



years over the content of pet food. Most of the major brands we recognize on the supermarket shelves are owned by the giants of the corporate world, including Procter and Gamble (Eukanuba and Iams), Nestle (Purina One, Felix, Go Cat), Colgate-Palmolive (Hill's Science Diet) and Mars (Whiskas, Sheba, James Wellbeloved, Pedigree Chum) to name but a few. Huge conglomerates not only use pet food companies as a profitable way of disposing of the waste from their human food companies; they also test on animals by inducing illness. Pet food has been found to contain diseased and disabled cattle unfit for human consumption; spoiled meat from the supermarket, including the plastic wrapping; road kill; rancid restaurant grease and euthanized pet remains. As standard animal agriculture now includes the liberal use of drugs and hormones, these are all present in the lungs, ligaments, bones and intestines of the animals that make their way into pet food. All of these waste products are rendered, or 'processed' by melting at extreme temperatures to create a pet food, to which flavourings, additives and preservatives are added.

Natural Pet Care



Lucy Corkhill investigates the pet food industry and explains how to care for our animals naturally

Since time immemorial, humans have enjoyed a close relationship with animals. Early cave paintings show hunters running with their dogs, the precursors to the animals we now keep as pets. Those of us who had a childhood pet know what an integral member of the family an animal can be. Our pets offer us solace, friendship, loyalty, unconditional love and fun. In the last 30 years, there has been an increased interest in the health benefits of caring for a pet, with animals visiting care homes, hospitals, hospices and schools. Scientific research shows that spending time with an animal can decrease blood pressure, increase self-esteem, reduce stress and create a general sense of wellbeing.

There's no doubt we love our pets, but how do we show it? The big multinational pet food companies assure us that feeding them this or that brand of 'premium' food is a gesture of loving kindness. However, there has been increasing concern in recent

In caring for ourselves, our families and children, we are aware that diet is the key to our good health. A balanced, natural diet adds years to our lives and vitality and happiness to those years. The same goes for animals: many of the cases of disease and ill health that vets see in their surgeries could easily be prevented by a simple change in diet. Advocates of the Bones and Raw Food/Biologically Appropriate Raw Food (BARF) diet believe that pets should be fed much what they would eat in the wild, namely raw meat. Given that our pets' ancestors have lived long, healthy lives for millennia without a Whiskas tin in sight, it makes sense to follow their lead on this one. It is advisable to arm yourself with plenty of knowledge before moving over to a fully raw diet. See ukbarfclub.co.uk for advice and information. Feeding your pet a raw diet is a big commitment and some find that juggling the food for the rest of the family is time consuming enough. There are food companies such as Burns Nutrition, Denes and Robbie's Holistic Cuisine for Dogs that are committed to creating healthy food for pets. However, no pet food will ever stimulate an animal's digestive system like their natural diet, so introducing at least some well-sourced fresh, raw meat will make a difference. See *'The Complete Herbal Handbook for the Dog and Cat'* by Juliette de Bairacli Levy for excellent information on natural rearing.

From a young age, animals are also subject to the rounds of vaccinations, parasite treatments, antibiotics and other drugs given routinely. This level of toxicity can build up in their small bodies and cause health problems, ranging from asthma, eczema, digestive problems, lethargy, weight gain or loss through to unexplained death. Taking an holistic approach to health benefits our pets as much as our children. An holistic approach aims to treat the animal as a whole, rather than just the symptom. There are many ways in which we can help our pets live long, healthy lives. Finding a supportive vet isn't always easy but there is a growing number of alternative practitioners who are trained in working with animals.

The following holistic therapies help to support them through times of illness, behavioural difficulties and injury.

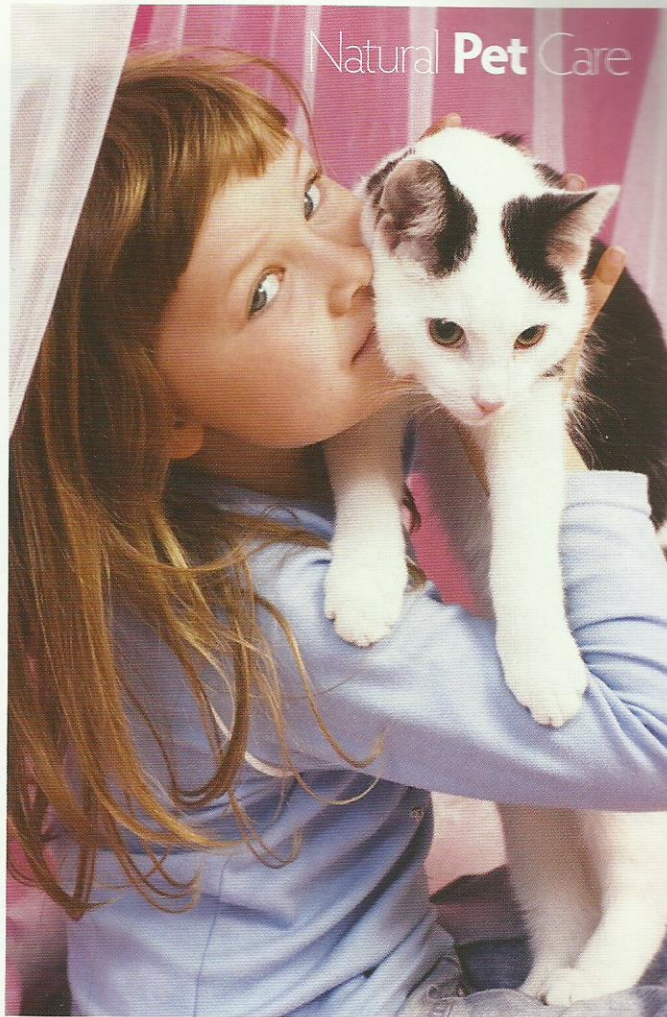
Homeopathy Homeopathic remedies are made from herbs and plants, minerals such as salts, and animal extracts such as insects and snake venom. They are diluted many times and carry no risk of side effects unlike many modern drugs. Homeopathy is an holistic form of medicine: for the most successful outcome one must take into account all of the symptoms that the patient is suffering. It can be used to treat all forms of disease from the acute cough or cold to chronic ailments such as asthma, skin problems and even behavioural problems in animals. Where conventional treatments suppress the body's reaction to chronic ailments, homeopathy aims to trigger the body's innate healing responses.

