Are Essential Oils Safe for Dogs?

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In recent years, essential oils have become more and more popular, so it’s no surprise some dog owners want to try them out. Essential oils are often advertised as natural treatment options or even alternatives to traditional medicine, treating everything from anxiety to skin conditions. Natural, however, doesn’t always mean safe. There can be serious risks associated with using essential oils incorrectly to treat dogs, but also ways to use them safely.

Can Essential Oils Help?

Essential oils are made from highly concentrated plant substances. Preliminary research suggests that these potent oils may have [some health benefits for dogs](http://veterinarycalendar.dvm360.com/aromatherapy-proceedings?id=&pageID=1&sk=&date=) and humans, and many holistic veterinarians incorporate essential oils into their practices. Though a large body of scientific evidence does not yet exist about whether or not essential oils are effective at treating a number of illnesses in dogs, many owners are willing to try using oils to help with a wide range of conditions, from anxiety and skin problems to [flea and tick prevention](https://www.akc.org/expert-advice/health/flea-tick/4-tips-to-help-keep-your-dog-safe-from-fleas-and-ticks/).

The Risks of Essential Oils

It’s easy to confuse natural with safe. However, the reality is a little different. Essential oils are potent substances that can pose serious risks when used improperly. If you’ve ever used essential oils yourself, then you know how much of a difference a few drops can make.

Applying oils topically can be irritating to the skin — yours and your dog’s. This is counterproductive for treating skin conditions and can add to your dog’s discomfort. Therefore, without proper professional guidance, it’s best to avoid using essential oils topically or directly on your dog. Instead, look for expertly formulated products that incorporate dog-safe essential oils.

The chemicals in essential oils are rapidly absorbed into the system, whether received orally or through the skin, and metabolized by the liver. Therefore, using essential oils could be problematic for puppies and young dogs, dogs with liver disease, or elderly dogs.

If your pup can reach the essential oil you put on him and licks it off, it could result in gastrointestinal upset. Never leave essential oils or bottles in a place where your dog (or any other pets, or children) can get them. If your dog does ingest essential oils, contact your veterinarian and poison control immediately.

Dogs’ noses are much more powerful than ours, so consider that if you use or diffuse essential oils in your home. Placing a few drops of lavender oil on a dog’s bedding may help calm them, or it may just cause further stress. Oils used improperly can also lead to changes in behavior, adverse central nervous system effects, and respiratory problems — all of which can be serious. Some essential oils are poisonous to dogs. This includes oil of cinnamon, citrus, pennyroyal, peppermint, pine, sweet birch, tea tree (melaleuca), wintergreen, and ylang ylang. These oils are toxic whether ingested by mouth or spread on the skin.

Natural flea and tick preventatives that use essential oils can be problematic, [according to veterinarians](https://www.cliniciansbrief.com/article/risky-natural-fleatick-products). The Environmental Protection Agency considers these products to be minimum-risk pesticides, which means they are exempt from most regulations. Some adverse reactions were reported when owners followed instructions for applying them to their dog’s skin as a flea and tick preventative, although most cases of toxicity resulted from product misuse. Since there is a lack of data supporting the success of these products, owners who use them may put their dogs at risk for flea and [tick-borne diseases](https://www.akc.org/expert-advice/health/parasites/akcs-chief-veterinary-officer-on-tick-borne-disease-symptoms-prevention/), so ask your veterinarian for advice about the best way to incorporate essential oil-based flea and tick control into your dog’s treatment plan.

Using Essential Oils Safely

If you want to use essential oils with your dogs, there is an easy way to do it safely: Talk to your veterinarian. Your veterinarian will let you know which oils are potentially harmful and can also provide you with information about the best carrier oils to properly dilute essential oils for dogs, as well as appropriate dosages.