

VOLUME 9  
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# The Whole



# Dog Journal™

A monthly guide to natural dog care and training

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## FEATURES

### 3 Drips Dried

*How to stop the trickle or flow of your dog's urinary incontinence.*

### 8 A Bark in the Park

*Ever been shocked at the behavior of some dogs (or some people!) at your local dog playground? These rules of dog-park etiquette and deportment could help.*

### 12 X Marks the Spot

*How to help your dog heal the most stubborn hot spots and lick granulomas.*

### 16 Go Barefoot

*"Barefoot doctors" – rural practitioners of Traditional Chinese Medicine – used methods like these to keep their healthy patients from becoming ill. You can use them to help your dog stay healthy.*

### 18 A World of Hurt

*The Tour of the Dog looks at canine pain and pain management.*



*Quiz: Which dog should probably be taken home from the park? ... page 8*

*Free from embarrassment ... page 3*



*Healthy touch ... page 16*



## ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 Editor's Note
- 24 Product and Expert Resources

# Problem-Solving

*This issue fixes issues.*

BY NANCY KERNS

I think if I was a dog with a health problem, I would want to live with Mary Straus. A gifted researcher and devoted dog owner, Straus has the ability to climb mountains of medical journals and emerge with the key points that can make a difference in the diagnosis, care, and treatment of a sick or compromised dog. I'm thrilled to have her writing for WDJ. Straus' article on the next page, "Drips Dried," is a wealth of information about helping dogs with urinary incontinence.

One point that Mary *didn't* mention in her article – probably because it seemed too obvious to her – was that you should *never* punish or even admonish your previously housetrained dog if you suddenly start finding puddles of urine in odd places in the house. They are probably as mystified and horrified by the discovery of their leakage as you are. Dogs who mark their territory by lifting their legs and urinating on significant items or prominent places in the house – that's a different problem, one we covered in "Permanent Markers?" in the April 2003 issue. But if there are wet spots in places where your dog has slept – on the couch, on his bed, or on *your* bed – you need to make an appointment with your veterinarian right away to diagnose the cause of the incontinence and find the best treatment for your dog.

I would imagine that most of us have been to a dog park at some time. That probably also means that most of us have been struck by some of the rude and perhaps dangerous behavior manifested by some dogs – and people! – at some dog parks. These hazards are usually outweighed, however, by the benefits of a safely contained venue for off-leash play and exercise. On page 8, Pat Miller offers some basic

rules of etiquette that, if observed by a majority of park-goers, could vastly improve the enjoyment and safety of all puppy playground visitors.

Last month, CJ Puotinen offered a wealth of information about helping your dog quickly heal his wounds. Not covered in that article were hot spots and lick granulomas, which she remedies in this issue. See "X Marks the Spot," page 12.

Instead of fixing problems, this month, animal acupressure experts Nancy Zidonis and Amy Snow tell us how to try to prevent health problems from arising in our dogs in the first place. Give the "acupressure for health maintenance" session on page 16 a try, and see if your dog seems brighter and feels better.

Finally, holistic veterinarian Randy Kidd discusses canine pain: what causes it, and most importantly, what dog owners can do about it. See "A World of Hurt" on page 18 for a world of information.

Before I moved my home and home-office, I put out a call to all my past and current writers for extra submissions, to help me accumulate articles for the editorial "bank," as a buffer against having too little time to write myself. Champions that these writers are, the



articles are starting to pour in. I look forward to presenting our readers with their combined fun, wisdom, innovative solutions, and depth of experience. Until then, stay cool!

NK

**MISSION STATEMENT:** WDJ's mission is to provide dog guardians with in-depth information on effective holistic healthcare methods and successful nonviolent training. The methods we discuss will endeavor to do no harm to dogs; we do not advocate perpetrating even minor transgressions in the name of "greater good." We intend our articles to enable readers to immediately apply training and healthcare techniques to their own dogs with visible and enjoyable success. All topics should contribute to improving the dog's health and vitality, and deepening the canine/human bond. Above all, we wish to contribute information that will enable consumers to make kind, healthy, and informed decisions about caring for their own dogs.

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# Drips Dried

*Don't give up; your dog's urinary incontinence can be cured.*

BY MARY STRAUS

**W**hen my dog Popcorn woke up one morning many years ago in a puddle of urine, I panicked, certain that only a deadly illness could cause this perfectly housetrained dog to wet her bed. I rushed her to the vet, where he did a thorough physical exam and urinalysis. I can still remember the relief I felt when my vet told me it appeared to be a simple case of incontinence.

As it turns out, incontinence, which is defined as involuntary urination, is quite common in dogs, especially spayed females, where about one in five dogs (20 percent) is affected.

Estrogen responsive incontinence or hormonally responsive incontinence, commonly called spay incontinence, is the most frequent cause of involuntary urination in dogs. It can occur anywhere from immedi-



**Maizey started leaking urine in her sleep shortly after she was spayed. However, her incontinence stopped when all grains were removed from her diet. Now 12 years old, she has been completely continent – and grain-free – for the past 10 years.**

The Whole  Dog Journal™

WHAT YOU CAN DO . . .

- **Suspect incontinence, not housetraining problems, when you find wet spots in your dog's bed.**
- **Schedule a physical examination and urinalysis with your vet, to check for urinary tract infection (UTI) and other problems before treating for incontinence.**
- **Try treating for incontinence if your dog has recurrent UTIs or vaginitis.**
- **When needed, keep trying different treatments to get incontinence under control.**

ately after spaying to 10 years later, with the average being around three years.

Low estrogen levels and other factors can lead to a weak bladder sphincter, resulting in anything from small urine drips to complete emptying of the bladder, usually while sleeping or resting. Leaking can happen daily or just periodically. Large breed dogs are more commonly affected than small breeds, and German Shepherds, Boxers, Spaniels, and Doberman Pinschers appear to be more at risk than other breeds.

A recent study showed that early spaying (before the first heat) reduced the chance of incontinence, from 18 percent to 9.7 percent in large breed dogs, but increased the severity when it occurred. It is possible that spaying midway between heat cycles may help prevent spay incontinence, but this is just speculation, as no studies have been done. Hormone-related incontinence can also affect neutered males, though much less commonly than females.

Incontinence can occur for many other

reasons, including urinary tract infections, bladder stones, congenital structural defects (e.g., ectopic ureters), spinal cord disease, and excess water intake. Older dogs, overweight dogs, and dogs with neurological problems may develop a weak bladder sphincter. These causes of incontinence can affect dogs of both genders, whether intact or neutered.

When additional symptoms such as frequent urination, painful urination, trying to urinate without success, or blood in the urine are seen, then urinary tract infection (UTI) or stones (uroliths) are likely. Keep in mind that about 20 percent of UTIs will not show up on urinalysis alone, so it's important to do a urine culture to rule out infection.

Neurological problems should be suspected when signs such as weakness in the rear, stumbling, or incoordination are present. Ectopic ureters are the most common cause of incontinence in young female dogs (under a year); they are uncommon in males.



