

## Tea Tree Oil

### **What is tea tree oil?**

Tea tree (*Melaleuca alterifolia*) oil is a highly potent oil extract from the tea tree (*Melaleuca alternifolia*) found in Australia, and is a traditional herbal remedy of Australian aborigines. Terpinen-4-ol, one of the main active ingredients, reduces swelling in inflamed tissues. Tea tree oil is also a broad spectrum antimicrobial (anti-infective agent) in even very tiny doses. This is fortunate, since toxic reactions ranging from mild to potentially fatal are common when tea tree oil is ingested to any extent. Tea tree oil should only be applied diluted to the exterior body surfaces, and should never be taken orally.



### **Why recommend administration of tea tree oil to my pet?**

Historically, tea tree oil has been used externally to relieve muscle, joint and tooth pain; and to repel fleas and other external parasites, including sarcoptic mange. Internally, the oil has been used for treating parasites, asthma, bronchitis, and sore throat. However, for safety reasons, tea tree oil is best used externally and should never be taken internally.



Tea tree oil is often used to treat yeast and bacterial ear infections, which are common in dogs.

The most common use of tea tree oil in veterinary medicine today is as a topical anti-fungal and anti-bacterial. In humans, it is also commonly used to treat superficial fungal and yeast infections, sarcoptic mange, and bacterial infections. Despite the risks associated with oral ingestion, tea tree oil has also been used effectively as a mouth wash. Specific activity of Tea tree oil against *Malassezia*, a yeast that is a frequent cause of ear and skin infections in dogs, has been demonstrated. Tea tree oil can be found in small amounts in veterinary shampoos, and can also be used diluted in ear cleansers as a highly effective anti-microbial.

Not only does tea tree oil appear to be a highly effective germicide, but it often relieves the itch and swelling that can attend yeast and bacterial skin and ear infections.

### **How much experience is there with the use of is tea tree oil in pets?**

Tea tree oil may be effective in treating mild topical infections, such as ringworm and moist pyoderma. It also appears effective in the management of yeast and bacterial ear infections in dogs.

### **What species of animals are being treated regularly with tea tree oil?**

Dogs and cats have been treated. However, only diluted oil preparations should be used. When excessive amounts of oil are applied to the skin undiluted, a hypersensitivity (allergic) reaction may occur, resulting in the appearance of hives all over the body.

### ***How much research has been conducted on this supplement?***

Ample research demonstrates the antimicrobial efficacy of tea tree oil, as well as its potential toxicity. Clinical experience in pets shows tea tree oil to be effective in the management of ear and skin yeast and bacterial infections.

### ***How can my pet benefit from tea tree oil?***

Tea tree oil can be used as a natural substitute for conventional medications for mild topical infections.

### ***How safe is tea tree oil?***

Like other essential oils, tea tree oil can be toxic if ingested. Since the maximum safe dosage has not been determined, most doctors recommend using it only topically in dilute form. Tea tree oil is so potent in its antimicrobial effects that even a 1:250 dilution is routinely effective and yet quite safe for use as an ear wash. Tea tree concentrations in anti-fungal shampoos for dogs and cats are often even lower. Never apply tea tree oil directly to the skin without diluting it, especially to areas that the animal can lick. Safety in young children, pregnant or nursing women, or those with severe liver or kidney disease has not been established. Use with caution in similar situations in pets.

Tea tree oil can result in a fatal toxicity in cats when ingested. Some holistic veterinarians prefer not to use tea tree oil in small dogs and cats to guard against any potential toxicity.



Caution is indicated in treating cats with tea tree oil. Tea tree oil can result in a fatal toxicity in cats when ingested. Some holistic veterinarians prefer not to use tea tree oil in small dogs and cats to protect against any potential toxicity. This precaution seems unnecessary, however, as long as very dilute tea tree oil preparations are used.

### ***Where do I obtain is tea tree oil and do I need a prescription?***

Your veterinarian may have preferred supplements that he or she will recommend. A prescription is not needed for tea tree oil and is readily available over-the-counter.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by Steve Marsden, DVM ND MSOM LAc DiplCH AHG, Shawn Messonnier, DVM and Cheryl Yuill, DVM, MSc, CVH.*  
<http://www.petcarenaturally.com/>

© Copyright 2004 Lifelearn Inc. Used with permission under license. April 3, 2007.