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The Holistic Dog An Owner's Guide



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We may find ourselves at the organic market, a chiropractic appointment, or learning a new breathing technique. But while we're in downward dog on our yoga mat, what about our dogs? We are developing a more holistic lifestyle for ourselves, yet are we extending that to our faithful companion? We can apply similar, if not the same, holistic principals to our pets.

Diet and Exercise. Just as diet and exercise are the most impactful steps towards a holistic lifestyle for we two-leggeds, so it is for our four-pawed friends. So first, before you grab that bag of kibble off the grocery store shelf, ask yourself, what is best for you? Feeding fresh food is ideal

and can save money and improve health. If you cannot prepare your dog's food, read the ingredients label. Consider that most dog foods are made up of the unusable leftovers of human food production. Simply looking at the first four ingredients tells the story.

Dogs are meat-eaters and animal proteins should be at the top. Chicken, Beef, Turkey and Lamb are the usual sources, and you'll see them listed as (in descending order of quality), Chicken, Chicken Meal, or Chicken By-Product, for example. Look for meat, not a by-product, as the first ingredient. Even many "premium" brands marketed on television will fail this simple test. The grains, leftovers, and, well, junk, that most common brands stuff in are just not nutritionally useful to Rover.

But go to a boutique or holistic pet store and you'll find the world of "super-premium" pet foods, including raw diets, where quality dog foods will have two, three or four animal protein sources in the top four ingredients. You'll pay a little more, but likely save on vet bills later in your pet's life. Feel free to sprinkle on some fresh cooked vegetables too, as they can benefit from those fresh vitamins and minerals.

Next up for discussion is exercise. Buster, like many of us, is probably not getting enough. In fact, overwhelmingly, most dog behavior problems are due to a lack of exercise. A well-exercised dog does not chew up the couch, tear down the blinds, or otherwise act out. Work as a family to make sure that, minimally, Sadie is getting brisk walks, if [CONTINUED]

not runs, at least twice a day. They'll love you anyway, but even more if you help them be active and entertained. And the health impact over the long term cannot be overstated.

A Healing Team. The cornerstone of your dog's health care team will undoubtedly be your veterinarian. Holistic veterinarians have multiplied in recent years, and if you haven't looked recently, you very likely will find one near you. A holistic veterinarian may have different advice on vaccines, medications, dental care, and more, as well as probably offering alternative therapies in-house. Many vets are increasingly becoming holistically-minded and open to an integrative approach with other practitioners. You may have to take a little more of a leadership role in collaborating complementary care, but generally you'll find that everyone is supportive of what will be the best outcome for the family dog. Your holistic canine practitioners can generally help advise how to find and assemble the care you want for Fido.

Of course, the first responder for your pet's health care needs is always you. There are now a growing number of choices for training in animal CPR and first aid for those that want to be to be ready in an emergency.

Holistic Modalities. Partly due to the growth of the pet care market, but even more because so many practitioners love animals and have switched to having pet patients, today almost any modality available to humans is available to Coco. The indications and benefits of the treatments are also very similar.

Acupuncture, the ancient Chinese medicine modality, works to remove blocks in the "qi" or energy flow through the body and is a common animal modality now. This improves the overall balance of health and the body's innate ability to self-heal. Specific "meridians" or locations on the body might be targeted for particular conditions, including arthritis, kidney disorders, and even behavioral disorders.

Reiki is a calming form of energy work that strives to balance the energy field surrounding the animal's body. Many dog owners are becoming "attuned", or trained, in Reiki themselves, as it is a wonderful practice on a daily basis and provides a special energetic connection while promoting wellness. Reiki can be tremendously supportive to a dog under stress too though, like aiding healing after surgery or a progressing stage of illness.

Chiropractic care has also become quite ordinary for animals. Just as with humans, gentle chiropractic "adjustments" can help correct and maintain bone and spine

alignment to the benefit of joints, nerves and more.

Massage is another modality that can be both recovery-oriented as well as preventative in nature. While it will ease the muscle pains of Mollie's worn body, massage will also boost her immune system, circulate blood, flush toxins, and speed healing.

Again, most any holistic modality can be found for Daisy's benefit: aromatherapy, herbs, homeopathy, and more are routinely available today. Of course, it is important to remember that holistic care is meant to compliment, not replace, veterinary care. But with a core focus on diet and exercise, and a healing team assembled, Sparky can enjoy the same health and wellness as you do and be by your side for even more years to come.

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