Herbs Animals are great herbalists and in the wild they seek out the herbs they need for healing instinctively. Just watch your cat munching grass or your dog digging up tasty roots to witness their natural healing capacities in action. Lewes-based herbalist Nancy Makin recommends comfrey tincture in an animal's water to help with arthritis. Rabbits respond very well to sheep sorrel. She remarks that horses like herbs, dogs will eat them in their food but cats can be quite choosy as they can't break down certain things in their gut. With cats, she advises getting the cat to 'self-choose' by offering different herbs to them and seeing which one they go for. Nancy is happy to give herbal advice, call her on 01273 480124.

Reiki Healing This is a Japanese word that translates as 'universal life energy'. It is a method of healing by the laying on of hands or through distant healing. When we hold someone we care about, we are transmitting energy to them – think of when you place a hand on a child's feverish head. An animal's awareness is often a lot more receptive and open than a human adult, a little like a baby's or young >



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> child's. For this reason animals respond well to reiki healing. Try holding your hands above or around the area on your pet that needs healing and sending them loving thoughts, imagining a channel of healing light travelling through you to your pet. Some reiki practitioners specialise in treating animals.

Bach flower essences The original Bach Flower Essences is a system of 38 Flower Essences that corrects emotional imbalances: negative emotions are replaced with positive. Rescue Remedy is one of the most familiar of the essences, one which was used successfully when one of our cats had been hit by a car to calm, soothe and reduce panic. As animals experience emotional responses to things just like us, they too can benefit from these gentle, safe essences to restore balance and harmony. bachflower.com/pets

Aromatherapy Essential oils derived from plants, trees, flowers and herbs work on a physical, emotional and spiritual level. The active chemicals in essential oils have well-known and researched benefits, for instance tea tree oil is a respected anti-fungal and anti-bacterial agent used in many household and medicinal products. Essential oils can be used through massage or inhalation. Care needs to be taken with choice of oils and dosage for animals, as with babies and children. In her excellent book 'The Fragrant Pharmacy', Valerie Ann Worwood includes this great recipe for a natural flea collar: buy a soft material collar and soak it in the following mixture of essential oils: ½ teaspoon alcohol, 1 drop cedarwood, 1 drop lavender, 1 drop citronella, 1 drop thyme, mixed with 4 garlic capsules. A drop of lemongrass oil can be added to a mild, natural shampoo to deter fleas.

A good diet and the use of holistic medicine can help our pets live long, vibrant lives. If in doubt about your pet's health, seek the advice of your vet or an alternative animal practitioner. ■

Further Reading
The Holistic Animal Handbook: A Guidebook to Nutrition, Health and Communication by Kate Solisti-Mattelon and Patrice Mattelon
A Modern Horse Herbal by Tim Couzens
Natural Nutrition for Cats: The Path to Purrr-fect Health by Kymthy Schultz
The Holistic Guide for a Healthy Dog by Wendy Volhard and Kerry Brown
The Natural Way for Dogs and Cats: Natural Treatments, Remedies and Diet for Your Pet by Midi Fairgrieve and Jane Norman



Tim Couzens is an holistic vet who uses homeopathy, acupuncture and herbs in his practice at the Holistic Veterinary Medicine Centre in East Hoathly, Sussex

Why would you recommend people take a holistic approach with their pets?

To improve their wellbeing and state of health by looking at all aspects of their pet's welfare from environment, diet and treatment of illness by the most appropriate means.

What made you decide to specialize in holistic veterinary medicine?

After about 15 years in general practice I came to the conclusion conventional medicine did not hold all the answers to solving health problems in animals. I felt the need for a more

individual approach that looked at the patient as a whole rather than as a set of symptoms. I was also concerned about the overwhelming influence of the big drug and pet food companies on the profession and the side effects of some drugs used to treat animals.

What do you most enjoy about your work?

Talking to people and the great variation in the types of cases I see. The way that we work means that on the first appointment we can allow an hour per patient and half an hour on follow ups. This is a lot more time than in general practice where you might see someone for 10 minutes if you were lucky. Even today, after 15 years of using natural medicine I still get a buzz when a patient improves where there has been no success using the normal approach.

Is there anything you wish conventional veterinary medicine did differently?

1 Taking more time, listening to people, being more observant of the patient and being more compassionate to owner's wishes and needs.

2 Avoiding overuse or unnecessary drugs.

Do you have a favourite case history story?

I always remember my first really successful homeopathic case when I was still working as a conventional vet in Seaford. This was a dog with a chronic nail bed infection, which had not responded to several courses of antibiotics. The toe was due to be amputated. In the few days before surgery was scheduled I gave the dog Silica 30c 3 times daily having just come back from my first homeopathic course in London and keen to "give it a go". At the pre-op check on the day of the surgery the toe had returned to normal so the operation was cancelled and the dog kept the toe, all thanks to the action of the homeopathic Silica.

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