Most causes of incontinence other than weak bladder sphincter can be identified from a urinalysis and urine culture, but sometimes it is necessary to see a specialist. Additional tests that can be done to find the cause of incontinence include X-rays or ultrasound to look for bladder stones or structural defects, dye contrast studies, and exploratory surgery.

In addition to being a problem for the owner who has to clean up after a leaky dog, incontinence can be very distressing to dogs who are housebroken, and can also lead to urinary tract infections, vaginitis, and sometimes skin ulcers caused by urine scald and licking.

Incontinence should be suspected as a contributing factor in dogs with recurrent bladder or vaginal infections. Incontinence aids such as doggie diapers and pads to protect furniture and dogs beds are available, but it's very important to keep the dog clean and to get the incontinence under control, if at all possible. Baby wipes can be used to keep the skin clean, and will also soothe irritation, as does aloe vera gel. Use only those lotions that will not be a problem if a dog licks and ingests them.

## Treatment

Treatment of incontinence is usually simple and effective. There are many different ways of treating incontinence, and the choice may depend on the cause. Phenylpropanolamine (PPA), a decongestant that helps to tighten the sphincter muscle, is the most commonly used treatment for incontinence in both male and female canines.

Spay incontinence can also be treated



**Urinary incontinence affects male dogs, too. These male Beagles began leaking urine late in life. A switch to a home-prepared diet stopped the problem.**

with estrogen supplements, usually in the form of DES (diethylstilbestrol), but estradiol, a more natural form of estrogen, can be used. Neutered males with hormonally

caused incontinence may respond to monthly testosterone injections, though these can also lead to urine marking and an increase in aggressive behavior.

Ectopic ureters, where the tubes leading from the kidney do not properly connect to the bladder, require surgical correction. A new surgery using collagen injections is now available for incontinence that does not respond to any other form of treatment.

Natural treatments are frequently helpful for incontinence, once more serious conditions have been ruled out. Herbs, acupuncture, chiropractic treatment, and homeopathic remedies have each helped many dogs. Feeding a homemade diet can also make a difference.

## Conventional treatment options

PPA (phenylpropanolamine) is the most commonly used veterinary treatment for incontinence in both male and female dogs. It is a decongestant that works by tightening the sphincter muscle from the bladder. PPA is effective in controlling incontinence in about 70 percent of dogs who try it, with improvement in most of the rest. A veterinary PPA product called Proin comes in chewable tablets made for dogs, and is also available in liquid form.

PPA must be given daily, usually two or three times a day, as its effect lasts only 8 to 12 hours. It can be used on an as-needed basis for dogs who have only occasional problems with incontinence. Most dogs tolerate PPA without any problems, but side effects can include irritability, nervousness, panting, restlessness, rapid heartbeat, and excitability. PPA should not be given to dogs with high blood pressure or heart disease. PPA has been removed from over-the-counter human products due to an increased risk of stroke, but this side effect is not a concern with dogs.

DES (diethylstilbestrol), a synthetic form of estrogen, can be used to treat spay incontinence. It is given daily for the first week, and then dosage is dropped to once or twice a week. It's important when using this treatment to experiment and find the lowest possible dose that will work to control the incontinence, once it has been found to be

effective. Estrogen supplements are considered relatively safe, but in rare cases they can cause bone marrow suppression leading to anemia that does not go away when the treatment is stopped. Higher doses and non-DES forms of estrogen are more likely to cause this effect. DES is readily available thru compounding pharmacies.

PPA can be combined with DES when needed to control difficult cases. Imipramine (Tofranil), a tricyclic antidepressant that causes urine retention in some patients, is occasionally combined with PPA for dogs who do not respond to other medications.

A natural estrogen supplement called Genesis Resources Canine Incontinence Support is available for treating spay incontinence, as are ovarian glandular products. I have heard reports of each of these working for some dogs.

## Herbal treatment options

There are several natural treatment options for incontinence, including a number of different herbs. Corn silk is the herb most commonly used to treat incontinence. It can be given in capsules, brewed into tea, or made into a tincture.

Beth Teffner of Ohio has a four-year-old Doberman, Inga, who was rescued from a puppy mill. Inga has spay incontinence, which Teffner has treated successfully with corn silk. "We first tried giving her Proin, but it made her cranky," says Teffner. "Inga now gets three capsules of corn silk (425 mg) a day, two in the morning and one in the evening, opened and sprinkled over her food. She leaks only when extremely tired. She is dry 90 to 95 percent of the time."

Teas made from corn silk (and other herbs) may be more effective than capsules. To make an herbal tea, add 1 tablespoon of fresh or dried herb per 2 cups of boiling water. Give 1 teaspoon of strong tea per 20 pounds of body weight, twice a day. Other herbs that can help with incontinence include raspberry leaf, horsetail, saw palmetto, nettle root, couch grass, uva ursi, agrimony, marshmallow, and plantain.

Glycerin tinctures (also known as glycerites) containing these herbs in any combination are another alternative. Give 12 to 20 drops of glycerite per 20 pounds of body weight, twice a day.

There are also commercial herbal blends made for dogs with incontinence. Products that have worked for some include Azmira's Kidni Kare, Animals' Apawthecary's Tinkle Tonic, and Vetri-Science Bladder Strength for Dogs.



**Ben began leaking urine after suffering a urinary tract infection, and this continued after the infection was cleared. Chinese herbs eventually stopped the leak.**

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) also offers herbal combinations for controlling incontinence. Chinese herbs helped Ben, a 13-year-old Border Collie owned by Laura Miller of Lovettsville, Virginia, after the dog started leaking urine about six months ago. The leaking began with a urinary tract infection, but continued after the infection was gone.

“While Proin controlled the problem, it seemed to make him grouchy to the point where the other dogs in the house were avoiding him,” says Miller. “With the help of a veterinarian who practices both conventional and holistic medicine, we were able to switch him to a Chinese herbal combination that has been as effective as the Proin, without the grumpiness.”

The formula her vet prescribed is called Sang Piao Xiao San - Mantis Formula 524, from Sun Ten. (Note: Chinese herbal formulas are typically custom-prescribed for the

unique needs of the patient, rather than indicated for specific symptoms. Your veterinary TCM practitioner may prescribe a different Chinese herbal formula for the same condition in your dog.)

### Diet can make a difference

Some dogs stop being incontinent when all grains are removed from their diet. Maizey, a 12-year-old Bull Terrier owned by Shari Mann of San Francisco, is one of those dogs. “Soon after she was spayed, Maizey started dribbling, especially at night or when taking a long nap,” Mann says.

“Maizey has eaten a raw, grain-free diet since 12 weeks of age. The only grains she ever got were in my home-baked cookies made from liver and organic wheat. I stopped giving her the cookies, in an effort to help with a yeasty ear problem. To my utter surprise and delight, not only did her ears clear up, but her dribbles also stopped. I did not believe it. Just to be sure, I again gave her one cookie a day for two weeks, and she began dribbling again.” Maizey has been off all grains, and free of incontinence, for 10 years.

