

# Natural and Home Remedies for Sheep/Goats, A-Z

By Susan Schoenian  
sschoen@umd.edu  
Sheep & Goat Specialist  
University of Maryland

There are numerous natural and home remedies -- things on your kitchen shelf or readily available at Walmart -- that are commonly used to treat disease conditions or provide supportive therapy to sheep/goats. While benefits may be largely anecdotal, and research is often lacking, they are frequently used and might actually work.



## Aspirin

Aspirin (or ibuprofen) can be an option for those who don't have prescription pain meds/anti-inflammatory drugs on-hand. Aspirin is a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug used to treat pain, fever, and inflammation. It can be given to sheep/goats for these same reasons. Some producers opt for baby aspirin, especially for smaller animals. There are also aspirin formulations (boluses and powder) commercially available for livestock, though not all are approved for sheep/goats. While oral aspirin has not been found to be an effective pain reliever when administered immediately after application of rubber rings (for docking/castrating), its use may warrant further investigation.

## Antacids

Over-the-counter antacids, such as Mylanta® and Tums®, can help to neutralize acid in the gut. They can be used to treat bloat, acidosis, and other digestive upsets in sheep/goats.

## Apple Cider Vinegar

While all sorts of claims have been made about apple cider vinegar, few have been substantiated. Regardless, apple cider vinegar (raw, unfiltered) is a source of nutrients, including probiotics, that can be given to animals that are off-feed or require a nutritional boost. Some producers provide apple cider vinegar on a regular basis to their animals, touting the "potential" health benefits. Apple cider vinegar is commercially available in gallons and barrels. You can improve the palatability of it by mixing it with molasses.

## Baking Soda

Baking soda (sodium bicarbonate) helps to neutralize acid in the gut. As such, it is a common treatment for bloat, acidosis, and other digestive upsets. It is the recommended treatment for floppy kid syndrome and "big and dumb" syndrome, both of which are characterized by a build-up of lactic acid. Some producers offer baking soda free choice to their sheep/goats as a preventative for acidosis and/or bloat. In fact, free choice baking soda is a good idea for any sheep/ goat that is fed a lot of



grain. It can also be incorporated into the ration as a rumen buffer. Feed grade sodium bicarbonate is available from most feed stores.

## Beer

Beer (especially dark) has a long history of being used for livestock. Beer is usually given to animals that are off-feed. It is a source of fluids, energy, vitamins, and minerals.



The yeast in beer may help to restart the rumen. Beer is sometimes given to a sow after she's finished birthing her pigs. Supposedly, the beer helps the sow relax and let her milk down.

## Benadryl®

Benadryl® is an over-the-counter antihistamine used to relieve symptoms of allergy, hay fever, and the common cold. It is sometimes used to treat allergic reactions in sheep/goats.

## Castor Oil

Castor oil is a vegetable oil pressed from castor beans. Besides being an energy source, castor oil can be used to treat various metabolic problems in sheep/goats, including acidosis, bloat, and constipation (in young lambs/kids).

## Corn Oil

Corn oil is a dietary source of fat. It can be added to the ration to increase energy intake. It can also be given to animals that are off-feed or require an energy boost. If propylene glycol is not available, corn oil can be given to ewes/does in the initial stages of pregnancy toxemia (ketosis).

Corn oil is commonly included in recipes for homemade nutri-drench.

## Corn Syrup

Corn syrup is different from corn oil. It is a sweetener. It consists of half fructose and half dextrose (chemically identical to glucose). It can be given to ewes/does in the early stages of pregnancy toxemia (ketosis). Corn syrup is commonly included in recipes for homemade nutri-drench. Karo® syrup is commercially-prepared corn syrup.

## Ensure® (or other nutritional drinks)

Ensure® provides nutrition in a tasty "shake." It is often recommended for older people or those who need to gain weight. Ensure can provide a similar nutritional benefit for sheep/goats. Generic brands are cheaper than the Ensure® brand and probably just as good.

## Essential Oils

Essential oils are compounds extracted from plants. They have many potential benefits. Peppermint oil is recommended for mastitis therapy. Tea tree oil has been used to treat hoof disease. Oregano oil is being evaluated for its potential to prevent coccidiosis. Some essential oils are "hot" and need to be diluted with carrier oils or water before they can be used. Be sure to do research before using essential oils.

An increasing number of commercial products contain essential oils. Research is



currently underway to determine the benefits of different essential oils or mixtures on livestock health and productivity.

## **Gatorade®**

Gatorade® is an electrolyte-restoring liquid (a “sports drink”). It can be used to rehydrate sheep/goats. It is commonly given to stressed animals. In fact, Penn State research showed that offering livestock Gatorade®



helped to reduce weight loss during transportation. Gatorade® is an option when commercial electrolyte solutions are not on-hand.

