

Info shared by Pitbull SA.

Manjaro APBT kennel.

South Africa.

My Website <http://www.pitbullsa.co.za/>

My E mail "manjaro@pitbullsa.co.za"

My Facebook "Gawie Manjaro"

My Facebook page "Manjaro Kennel"

My mobile +27827838280.

Zello.com "VoIP" – ask for info.

Probiotics.

Written by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

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- Your dog's digestive health also affects their psychological well-being and behavior;
- **the microbiota in your dog's GI tract can affect their moods and vice versa**
- Research shows **a probiotic supplement can help alleviate stress in dogs who've been relocated from homes and kenneled**
- Probiotics have also proved to be **just as effective as antibiotics in treating stress colitis** in dogs entering shelters

- In a study of anxious Labrador Retrievers, **90% of those receiving a probiotic supplement showed a reduction in overall anxiety**
- It's important to select a high-quality dog probiotic - (not human), and to ensure your dog is fed a fresh, whole, nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate diet, including fermented foods

This is due in part to a growing body of research that suggests the health of **an animal's gastrointestinal (GI) tract affects their physical well-being**, which makes perfect sense when you consider that up to 80% of your dog's immune system is located within the GI tract.

Interestingly, studies show that **GI health also affects a dog's psychological well-being and behavior.**

There's an important relationship and bidirectional communication between the GI tract and the brain— it's called the gut-brain axis.

Research suggests **the flora (microbiota) present in the digestive tract can affect moods and vice versa.**

Probiotics: Friendly 'bugs' help keep gut bacteria in balance.

Probiotics are the beneficial bacteria that dogs need to not only **maintain healthy levels of friendly bacteria in the gut**, but also to **discourage potentially pathogenic bacteria from overtaking the GI tract.**

Your dog's digestive tract is the largest immune organ in their body, and home to an extremely large population of needed bacteria.

The **digestive tracts of canines evolved to handle a tremendous bacterial load from the food they consume – just like Mother Nature intended.**

Your dog's GI tract must maintain a healthy level of good bacteria, because **if populations of bad bacteria grow unchecked, your dog will develop digestive issues and other health problems as well.**

Studies show animals without colonies of friendly bacteria in their gut, or with a poor balance of good-to-bad gut bacteria, are at high risk of developing disease.

Probiotics help alleviate moving and kenneling or confinement stress in dogs.

Stress and anxiety can trigger a variety of physical and behavioral problems in dogs.

For example, stress can cause diarrhea, and anxiety often results in undesirable behaviors such as aggression

We know that **a high-quality probiotic supplement can alleviate GI disturbances in pets just as it does in humans, and in addition, recent research suggests probiotics can also help our dogs feel less anxious.**

In one study, researchers evaluated the use of **probiotic supplements to reduce stress-related digestive problems in 134 healthy dogs who were moved from their homes to a kennel.¹**

The dogs were separated into four groups, three of which received different doses of a probiotic supplement.

The dogs in the fourth or control group **did not receive a supplement.** Before the study began, all 134 dogs were **gradually transitioned to the same diet.**

The dogs in the three test groups received **a daily probiotic supplement for five weeks before being moved to the kennel on confinement area, and for 20 days after the move.**

- a. The researchers tracked the dogs' "fecal scores" based on the appearance of the poop, the number of times they pooped per day and the bacterial population in the poop.
- b. They also tracked serum cortisol levels to determine the dogs' stress levels.

The study results showed.

- a. higher levels of probiotic bacteria populations in the three groups of dogs who received the supplement.
- b. The concentrations of bacteria suggested they were dose-responsive, meaning they were the result of supplementation.
- c. The dogs who received **the highest doses of probiotics** had larger populations of friendly bacteria in their poop than the dogs who received weaker doses.
- d. In addition, fewer dogs given the supplement had "unacceptable" poop (too runny or too dry) during their first week in the kennel – confinement area.

The researchers concluded the probiotic supplement

"... supported optimal stool production
.....may help to prevent stress-related gastrointestinal upsets and
.....may prevent diarrhea" in dogs who've been recently relocated and
kenned – in a confined area.

Probiotics outperform antibiotics to treat stress colitis in shelter dogs. The standard treatment for stress colitis in adult shelter dogs includes anti-parasitic drugs and antibiotics.

In fact, many traditional veterinarians in private practice treat dogs with diarrhea and other GI issues **with the antibiotic "metronidazole"**.

