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Holistic Alternatives for Pets

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You may ask, what does the term 'holistic' mean? The word holistic is derived from the word 'whole'. Holistic veterinary medicine, therefore, refers to the treatment of the whole organism rather than the treatment of individual body parts or simply the removal of symptoms. For example, if a cat is diagnosed by the veterinarian with a urinary tract infection, the veterinarian may prescribe pharmaceutical medication to treat the cat. Where the holistic veterinarian may provide advice on improving the cat's overall health through the use of holistic methods in addition to, or instead of, antibiotics to treat the urinary tract infection. Thus, the cat's overall well being is being addressed and improved rather than just the ailment that the cat has acquired.

Under the heading of holistic veterinary medicine are many modalities including acupuncture, homeopathy, chiropractic, herbs, supplements, and flower essences, energy healing modalities such as Reiki, magnetic therapy and nutrition.

Acupuncture is an ancient Chinese method used to treat blockages in the energy lines, known as meridians, running through the body. With the use of needles being inserted in specific acupuncture points, blockages in the energy lines will be eliminated and the body will return to an energetically balanced state. Some of the benefits of acupuncture include pain relief, increased blood flow to the area being treated and decreased inflammation. Acupuncture can be a viable alternative to using pain killers and steroids. Conditions that can benefit from the use of acupuncture in animals include hip dysplasia, arthritis, and nerve damage, controlling nausea and vomiting. In addition, acupuncture can be used to help relieve the side effects associated with chemotherapy and radiation. There are few, if any, side effects when done correctly.

Homeopathy has been around since the mid-1800's and, as practiced today, is credited to Dr. Samuel Hahnemann, a German medical doctor. The principle behind homeopathy is that 'like cures like'. That is to say that a very diluted form of a substance is used to treat a condition or group of symptoms which, if used in its full strength, would cause the same set of symptoms in an animal. Thus, the homeopathic practitioner

must carefully match the animal's symptoms with the appropriate remedy.

Chiropractic therapy is based on the manual manipulation of the spine to improve health. Spinal manipulation is almost as old as acupuncture which was used by the Chinese from about 2700 B.C. Hippocrates used spinal manipulation on humans because he believed that alignment problems with the spine were the cause of many diseases. Chiropractic care in general focuses on the interaction between the nervous system and the biomechanics of the vertebrae. Since all of the body's systems are regulated by the nervous system, anything that causes interference between the nervous system and any of the body's systems can adversely impact those areas. Therefore, when seeking chiropractic therapy for your pet, ensure that the veterinarian or chiropractor you choose uses techniques approved specifically for animals.

Herbs have been used around the world for medicinal purposes for thousands of years. This includes Western herbs from North America, Ayurvedic herbs from India and traditional Chinese herbs. Herbs are effective in treating many conditions that pets have. Conditions that have been effectively treated with herbs include liver and kidney diseases. Herbs can also support the immune system by assisting the full recovery of the pet while other herbs serve as detoxification agents, antioxidants and anti-cancer therapies. Only well-known and respected herbal companies should be considered when purchasing herbal products for your pets.

Supplements can help to strengthen the body and improve immune system function.

To ensure that your pets are receiving health and nutritional supplements that are of the highest quality, ask your veterinarian if their products carry the Natural Animal Supplement Council's (NASC) seal on the label. Products that have the NASC seal on them provides you with the assurance that the company adheres to the standards set forth for animal health and nutritional supplements by the NASC, has regular quality control checks and has an adverse event reporting system.

Flower essences can be used to modify the behavior of animals that are exhibiting aggression, fear or behavioral problems. Bach Flower's Rescue Remedy is a flower essence combination that is used commonly to calm scared or anxious animals. It can be sprayed in the exam room of a vet's office, sprayed directly on the pet's body (not in the eyes) or put in the pet's water. The choice of remedies for other behavioral challenges should be based on the individual pet's needs. Oversimplification by using a particular flower essence for a particular problem is much less effective than evaluating your pet's overall

condition and formulating a remedy of various flower essences.

Energy healing therapies have existed for thousands of years and are practiced throughout the world by many cultures. Some of the more familiar forms of energy healing therapies include Reiki, Therapeutic Touch and Quantum Touch. These healing practices involve a practitioner who serves as a conduit for the Universal energy to clear imbalances that exist within an animal's energy field. Energy healing is very useful in calming a nervous or distressed animal, but can also be beneficial for any animal regardless of their health.

Magnetic therapy can be used when a pet is experiencing joint challenges that affect their mobility. Many animals sleep on magnetic pet pads that have specially placed magnets embedded within them and have shown increased mobility after laying on them.

Natural foods are recommended in order for a pet to live a healthy and happy life. Many commercial pet foods contain by-products and chemicals that are known to have serious side effects. Chemicals to avoid include BHA, BHT and ethoxyquin as well as any artificial coloring and flavoring. Foods that are good to feed your pets include natural whole grains (e.g. brown rice, organic vegetables and meats such as chicken, beef or rabbit. Of course if your pet is allergic to any of these types of foods then don't include them in their diet.

Thankfully, holistic alternatives are more readily available for pets than in the recent past and their use is growing in popularity among many veterinarians. They can be used as complimentary therapies in conjunction with your pet's regular veterinary care. For example, if your pet has a broken leg your veterinarian would need to do surgery to repair the break. In addition, a holistic therapy could also be used to help speed the healing process and decrease the amount of pain and inflammation that would accompany a broken leg. This is how traditional veterinary care and holistic veterinary medicine are used to complement one another to the benefit of an animal's health.

The American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association's web site, www.holisticvetlist.com, is a great resource to locate a veterinarian in your area that is certified in holistic modalities. I would recommend seeking holistic alternatives for your pets in addition to any traditional treatments that are available.

Disclaimer: Holistic alternatives can be used as complementary therapies in conjunction with your pet's regular veterinary care. Always consult a veterinarian for any concerns regarding your animal companion's well being.

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Tim Link is an author, speaker, animal communicator and Reiki energy healer for animals. Tim's new book, Wagging Tales: Every Animal Has a Tale, is available in bookstores and online through Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble.com, Borders.com and IndieBound.com. Tim has been featured in numerous newspaper, television and radio shows including the Associated Press, "The Morning Show with Mike and Juliet," "Good Day Atlanta," Forsyth County News, The Bronx Times, Species Link, "Live Your Legacy", "Cumming Home", Woman 2 Woman Business, Atlanta magazine, "Everyday with Marcus & Lisa", Shirley MacLaine's Independent Expression Internet radio show and remains a regular guest on two Internet radio shows. Since May 2008, Tim has been a featured AJCpets expert for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. For more information about Tim, visit www.wagging-tales.com.