Judi Rothenberg’s Doberman Lucy is another dog who responded to the elimination of grains from her diet. Although DES was effective in controlling Lucy’s spay incontinence, Judi preferred something natural. “I give Lucy corn silk (¼ teaspoon twice a day), but removing grains from her diet helped the most. As long as I

remember not to give her treats with grains in them, Lucy no longer needs the DES.”

Sometimes, just a homemade diet can help, even if it includes grains. Judy Coates of Pennsylvania had two male beagles, Guillaume and Darwin, who were neutered in April 2003, when Guillaume was 10 and Darwin was 9 years old.

“At the time of neutering they were eating a high quality dry food,” Judy says. “After a few months they started leaking while they were relaxed or sleeping. I increased the amount of fresh food I added to their kibble, and eventually began feeding all home-cooked meals at the beginning of 2005. As soon as they started to get fresh food, their water intake dropped and the leaking went away. Even now, with Guillaume testing positive for Cushing’s and drinking more water than he did, he still has no problem with leaking.”

When preparing homemade diets, keep in mind that certain vegetables, such as parsley and celery, have diuretic properties and may increase leaking.



**Lucy’s solution? Corn silk, a grain-free diet, and sometimes DES.**

### Other natural treatments

Incontinence may respond to alternative treatments such as chiropractic adjustments and acupuncture. Acupuncture may be particularly effective if done on the spay incision.

Maggie is a 10-year-old Vizsla owned by Maisie Griffiths in Canberra, Australia, and fed a raw, grain-free

## Resources

### TREATMENTS MENTIONED IN THIS ARTICLE

Ask your veterinarian about trying one of the following alternative or complementary treatments:

**Animals’ Apawthecary Tinkle Tonic**  
animalessentials.com or (888) 463-7748

**Azmira Kidni Kare**  
azmira.com or (800) 497-5665

**Diethylstilbestrol (DES)**  
Retailer: Wedgewood Pharmacy  
wedgewoodpharmacy.com/diethylstilbestrol.asp

**Genesis Resources Canine Incontinence Support**  
genesispets.com or (877) 738-7454

**Sun Ten Chinese Herbs**  
Manufacturer: suntenglobal.com  
Retailer: chineseherbs.net/china or (847) 475-1900



### Vetri-Science Bladder Strength for Dogs

Manufacturer: vetriscience.com (includes links to Vetri-Science retailers) or (800) 882-9993

Also sold as Pet Naturals Bladder Support for Dogs by petnaturals.com, Mountain Naturals Bladder Aid for Dogs by mt-naturals.com, and US Animals Bladder Control for Dogs by shopusanimal.com

### INCONTINENCE AIDS (DIAPERS, PADS, ETC.)

Available in local pet supply stores; ask the manager to order if the store doesn’t carry them. Or, contact one of these mail-order suppliers:

**Doctors Foster & Smith**  
drsfostersmith.com or (800) 381-7179

**VetAmerica**  
vetamerica.com or (888) 838-2637

**KV Vet Supply**  
kvvet.com or (800) 423-8211

diet. “Maggie began to have some episodes of incontinence about a year ago, just dribbles that only occurred in her sleep,” says Griffiths.

“The leaking increased at the same time that she began to show more obvious signs of the effects of her spondylosis. My vet is also a chiropractor; we began to give Maggie



**Maggie’s incontinence and soundness improved with chiropractic treatments.**

chiropractic treatments. The urine dribbles turned into floods for a few days following each treatment and then returned to dribbles. We continued the treatments as her movement was improving. Gradually, the incontinence following each treatment completely disappeared, along with the original dribbles.” Griffiths reports that Maggie now moves better than she did two years ago and has no incontinence at all.

Homeopathic remedies, both individual and combinations, have helped many dogs. Jo Wells of Euless, Texas, has a 10-year-old Rottweiler mix also named Maggie who was diagnosed with spay incontinence about a year ago.

Wells says, “We tried corn silk capsules with no success. The homeopathic formula Leaks No More from Homeopet worked for us, but I quit using it because of the expense. It comes in such a small bottle and using it three times a day it only lasted about 10 days for a large dog. I switched to Herbasaurus Bedwetting homeopathic formula made for children. It has worked for us and a bottle lasts me for three to four weeks. I just put it in her food and she scarfs it right down.”

Other homeopathic remedies recommended for dogs with incontinence are Sepia, Solidago (goldenrod), and Hyland’s EnurAid.

## **A combination of treatments**

For some dogs, the treatment isn’t so simple. Mindy Fenton of Southern California adopted a two-year-old Chow also named Maggie who leaked urine continuously. Maggie was diagnosed with an ectopic ureter using a dye test. Fenton explains, “The ureter was attached to the kidney

but at the distal end it emptied right out instead of going into the bladder. The vets said it was probably genetic. Maggie could hold no urine; her bladder never filled. She would squat and try to pee but she also constantly leaked.”

Maggie required surgery to correct this defect. The surgery was successful and allowed Maggie to urinate normally, but she continued

to have problems with dribbling during any kind of stress. “The specialist had told me at the time of surgery that it is common for dogs with an ectopic ureter to not be fully continent post-surgery. Within a couple of months after surgery, Mags was greatly improved but she would still leak from time to time, and the leaking made her susceptible to bladder infections.”

Fenton tried DES, which didn’t help at all, but she had success using Proin. She preferred more natural methods, however. “I used a number of supplements, including vitamin C, cranberry capsules (which help prevent bladder infections), and Animals’ Apawthecary’s Tinkle Tonic. I would make my own tincture using corn silk in an alcohol (brandy) base and I added uva ursi. I tried adding corn silk directly to her food, but that did nothing. Switching to a raw, grain-free diet helped quite a bit. Mags was nine years old when I made the switch.”



**It was no party to discover that the two-year-old Chow that Mindy Fenton adopted leaked urine continuously. A dedicated owner, Fenton employed a surgical procedure, a grain-free diet, prescribed medications, and many supplements to help her dog. Each has played a useful role at different times.**

This approach worked most of the time, but under stress, the dribbles would return. “When she would drip, I would give her PPA, twice a day, which I usually had to do only for about three days at a time. I also used PPA as a preventative when I knew there was going to be stress and thus a high likelihood that she would drip.”

## **Incontinence secondary to other diseases**

Sometimes incontinence is secondary to other disorders, so treatment is directed at the primary disease. Any illness that causes the dog to drink excess amounts of water, including diabetes mellitus, kidney disease, liver disease, Cushing’s disease (hyperadrenocorticism), and more, can lead to incontinence. Most of these can be ruled out by blood tests. Certain drugs can also cause increased water intake.

Kathy Moffett of Le Roy, Illinois, has a Brittany Spaniel named Abby who began having major incontinence issues associated with drinking lots of water at age 11. “Abby turned out to have a rare condition called diabetes insipidus,” Moffett explains. “The only symptoms of this condition are drinking lots of water and increased urination, including problems with incontinence.”