These drugs put the GI tract under additional physiological stress, which can prevent full recovery and prolong symptoms and suffering.

In addition, overuse of antibiotics in veterinary medicine has resulted in the widespread problem of highly resistant strains of deadly bacteria.

Researchers at North Carolina State University's College of Veterinary Medicine conducted a study to compare the use of probiotics versus metronidazole to treat acute diarrhea caused by stress colitis.²

The dogs in the study were from a Raleigh, NC animal shelter and **were suffering from severe diarrhea.**

The researchers examined the dogs, recorded their weights and body scores, and ran blood, urine and fecal tests. The dogs were randomly selected to receive either a probiotic or metronidazole to treat the diarrhea.

All were fed either an adult maintenance **or** growth life stage diet.

Food intake and fecal characteristics were recorded daily.

There were 50 dogs total
25 received the probiotic and
25 received the antibiotic.
At the end of the study, 11 dogs treated with metronidazole were unresponsive, and were then given the probiotic.

The fecal scores of all three groups of dogs (including those that didn't initially respond to the metronidazole) improved approximately twofold.

Even the parasite-infected dogs showed the same level of improvement at the end of treatment.

The weight and body condition scores of the 50 dogs didn't change significantly during the treatment period.

Based on the fecal score data, study **researchers concluded the probiotic "... is an equally effective treatment to the traditional antibiotic regime for the treatment of acute diarrhea in shelter dogs."**

The researchers further acknowledged **that "Antibiotic-treated dogs with limited improvement appeared to benefit significantly from subsequent probiotic treatment."**

Probiotics reduced overall anxiety in 90 % of dogs in this study.

Another study presented at a 2016 veterinary nutrition conference also **addressed the emotional and behavioral changes in dogs receiving a probiotic supplement.**³

The study involved 24 anxious Labrador Retrievers who were fed the same balanced diet for 15 weeks.

For the first six weeks, 12 dogs received a probiotic supplement and the other 12 were given a placebo.

During weeks seven through nine, none of the dogs received a probiotic or a placebo (this is called a washout period).

Then the same 12 dogs received probiotics for the final six weeks of the study.

The researchers evaluated **certain behaviors linked to anxiety, such as barking, spinning and pacing.**

They also tracked the dogs' cortisol levels and heart rate to determine stress levels.

The dogs who received the probiotic supplement showed a reduction in anxious behaviors and other signs of stress, and their cortisol levels and heart rates also improved.

In fact, 90 % of the supplemented dogs **appeared to be less anxious overall.**

In addition, **83 % had lower salivary cortisol measures** and **improved heart rate variability**, and 75 % also had **lower average heart rate.**

Selecting a high-quality multi strain dog probiotic

When researching supplements for your dog, **avoid human probiotics**, and probiotics added to commercial dog food – actually probiotics to anything you feed.

Probiotic formulas used by humans were developed specifically **to fortify the bacterial species found in the human GI tract.**

Dogs have specific strains of bacteria unique to them, so they do best with a customized probiotic for dogs.

A few strains have been shown to benefit both people and dogs, and emerging **research suggests sporebiotics may also be beneficial for animals**, but one thing that's important **to evaluate for all species taking probiotics is viability.**

The bacteria in a probiotic **must be live and able to reproduce in order for it to be beneficial.**

Know this! ... That's why commercial dog foods containing probiotics **aren't worth the money commercial feed is void of life.**

Tests on dog foods claiming to contain probiotic microorganisms showed **the manufacturing process kills too many of the live bacteria, rendering the probiotic effect useless by the time the food is packaged and shipped.**

When selecting a high-quality dog probiotic, look for the following five important characteristics:

- 1 . The correct strains of bacteria beneficial for dogs, not people
2. Easy to give to your dog
3. The ability to survive the acidic environment of your dog's stomach
4. Enough live organisms to colonize the intestines
5. Product stability under normal storage conditions

And remember that your dog should receive the majority of their nutrients from a fresh, whole food diet that is nutritionally balanced and species-appropriate.

Also consider adding some fermented veggies to your dog's diet, since they not only provide a wider variety of beneficial bacteria than probiotic supplements, but also far more of them.

Digestive enzymes.

Another very beneficial supplement to promote healthy digestion in your dog are **digestive enzymes**.

High-quality digestive enzymes for dogs should be **sourced from animals**, and should ideally contain some or all of these ingredients:

betaine HCl,
ox bile extract,
bromelain,
papain,
pancreatin,
protease,
amylase and
lipase.