hour spot test before applying it to the dog's entire body. Signs of allergy would include vomiting, reddish skin, and/or itching and scratching.)

Diluted 50-50 with water and applied using a sprayer or a sponge, an apple cider vinegar rinse will remove leftover soap residue after a bath, help alleviate dandruff and itchy skin and leave the coat shiny and soft. To use it as a dandruff preventative, rub the diluted solution into the dog's skin just prior to giving him a bath (never do this without having done the 24-hour spot test), then wash it off in the bath.

If you're like most of us, and prefer to minimize your dog's exposure to chemicals, apple cider vinegar might be the answer for a natural flea and/or flying insect repellent. While it's not the answer for a flea infestation, it does a good job combatting small incidences, such as added protection on a walk during heavy bug season.

Apple cider vinegar has a cooling sensation, making it a good choice for small topical problems, like burns, bruises, and hot spots. Be careful, though. If the wound is at all open or raw, apple cider vinegar will sting!

It's especially useful to minimize itchy feet and ears. Thoroughly soak the dog's paws in a vinegar-water mix. Use cotton swab or gauze pads soaked in the mixture to clean ears.

A massage with a diluted ACV mix will go a long way toward relieving strained muscles from overactivity. Warm the solution slightly for added benefit.

Although you may read articles to the contrary, apple cider vinegar is not a strong choice for treating lice, fungus, warts, or ear infections. Your best bet in these situations is veterinary attention!

Since ACV is a great deodorizer and safe for your dog, you can use it to disinfect dog toys and bedding. Spray it anywhere you need odor control and/or a gentle disinfectant.

## **What Kind of Vinegar is Best?**

Like most things nowadays, the choices for vinegar border on over-whelming. You'll see words like raw, natural, unpasteurized, organic, and unfiltered. There are also white vinegars, balsamic vinegars, and wine vinegars. We're looking at apple cider vinegar, which is usually an amber color (light or dark) and made from apples.

For health uses, choose raw, unpasteurized apple cider vinegar, preferably in a glass bottle. Why?

**“Raw”** or **“unfiltered”** apple cider has the “mother” in it, which is the name of the brown stuff at the bottom of the bottle. These are fermentation leftovers, and they include all the good live bacteria and enzymes that give the product its health benefits. Of course, if you're using this vinegar for cleaning, you want to strain this out before you use it. (Can't stand the look of the debris in the bottom? Then look for “filtered” apple cider vinegar, which was strained to remove the debris.)

**“Unpasteurized”** is recommended because the process of pasteurization – a heat process – can kill the good bacteria we want. If you're willing to spend the extra buck or two, choose an organic apple cider vinegar. No reason not to avoid pesticides when you can, especially if your dog is going to eat the product.

Glass containers do not pose the risk (as plastic bottles can) of harmful chemicals leaching into the product.

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