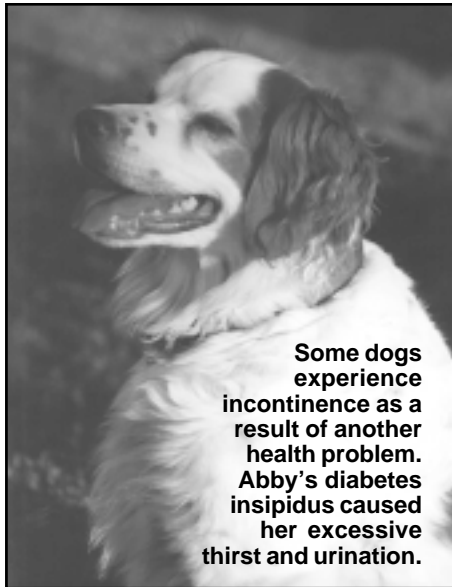
The treatment for DI involves injections twice a day with desmopressin, which controls the excess drinking and also the incontinence. (Note that there is no relationship between diabetes insipidus and the more common diabetes mellitus. See “Yo Adrenals!” July 2006.)

My own dog Nattie developed some incontinence when she was diagnosed with kidney disease and put on subcutaneous fluids. I did not give her medication for this, but solved the problem by getting up during the night to let her out one extra time, and by using washable waterproof pads under her bedding to protect the beds and furniture.

I found the mattress pads and liners made for children’s beds to be the most cost-effective and reliable way to keep dog beds and other places she liked to sleep dry. You can also find waterproof liners and pads made for dogs and dog beds in pet supply stores and catalogs. Diaper garments made for both female and male dogs can also be purchased.

Incontinence has also been





**Some dogs experience incontinence as a result of another health problem. Abby's diabetes insipidus caused her excessive thirst and urination.**

known to develop following corticosteroid treatment. Steroids such as prednisone cause excess drinking, which may lead to temporary incontinence, but sometimes, the incontinence continues even after the steroids are stopped.

Steroids also suppress the immune system, which can lead to increased risk of urinary tract infections. In addition, steroids can push a dog with a tendency toward diabetes into exhibiting symptoms. It makes sense to have a urinalysis done if your dog develops incontinence following the use of prednisone.

Dawn Lange of Duluth, Minnesota, has a retired racing Greyhound named Sly who experienced problems following the use of prednisone.

"Sly's incontinence started at about eight years old, almost immediately after receiving multiple steroid injections for pannus," says Lange. "It took about six months before the incontinence gradually stopped. None of the treatments that are used for spay incontinence worked. We chose to diaper her during the problem period, using Female Pet Bloomers from Drs. Foster & Smith, with a maxipad inside."

### Surgical options

Once in a while, you may have a dog who does not respond to any of the traditional or natural treatments for incontinence, or who cannot take them for various reasons. In those cases, surgery may help.

One older procedure for female dogs, colposuspension, surgically tacks the vagina to the belly wall, compressing the urethra.

Colposuspension surgery has been shown to be effective in curing incontinence in 40 to 55 percent of dogs initially, though many relapse within the first year. Most dogs show improvement, which is often increased when medications are added back in. Male dogs can have a similar procedure called a cystourethropepy.

Collagen injections (performed under anesthesia) into the area around the urethra offer a newer and more effective surgical method for controlling incontinence in female dogs. Studies show these injections to be completely successful in up to 75 percent of the dogs who receive them, with most of the rest improved and many of those responding to the use of PPA after surgery when they did not before.

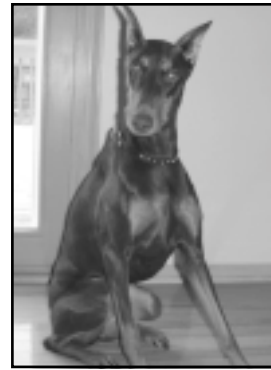
The major drawback to this approach is cost, which can run more than \$1,000 – and the treatment may have to be repeated, as the body removes the collagen over time. Retreatment with collagen is usually easier and may be less expensive. The average duration of effectiveness was 17 months in one study, though the effects can last more



**Sly's incontinence was triggered by steroids, given for another condition. Only time stopped the flow; in the meantime, she had to wear a canine diaper.**

than five years. It has few side effects, usually only transient problems with urination immediately after surgery in a small percentage of dogs. There is a current study of this procedure being done at Purdue University.

Beth Teffner is involved with Hand Me Down Dobes, a rescue group in Columbus, Ohio, that recently took in a two-year-old Doberman named Reese. Surrendered by her original owner due to incontinence, Reese would leak urine while standing and



**Reese was cured with collagen injections; now she needs a home.**

walking around, even immediately after urinating. Exploratory surgery did not find a cause.

The group contacted Ohio State, where the collagen injection procedure is being studied on Dobermans. "Fortunately, our group had an angel who donated money, and Reese has had the injections. She did not need additional surgery and is leak-free," Teffner says. "She is now in a foster

home waiting to be adopted." (If you can help, contact Hand Me Down Dobes at 614-470-2851 or [handmedowndobes.org](http://handmedowndobes.org).)

### Experimental treatment

A recent report from Europe involves the use of use of GnRH (gonadotropin releasing hormone) analogs to control spay incontinence that does not respond to traditional treatments.

In one small pilot study, seven of 11 dogs treated this way once or twice were cured for periods ranging from two months to two years, with all but one of the remaining dogs becoming continent when PPA was added. This treatment is still experimental and has not yet been approved, though GnRH is used with dogs for other purposes involving reproduction.

### Be persistent

With the many different treatments available for incontinence, it's important to keep trying various remedies when needed. Many people try a number of different remedies before finding the one that works best for their dogs. Don't give up when your dog does not respond to the first or second remedy you try.

When natural treatments and traditional medications do not work, look for other possible causes, and if needed, consider surgical options. Almost all dogs with incontinence can be successfully treated with persistence. 🐾

*Mary Straus does research on canine health and nutrition topics as an avocation. She is the owner of the DogAware.com website. She lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with her dog Piglet, a 14-year-old Chinese Shar-Pei.*

# A Bark in the Park

*Rules of dog-park etiquette and deportment for dogs and their handlers.*

BY PAT MILLER

Depending on who you talk to, dog parks are either the greatest invention since microwave ovens or the devil incarnate – either the perfect place to exercise and socialize your dog, or the best environment in which to traumatize your dog, make him dog-reactive, and perhaps get him killed. We’re told that perception is reality, but these two perceptions are worlds apart. Which one is right?

They both are. Your local dog park *can* be a terrific place to take your dog, provided it is well-constructed, well-maintained, and well-monitored. It can *also* be you and your dog’s worst nightmare. What determines which perception will be *your* reality?

In a word, it’s all about etiquette. If you understand the rules of dog park etiquette – and if other park users also understand and follow the same rules, you can be in dog



**Not all dogs at the park are social. Some, like the Pointer on the right, simply enjoy the opportunity to run and play fetch games off-leash. The dog on the left isn’t socializing, either, but keeps barking at other dogs. Unless she finds other things to do with her park time, she may not be the best candidate for repeat visits.**

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## WHAT YOU CAN DO . . .

