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Pet Dish: The Holistic Way

Q: Our 14-year-old West Highland white terrier, Katy, suffers from diabetes, arthritis, skin ailments, and an occasional ear infection. Is it too late to pursue a holistic approach to her health care?

A: It's never too late to pursue a natural alternative or drugless therapy for your pet. Your best bet is to seek the advice of a holistic practitioner to complement your conventional veterinarian's course of treatment.

The three main therapies used by holistic vets are acupuncture (the insertion of needles at specific body points to restore the flow of energy to the body), chiropractic (the manipulation of the vertebrae to correct alignment), and homeopathy (a course of treatment in which like is cured by like). Acupuncture is often used to alleviate arthritis, allergies, cataracts, or neurological disorders; chiropractic to reduce pain in the spine and other bones; and homeopathy to treat diarrhea, behavioral problems, skin conditions, and wounds. Whatever therapy you choose, the holistic approach to veterinary medicine considers the animal in its entirety.

When choosing an alternative veterinarian, Michelle Yasson, a popular New York holistic vet (914-658-3923), cautions pet owners to "beware of the practitioner who is a jack-of-all-trades and a master of none." In her treatment, Yasson says she "considers the physical and mental state of the animal." As a homeopath, Yasson treats the animal as if it has one illness and prescribes the most effective single remedy.

Most holistic practitioners agree that good health begins with a fresh and natural diet. At Whiskers, owners Phil and Randy Klein encourage questions regarding food choices and are ready to recommend appropriate "good-quality health-conscious diets." In addition to their raw and home-cooked meals for cats and dogs, the Kleins sell natural brands such as Abady, California Natural, and Wysong. Whiskers also stocks vitamins, supplements, herbs, and other natural remedies; safe and environmentally sound dog and cat toys, and an abundance of helpful source information.

Keep in mind that holistic treatments are often lengthy and require pet owners to observe and record their animal's behavior and reactions to the specific therapies. When in doubt, use the "three P" philosophy: patience, perseverance, and participation.

Charlotte R. Reed, Pets Contributing Editor, Feb. 28