## **Honey**

Honey is a sweet food substance made by bees. It is an energy source for sheep/goats. It can be given to animals that are off-feed or require an energy boost. Research is currently underway to evaluate the potential benefits of bee products on livestock nutrition and health.

## **Jell-O**

Jello (gelatin) is a sometimes treatment for diarrhea (scours). It can also make bitter-tasting medicines more palatable. For example, Jello is often mixed with ammonium chloride (to treat urinary calculi) and DiMethox® (to treat coccidiosis).

## **Kaopectate®**

Kaopectate® is an over-the-counter treatment for mild diarrhea. It is commonly

used to treat non-infectious causes of diarrhea (scours) in sheep/goats. It can be purchased commercially (in larger quantities) as Kaolin Pectin.

## **Kefir**

Kefir is a fermented milk drink, especially popular in the Middle East. Kefir contains more probiotics than yogurt. Kefir is most commonly given to stressed animals to improve gut health. It may be most beneficial for livestock still on milk diets or transitioning off milk. Research is underway to determine the potential benefits of Kefir.

## **Milk of Magnesia**

Milk of Magnesia is an over-the-counter antacid and laxative. It is used to treat various metabolic problems in sheep/goats, including bloat, acidosis, and constipation in young lambs/kids).

## **Mineral Oil**

Mineral oil is a tasteless, odorless oil used to treat various metabolic problems in sheep/goats, including bloat, acidosis, and constipation. It can also help to clear intestinal impaction or obstruction. Mineral oil is a laxative that lubricates the intestinal tract. When administering mineral oil, care must be taken to avoid aspiration into the lungs. Larger quantities of mineral oil should be administered using a stomach tube. Gallon jugs of mineral oil are commercially available from livestock supply companies.

## **Molasses**

Molasses is a common feed ingredient (wet or dry). It is usually added



to rations to increase palatability and remove dust. Molasses is an energy source that can be given to animals that are off-feed or in need of an energy boost. It can be used to treat early stage pregnancy toxemia (ketosis). Molasses can improve the palatability of other over-the-counter remedies. It is often included in recipes for homemade nutri-drench. Larger quantities of molasses can be purchased from farm or feed stores or stores that supply hunters.

## **Pedialyte®**

Pedialyte® is an electrolytes drink for children. It can be used to rehydrate sheep/goats, especially young ones.



Lambs/kids with scours often become dehydrated, regardless of the cause of the diarrhea, and need fluid replenishment. Pedialyte® is an option when commercial electrolyte solutions are not on-hand. Plus, it's available in smaller amounts, more suitable for sheep/goats.

## **Pepto Bismol®**

Pepto-Bismol® (bismuth subsalicylate) is commonly used to treat non-infectious causes of diarrhea (scours) in sheep/goats. Kaolin Pectin or Bismusal is sold commercially as an anti-diarrheal drug for livestock. It is similar to Pepto-Bismol®.

## **Triple Antibiotic Ointment**

Triple antibiotic is an over-the-counter antibiotic that can be used to heal and treat

wounds and infections, including pink eye. It contains three antibiotics (neomycin + polymyxin + bacitracin); hence, its name.

## **Vegetable Oils**

Besides being a dietary source of fat (energy), vegetable oils are used to treat metabolic problems in sheep/goats, including bloat and acidosis.

## **Vitamin C**

While some producers use vitamin C, aka ascorbic acid, as an alternative treatment for the early stages of urinary calculi, there is no proof that it helps. The idea is that vitamin C may help to acidify the urine and dissolve the stones. The vitamin C is usually delivered via fresh fruit or vitamin C tablets or powder. Sheep/goats do not have a dietary requirement for vitamin C because they manufacture it as part of their normal metabolism.

## **Yogurt**

Yogurt is a food produced by the bacterial fermentation of milk. It is a source of probiotics. Yogurt (plain) is commonly given to stressed animals. It helps to stimulate appetite and restore gut health. Many producers give it to animals with diarrhea (scours). Yogurt is oftentimes added to milk replacers to reduce the risk of abomasal bloat. When adding yogurt to milk, it is important not to feed the milk right away, as the bacteria need time to multiply. In addition to store-bought yogurt, you can make your own yogurt from cow, goat, or sheep milk.



## UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND EXTENSION SMALL RUMINANT PROGRAM

Commercial probiotics are available from livestock supply companies and feed stores. It is likely that future research will determine more precisely the role of probiotics (including yogurt and Kefir) in animal health and nutrition, as animal industries look for “replacements” for antibiotics.

Any questions regarding these various natural and home remedies and their use should be directed towards veterinarians.

### Homemade Nutri-drench

1 cup corn oil  
1 pint molasses  
1 pint Karo® syrup

### Homemade Electrolyte Solution

2 tsp. baking soda  
2 tsp. salt  
½ cup molasses or raw honey  
4 quarts warm water

University of Maryland Extension programs are open to all citizens without regard to race, color, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, marital or parental status, or national origin.

**Last revised April 13, 2021**