- Evaluate your dog realistically to determine whether she is a good dog-park candidate. If you’re not sure, ask your dog behavior professional for her perception of your dog’s park potential.
- Check out the dog parks in your area to determine if any appear to be suitable for your dog.
- The first time you take your dog to a dog park, ask a friend who is knowledgeable about dogs and dog behavior to accompany you and help troubleshoot.
- Have fun with dog-park play!

park heaven. When etiquette goes by the wayside, you have a classic recipe for disaster.

## Create a park culture

It only takes one renegade to spoil a park for other users. The best dog parks are those whose users band together to create a sense of community, who use education, peer pressure and, when necessary, call in the appropriate authorities to help regulate those who won’t follow the rules of etiquette and common sense.

One of the early dog parks, Remington Dog Park, created in Sausalito, California, in the early 1990s, initially held informal wine-and-cheese parties every Friday evening, to encourage camaraderie, a sense of community, and to create a social opportunity for humans as well as their dogs. The group developed a strong culture and close friendships. Park regulars were thus able to work together to monitor dog park behavior, educate new users, and keep park problems to a manageable minimum.

Most of the early dog parks were pub-

lic/municipal parks – owned and operated by local government, with park upkeep and management sometimes delegated to a users’ group, sometimes performed by the parks and recreation department, sometimes the animal services (control) division, sometimes even the local police department.

More and more communities across the country are developing new municipal “bark parks” as dog owners lobby for recreational facilities for humans and their dogs and insist on claiming their share of local park resources.

In addition, there are a growing number of privately owned dog parks where owners pay a membership fee for the privilege of sharing dog park play in a more controlled environment. Private parks are often more closely supervised, dogs are more carefully screened before being granted privileges, and rules more promptly and effectively enforced.

Whether private or public, rules of dog park etiquette generally fall into three categories: Appropriate dog behavior, appropriate human behavior, and rules of



engagement – what to do when someone doesn't follow the rules.

## Appropriate dog behavior

Not all dogs are good candidates for dog-park play. A dog park is *not* the appropriate place for dogs who have serious behavior problems in relation to other dogs or humans. Dogs with these kinds of "issues" should be carefully socialized in environments that are far more controlled than a dog park while their owners do behavior modification work. Consider the following carefully before taking your dog through the gate into your local dog park.

- Dog-park dogs should be friendly and outgoing, without being overbearing, obnoxious, or bullying.

- Your dog should be reasonably confident and social. Those who are fearful, aggressive, or reactive are not appropriate for dog parks.

- Basic good manners are a park prerequisite. Your dog should not body-slam, mouth, jump on kids, or mark (leg-lift) humans in the park, nor should he jump into laps of random sitting humans without invitation.

- Your dog should be responsive to basic cues – at least "come when called," "sit," and "leave it/off," so you can get control of him if necessary, and prevent him from harassing others.



Two dogs were running very fast, and were so absorbed in their game, they didn't see this man. They both slammed into him from behind at a high speed. All you can see of the Shepherd-mix is the tip of his tail.

- Barking should be kept to a reasonable level, both for the comfort of other park users as well as nearby neighbors. Occasional barks of joy are acceptable. Non-stop barking of a "fun police" type dog is not, nor is barking with more serious aggressive intent.

- Only healthy dogs should visit dog parks. Obviously, communicable diseases and parasites are unacceptable as these can affect and infect other dogs. Structural unsoundnesses that can cause pain (hip dysplasia, arthritis, etc.) are a high risk factor for causing aggression when a dog is hurt *or* stressed by the anticipation of being hurt.

## Human behavior

This is even longer than the dog behavior list. We humans are responsible for our dogs' behaviors, hence we play a critically important role in making sure proper etiquette is adhered to, by our dogs as well as ourselves.

- As a new park user, visit the park without your dog to observe park culture and practices. Arrange to take your dog to the park the first time at non-peak use hours to allow both of you to acquaint yourselves with the environment without the stress and distraction of multiple dogs.

- Obey all posted park rules, even if you disagree with them.



Boom! He went down like a ton of bricks. Both dogs recovered quickly, although they easily could have gotten hurt. It's wonder that the man was *not* hurt. Imagine if he had been elderly, on crutches, or had a baby in his arms or in a backpack.

- Don't bring small children inside the dog park. Occasionally, dogs who are running fast in a chasing game will accidentally run into a grown-up, sometimes even knocking down a full-sized man. Imagine what could happen to your toddler – and that's just from an accident, not even from the attention of a large dog with a strong prey drive who has never been socialized to small children!

- Limit your use of toys or food treats as necessary to avoid dog/dog conflict. This may vary depending on the dog population at the park during any given visit.

- Keep puppies under the age of four months at home. They aren't fully immunized yet, so are at higher risk for contracting diseases, and are very vulnerable to being traumatized by another dog's inappropriate behavior.

- Be harshly realistic about your dog's potential as a park playmate. The dog park is *not* the appropriate place to work on fixing your dog's behavior problems.

- Watch park play for several minutes before you take your dog in to be sure there are no dogs present who are inappropriate play partners for your dog.

- Remove your dog's leash as soon as you enter the off-leash area. Mixing on-leash and off-leash dogs can cause stress in the leashed dogs, which may lead to aggression.



No harm done – *this* time. But this common dog-park accident demonstrates why small children should not be in a dog park, for their own safety. And why park visitors must stay alert at all times to the activities of all the dogs around them.

■ Supervise your dog's play. This is not the time to bury your nose in the latest copy of WDJ or your favorite novel. Be prepared to interrupt inappropriate play – whether your dog is the perpetrator or the victim.

■ If someone complains about your dog's behavior, be prepared to consider his perspective before defending your dog or just blowing off the complaint. Apologize if your dog has been inappropriate, and be willing to leave the park if your dog is being too rough. If you *really* disagree with the person's assessment of your dog's behavior, ask someone you respect for her honest and frank opinion.

■ Be polite, even if someone else's dog is inappropriate and the owner isn't control-

ling her dog or is unwilling to take her own dog out of the park.

■ Keep the dog-human ratio manageable. A standard recommendation is no more than two or three dogs per human – assuming those two to three dogs can be reasonably managed by one human!

■ Remember: not all dogs enjoy playing with others. Be willing to leave if your dog isn't having a good time. Some dogs enjoy a small circle of intimate friends but aren't keen on crowds. Some enjoy park play as youngsters, but less so as they mature. If you love going to the park but your dog doesn't, go without him! Go with a friend who has a more gregarious canine, or go dogless and socialize with other owners.

■ Avoid disciplining another park user's dog. If you must use force to break up a fight, so be it, but do not attempt to "punish" someone else's dog once the conflict is ended. If you find another dog's behavior unacceptable, take your own dog out of the park rather than "correcting" someone else's dog.

■ Honor the posted dog-park hours. They are set for a reason – often for your own safety, or to maintain peace and harmony with nearby neighbors.

