



Paw Prints

Jodi Schneider McNamee
Columnist

Cannabidiol for pets?

Northern Michigan veterinarian Jeffery Powers is a pet parent to Ella, a 10-year-old Saint Bernard who has severe anxiety when she hears thunder or the first pop of fireworks. Recently, Powers said he has found a way to control his dog's noise anxiety: cannabidiol, aka CBD, a compound that can be extracted from cannabis, the plant family that includes marijuana and hemp.

People are turning to CBD to help manage pain, anxiety, arthritis, seizures, and other health problems in their pets. And a growing crop of CBD products marketed for pets — including tinctures, capsules, and chew treats — has burst onto the market to meet the consumer demand.

CBD is thought to have many therapeutic properties, but unlike cannabis' other main compound THC (tetrahydrocannabinol), it doesn't get users high. Powers, who is also vice chairman of the American Veterinary Medical Association's Council on Biologic and Therapeutic Agents, credits CBD for easing his dog's distress.

As of July 2018, 47 states have gotten around the federal restriction by legalizing CBD for human use within their own states, according to the National

Organization for Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML). Physicians in those states, including Oregon, can now recommend CBD to their patients, and consumers can often buy the compound on their own — for themselves or their pets — without any interaction with a healthcare professional.

Even without official guidance, pet parents are increasingly seeking out CBD for their furry family members. In a survey conducted this year by the Veterinary Information Network, an online community of veterinarians, nearly two-thirds of survey respondents said they were asked about cannabis by their patients at least once a month.

Sarah Schaff, sleep educator for St. Charles Sleep Center, gives CBD to both of her older pets that have health issues.

Sarah said, "I began using CBD one year ago on my 15-year-old cat and 14-year-old dog. After my cat Dipsy received the diagnosis of a large possibly benign cyst on the heart, hyperthyroidism, and signs of kidney and liver disease I wanted to make her comfortable since it was just a matter of time before passed."

She added, "Two months later after starting the CBD treatment the veterinarian said she might have another four months to live. Prior to Dipsy's diagnosis she was having frequent urinary tract infections and noticeable breathing distress as well as a throw-up incident almost once a day. She just had her 16th birthday this April and has improved overall in health, and is playing and acting like normal. She appears to be more comfortable and sleeps easier since starting the CBD."

Schaff's dog is nearly 15 years old, a retired sled dog that had signs of joint/hip pain since she was 10.

"I don't believe the CBD completely relieved her pain, but there has been a significant difference," Schaff told *The Nugget*. "She now acts like a puppy at times. We are not positive, but my vet and I believe we noticed recently that her cataracts seem to be smaller. I do know that the CBD has helped with slowing the growth of her cysts."

Last June, Byron Maas, veterinarian at Bend Veterinary Clinic, had an article published in Cascade Business News titled "CBD Therapy for pets."

Maas noted, "There has been a recent surge in the awareness and use of CBD in health, nutrition and alternative therapies for people, but how does that relate to our pet companions?"

He went on to say that the reason veterinarians don't know that much about CBD is due mainly to a lack of research because of its federal classification as a Class I controlled substance. However, Maas also noted that there is a wide range of potential medical benefits used to treat pain associated with arthritis, back pain, stress, anxiety, nausea, seizures and gastrointestinal problems and even cancer. Pet parents often report good success with treatment. Clinically, reports show CBD to be extremely safe with few side effects. CBD wears off as it is metabolized by the pet's liver and excreted in the bile, urine or stored in the pet's body fat.

CBD is typically administered orally to pets as an extracted oil or in combination with nutritional supplements, other medications or traditional treatments. Topical application is reported to provide improvement with joint pain, chronic arthritis and some anxiety. You can find many forms available from pet stores, dispensaries and some veterinary clinics. But not all products are the same and

since it is not FDA approved often the potency can vary, with some CBD marketed products containing little if any of the cannabinoid when tested.

However, without study, veterinarians can't accurately say how much to administer or how to predict effects after administration.

"While some pet owners swear by CBD, keep in mind that researchers are just starting to learn how to use it for pets and at which dosages," said Stephanie McGrath, D.V.M., a veterinarian and assistant professor of neurology at Colorado State University's College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences.

In 2016, she conducted some of the first studies looking into basic questions

about how CBD is metabolized by dogs and whether the compound poses any immediate health threats. "There were no studies on CBD [and pets] at that time," added McGrath, who published two of her CBD studies in 2018.

After her initial research, McGrath began two clinical trials, one on dogs with epilepsy and another on dogs with osteoarthritis. Early results are encouraging, she says, but notes that the results are not yet final or published.

Pet parents seeking alternatives to traditional medication or that need additional options for symptom relief should consult with their veterinarian for recommendations on how to best treat their individual pet.

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