■ Of course, as always, clean up after your dog *religiously* both inside and outside the park. Be willing to clean up unclaimed piles of dog poo from visitors who don't know or don't follow the rules of dog-park etiquette, or perhaps who just didn't notice their dog leaving a fecal souvenir.

## Common Dog-Park Rules

Park rules will vary from one location to the next. Rules should be posted prominently near park entrances; if they're not, ask about them prior to bringing your dog to the park. Here are some of the rules that you are likely to find:

- Dogs over the age of 6 months must be spayed/neutered – or, alternatively, no females in season allowed.
- All dogs must be currently licensed.
- No unsupervised dogs. Dogs may not be left unattended.
- Owners must clean up after dogs. (So, owners must really *watch* their dogs, to be able to clean up after them!)
- Aggressive dogs are not allowed. Do not bring dogs with a history of aggression toward dogs or humans. Dogs who demonstrate aggressive behaviors toward dogs or humans in the park should be removed from the park and not return.
- Children under the age 8 (or some other designated age) should not enter the off-leash area of the park. Alternatively, children under the age of (designated age) must be directly supervised at all times in the park. No running or loud or rough play allowed.
- No more than three dogs per person (or other designated number).
- No choke, prong, or shock collars. All extra gear (harnesses, collars other than plain buckle collar) should be removed before entering park.
- Keep dogs on-leash until you enter off-leash area. If a separate area is provided for small dogs, please honor the size restrictions.
- No smoking or eating within the fenced dog park area.
- Be polite and considerate of other park users.



## Rules of engagement

As Patrick Swayze says in the movie *Road House*, "Be nice – until it's time to *not* be nice." If a human or his dog is behaving inappropriately, assume they don't know any better, and do your best to educate gently and politely.

If you're uncomfortable doing so, seek out the help of another park user for support. Don't wimp out! As a responsible dog-park user, you have an obligation to report inappropriate actions of other users that put the safety of dogs and humans at risk. How would you feel if you turned a blind eye to a potentially dangerous behavior, only to have another person or dog injured – perhaps seriously or fatally – if an incident happens in the future that you might have been able to prevent? (See "An Accident Waiting to Happen," February 2004.)

Examples of positive phrases to use with an owner might include:

■ "Excuse me, but perhaps you didn't realize that this side of the park is for dogs under 25 pounds . . . Your Lab is really handsome; I bet he'd love to play with the Golden Retriever on the other side of that fence."

■ "Hey, that sandwich looks tasty – and there's a St. Bernard headed this way who's eyeing it with great interest. It might be safer if you finished eating it outside the fence and then brought your dog back in to play."

■ "What a cute baby! If she were mine I'd be worried about having her in the park here with all these energetic dogs. I've read some



Before you turn him loose to play, remove all of your dog's gear except for the easily removable plain buckle collar that (we hope!) holds your dog's ID. It's very common for a dog to get his teeth or jaw caught in his playmate's gear; some dogs have suffered broken jaws, and others have choked to death before they could be freed.

pretty scary stories about dogs grabbing babies out of adults' arms – I'd hate to see your little girl get hurt! And actually the park rules say kids should be 8 years or older to be in here . . .”

If the inappropriate actions are putting you or your dog at risk and the other dog owner isn't receptive to education, take your dog and leave the park until you can ask the users' group or other park authorities to handle the situation.

If you don't know and can't get the dog owner's name and contact information, try to get his license plate number. If that's not possible, write down a detailed description of both dog and human, and note any times you've seen them at the park, to help authorities make contact. Also write a detailed and *unemotional* description of the behavior(s) you felt were inappropriate.

The positive approach generally works better with humans, just as it does with dogs. A dog owner on one of my training lists recently posted a message about her dog who occasionally became aggressive with other dogs at her local dog park. Other list members gently explained to her why the dog park was not the appropriate place to work on modifying her dog's reactive behavior, and offered other options for doing behavior modification work with him. I'm pretty sure from her responses that she understood. At least I hope she did, for her dog's sake, and the sake of other dog-park users in her community. 🐾

*Pat Miller, CPDT, is WDJ's Training Editor. Miller lives in Hagerstown, Maryland, site of her Peaceable Paws training center. For book purchasing or contact information, see "Resources," page 24.*

## Dog-Park Resources

**dogpark.com:** Listing of dog parks around the U.S. and Canada. Offers suggestions and resources for starting a dog park – and more.

**ecoanimal.com/dogfun/:** International list of places to take your dog off-leash, including US and Canada off-leash dog-park guide.

**United States and Canada Dog Travel Guide** (paperback, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition – 2006; \$18) at (877) 475-BARK or [dogfriendlycom-store.stores.yahoo.net/dounstandcad.html](http://dogfriendlycom-store.stores.yahoo.net/dounstandcad.html)

**So You Want to Build a Dog Park?** Guide to creating a dog park in your community (paperback, \$75; 340 pages) at [cafepress.com/dogparksusa](http://cafepress.com/dogparksusa)

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# X Marks the Spot

*How to heal even the most stubborn hot spots and lick granulomas.*

BY CJ PUOTINEN

Your dog has a weeping, oozing wound on her leg or a yucky red blob on the top of her head, and at first you wonder how she injured herself. But if you've been around the dog-care block, you realize that it isn't a cut or scrape. That goeey mess might be diagnosed as pyotraumatic dermatitis, wet eczema, or a *Staphylococcus intermedius* infection, but it's what everyone calls a hot spot.

Painful, irritating, swollen, and warm to the touch, hot spots can emit pus and smell awful. They can be triggered by bacteria, yeast, fungi, mange, fleas, irritating grooming products, swimming pool disinfectants, contaminated lakes or ponds, lawn-care products, or other environmental factors. Some dogs break out in hot spots weeks or months after being vaccinated. In many dogs, hot spots mark the return of seasonal allergies.

Most veterinarians treat hot spots after clipping and shaving fur around the lesion, a process that in severe cases can require

sedation or the use of a local anesthetic. The area is washed with a disinfecting soap or rinsed with a liquid antiseptic. Astringents, anti-itch agents, antihistamines, hydrocortisone sprays or creams, drying agents, or antibiotics may be applied. In some cases topical treatment is accompanied by steroid injections or oral medication.

If the patient can't leave a hot spot alone, she may have to wear an Elizabethan or cervical collar, which prevents the dog from biting, licking, or chewing the area while it heals.

Any dog can get a hot spot, especially those with heavy coats who live in humid climates. Sometimes swimming dogs get hot spots on their necks, which stay moist under collars. Dogs with a history of allergies, ear infections, anal sac irritations, or tangled hair mats are likely candidates. Breeds associated with hot spots include Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers, St. Bernards, Bernese Mountain Dogs, Collies, and German Shepherds.

## Licked to death

Lick granulomas, officially known as acral lick dermatitis or ALD, occur when a dog licks excessively on a leg, paw, or other area, producing an itchy ulceration. Over time the licking forms a thick, hairless, red patch that may be accompanied by infection. Most lick granulomas are the size and shape of a silver dollar, but some extend for several inches in all directions.

A lick granuloma can result from an insect bite, cut, skin infection, imbedded foreign object, allergic dermatitis, arthritis pain, deep-seated fungal infections, external parasites like scabies and demodex, skin cancer lesion, or inflamed nerves or neuro-



**Who, me? Weimaraners are among the breeds that are frequently plagued with acral lick dermatitis, or ALD. The symptoms often coincide with seasonal allergies.**

pathies, or it might begin for no apparent reason. In the last case, it's considered a behavioral problem similar to human compulsions like nail biting. Psychological factors that contribute to compulsive licking often involve boredom, being crated for long periods, the addition of a new pet or person to the household, the death or loss of a companion animal, the absence of a family member, a move to a new house, or being boarded away from home.

The breeds most associated with ALD include Doberman Pinschers, Great Danes, Golden Retrievers, Labrador Retrievers, German Shepherds, Boxers, Dalmatians, English Setters, Shar Peis, and Weimaraners. In these breeds, allergy-related ALD is most likely to appear in middle age, when the dog is at least five years old. In many cases, symptoms coincide with seasonal allergies.

Anti-inflammatory drugs such as cortisone, antibiotics such as Cephalexin and Clavamox, laser therapy, antifungals, allergy shots, and psychoactive medications are conventional treatments for ALD. As with hot spots, an Elizabethan or cervical collar may be necessary to allow the wound to heal without being disturbed.

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WHAT YOU CAN DO . . .

- **Treat hot spots and lick granulomas with natural remedies that speed healing and tissue repair while clearing bacterial infections.**
- **If necessary, keep your dog from licking and irritating the area by applying a bitter tasting topical product or fitting the dog with an Elizabethan or cervical collar.**
- **Help prevent future outbreaks by improving your dog's diet and lifestyle.**

## Finding the cause

Because conventional therapies can have serious side effects and because hot spots and lick granulomas are notorious for recurring, holistic veterinarians look beyond their obvious symptoms to their underlying causes.

Richard Pitcairn, DVM, PhD, author of *Dr. Pitcairn's Complete Guide to Natural Health for Dogs and Cats*, disagrees with conventional veterinarians who diagnose various skin and coat problems as separate diseases. All skin and coat disorders, he says, are a single basic problem that manifests in individual animals depending on heredity, environment, nutrition, and other factors.

"One dog may have severely inflamed, moist, itchy hot spots near the base of his tail," he explains, "while another may have thick, itchy skin along his back, with greasy, smelly secretions – but they are really the same health problem."

According to Dr. Pitcairn, skin disorders stem from:

- Toxicity, most of it from poor-quality food and some from environmental pollutants or topically applied pest-control chemicals.
- Vaccinations, such as routinely administered multiple vaccines, which can induce immune disorders in susceptible animals.
- Suppressed disease, the remains of inadequately treated conditions that were never cured and which may cause periodic discharge through the skin.
- Psychological factors such as boredom, frustration, anger, and irritability. "As I see it," he adds, "these are nearly always secondary issues that simply aggravate an already-existing problem."

What's the cure? "It is possible to alleviate or even eliminate skin problems simply through fasting, proper nutrition, and the total health plan I describe in my book," says Dr. Pitcairn. "It is surprising how much improvement can occur by these measures alone."

He adds, "The most difficult conditions to treat are those previously dosed with lots of cortisone or its synthetic forms such as azium, depo, flucort, prednisone, or prednisolone. Corticosteroids effectively suppress symptoms like inflammation and itching, but they are in no sense curative."

## Fast, fast!

The first step in Dr. Pitcairn's treatment of hot spots, lick granulomas, and other skin problems is a short fast followed by improved diet.

Juliette de Bairacli Levy (see "Grandmother Nature," July 2006) recommends fasting for every canine illness. As she explains in her book, *The Complete Herbal Handbook for the Dog and Cat*, "During a fast, the body burns up fat deposits. As large amounts of body impurities are embedded in the fatty tissue of domestically reared dogs, the body begins to be cleansed deeply as stored fat is oxidized. Also the stomach and intestines, relieved of their usual tasks of dealing with food, can now concentrate on clearing away toxins."

For skin conditions, Levy recommends feeding water only for two days, then water supplemented with honey, a tablespoon or two depending on the dog's size, at mealtimes for an additional two days.

When it's time to reintroduce food, consider switching from commercial pet food to a home-prepared diet, which is a simple, effective way to avoid processed grains, soy, chemical preservatives, artificial colors and flavors, synthetic vitamins, and other hard-to-digest or inferior-quality ingredients that can contribute to hot spots and skin irritations. If it's not possible for an owner to feed her dog a home-prepared diet, upgrading the dog's commercial food to a better-quality protein-based food that does not contain grains or soy may do the trick.

Another helpful strategy is to feed the dog once per day, removing food after 15 to 20 minutes, and omitting snacks and access to food dispensers. The canine digestive tract is designed for short feasts and long famines, not constant grazing.

For improved digestion and assimilation, try supplementing your dog's food with an enzyme product such as Prozyme (see Resources) and/or Willard Water (described in the June 2006 issue).

Adding Seacure, the predigested fish protein powder described in "Securing Seacure" (April 2003) and "Accelerated Wound Healing" (August 2006), is another way to speed tissue repair. Dee Eckert, the manufacturer's director of operations, has received numerous reports from customers whose dogs recovered from hot spots and lick granulomas in record time. "Some of these dogs had lost over half their fur to hot spots," she says, "but once they were put on Seacure, their sores healed quickly and their hair grew back."

## Topical remedies

When it comes to topical remedies, holistic veterinarians, groomers, breeders, and owners have dozens of favorites. Here are a few.

EMT Gel, made from bovine collagen, stimulates and literally supports new cell growth by acting as a tissue adhesive while sealing and protecting hot spots, lick granulomas, and other injuries, including severe or deep wounds. The gel significantly reduces pain, bleeding, scarring, wound weeping, and the risk of infection. As described in "Accelerated Wound Healing" (August 2006), EMT gel comes in a tube. EMT Gel Spray is recommended for the treatment of scrapes, scratches, and other minor skin injuries, and it's ideal for lick granulomas and hot spots because it contains a bitter, nontoxic ingredient that deters dogs from licking it off.

Another product mentioned in August's wound healing article is the North American Tree Resin Company's Hotspot/Livestock Formula, which contains highly antiseptic resin or pitch from coniferous trees. In addition to treating staph infections, cuts, fungal infections, and other wounds, pitch salve quickly repairs the damage caused by hot spots and lick granulomas.

The medium-chain fatty acids in coconut oil make it a skin-healer with antibacterial, antiviral, and antifungal properties. Coconut oil can be applied directly to hot spots, lick granulomas, boils, and other skin conditions, and is making a comeback in the diets of the health-conscious (see "Crazy about Coconut Oil," October 2005). Most dogs love the taste, so it's easy to add to food.

The recommended maintenance dose is 1 teaspoon per 10 pounds of body weight. For topical application, it can be made less appetizing with a top layer of grapefruit seed extract, which has a bitter taste, or a tablespoon of coconut oil can be mixed with 10 to 15 drops of any skin-healing essential oil that has a medicinal odor.

Willard Water (described in the June 2006 issue) is a concentrate added to water for enhanced healing benefits. Wendy Volhard, author of *Holistic Guide for the Healthy Dog*, applies a dilute solution of Willard Water to hot spots as soon as they appear. "It dries up the inflamed areas overnight," she says.

Cortney Rice of New City, New York, used Willard Water on her six-year-old Rottweiler, Kalle, who had a two-inch-wide hot spot on her inner left leg, just below the knee joint. "It was red, oozing, sometimes bleed-

ing, and very warm to the touch,” Rice describes. “It did not respond to Pramoxine HCl, which our veterinarian prescribed. I diluted a teaspoon of Willard Water concentrate with 8 ounces water and sprayed it twice a day, thoroughly soaking the hot spot and the area around it. By the second day, the hot spot had dramatically dried up and the skin was cool again. Kalle hasn’t licked her knee since the first application, plus she loves getting sprayed with it. I have continued this treatment for six days now, and her skin looks great.”

## Herbs and aromatherapy

Hot spots and eczema, says Juliette de Bairacli Levy, are often nature’s way of ridding the body of accumulated toxins from commercial pet foods and/or a lack of exercise. She treats hot spots and lick granulomas with fasting, natural diet, and medicinal herbs, adding her own herbal



**Rosemary Gladstar’s Bernese Mountain Dog, Deva, used to suffer large, weeping hot spots. A natural diet and herbal first aid has kept Deva free of the sores for years.**

antiseptic tablets (see “Putting Out Hot Spot,” next page) to the dog’s food to speed healing from within.

Vermont herbalist Rosemary Gladstar has followed Levy’s nutritional recommendations for all of her Bernese Mountain Dogs, including Deva, who arrived with mange and large, bald, weeping hot spots.

“Having shared my life with a breed that’s prone to hot spots, I have a lot of experience,” Gladstar says. “In addition to fasting dogs and putting them on a natural diet, I apply powdered goldenseal (*Hydrastic canadensis*) to the hot spot. It will stick, especially if there is that awful ooze, or you can mix it with aloe vera gel, comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*) tea, or powdered comfrey and aloe vera to make a paste that heals the sore. Thanks to her natural diet and herbal first aid, Deva, who is now nine years old, continues to thrive, and her coat looks terrific.”

Aromatherapy’s essential oils and hydrosols offer many effective ingredients for the treatment of hot spots and lick granulomas. As explained in our aromatherapy series (December 2004, January 2005, April 2005, and August 2005), essential oils and hydrosols (“flower waters” produced during steam distillation) have significant healing properties, as do the carrier or base oils in which essential oils can be diluted for safe, effective pet application. Hydrosols of any of the plants mentioned here can be applied full-strength to hot spots and lick granulomas.

Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*), helichrysum, also known as immortelle or everlasting (*Helichrysum italicum*), and carrot seed (*Daucus carota*) essential oils are famous for their skin-healing properties. Palmarosa (*Cymbopogon martinii*) and sweet marjoram (*Origanum marjorana*) essential oils heal the skin while relieving

stress. Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*) essential oil relieves pain and itching while stimulating circulation and healing. German chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*), Roman chamomile (*Anthemis nobilis*), frankincense (*Boswellia carteri*), and myrrh (*Commiphora myrrha*) essential oils reduce pain, itching, and irritation. Juniper berry (*Juniperus communis*) essential oil is recommended for eczema and hair loss.

Kristen Leigh Bell, author of *Holistic Aromatherapy for Animals*, recommends labdunum or rock rose (*Cistus ladaniferus*) essential oil in wound care blends because of its antibacterial, astringent properties. She also uses niaoli (*Melaleuca quinquenervia veridiflora*, or MQV) essential oil for any type of allergy manifesting itself in the skin. MQV oil is related to tea tree oil but has a more pleasing scent along with powerful antibacterial and antihistamine effects.

Unrefined sea salt helps heal wounds of every description, and when essential oils are added to sea salt and water, the result is a highly effective hot spot spray or wash. To a glass jar containing 1 cup of unrefined sea salt or kosher salt, add ½ teaspoon (30 drops) of any of the essential oils mentioned here, in any combination. Close tightly, then shake and rotate the jar to mix well. Store in a cool, dark place. When needed, dissolve 1 tablespoon of the salt in ¼ cup cool water. Shake or stir to dissolve. Spray on hot spots and lick granulomas, or saturate cotton and apply three or four times per day.

Ten to 15 drops of essential oil in a tablespoon (½ fluid ounce) of carrier oil is another effective treatment for these conditions. Calophyllum or tamanu oil (*Calophyllum inophyllum*) is one of the most prized carrier or base oils for the healing of wounds, eczema, and other skin conditions. Coconut oil, rose hip seed oil (*Rosa mosquette*, *R. rubiginosa*), and kukui nut oil (*Aleurites moluccana*) are other effective carrier oils renowned for their ability to fight infection, stimulate cell growth, and reduce or prevent scarring.

Years ago, Colorado aromatherapist Frances Fitzgerald Cleveland was out of town when her dog, Jake, developed a hot spot. The steroid shot he received caused kidney failure and Jake died. In his memory, Cleveland blended Jake’s Remedy, which contains purified water, apricot kernel oil, and a proprietary blend of essential oils. Oscar, Cleveland’s seven-year-old black Labrador Retriever, swims every day, gets sprayed every day, and has never had skin problems.

Shelley Voorhees of Littleton, Colorado, reports that her champion Rottweiler was a blood donor in 2000. “He had a severe reaction to the scrub that was used, and he developed a hot spot that covered his neck and chest,” she says. “After a course of antibiotics, the hot spot was still very inflamed and still oozing. I tried Jake’s Remedy, and within 48 hours the oozing stopped. The hot spot healed within a week and his hair quickly grew back.”

At AromaDog, Faith Thanas combines essential oils with rosehip seed, jojoba, and evening primrose oils to make Hot Spot Anti-Inflammatory, a healing blend that calms and soothes.

“It’s been tested over and over with great results,” she says. “Rose geranium balances the system, repairs capillaries, regenerates cells, and heals wounds. Rosewood is a cellular stimulant. Pine is anti-infectious and



good for sores and eczema. Helichrysum and lavender are an extremely healing combination, especially for open wounds. This product also contains Rescue Remedy, the Bach Flower Remedy blend that supports dogs in all types of emergencies.”

In Hollywood, Florida, Paul Funt’s American Bulldog, Diesel, had two very large hot spots on his head and face. “Both were extremely irritated and infected,” he says. “I tried several herbs sent by my homeopath and finally gave up. Then Diesel saw a doctor who sent him home with AromaDog’s Hot Spot remedy, which I applied twice daily. Within two days, the hot spots were almost completely healed, and after five days they were gone.”

Kansas aromatherapist Joan Clark developed Hot Spot Mist with the essential oils of blue chamomile, lavender, helichrysum, and tea tree in a base of fractionated coconut oil, callophyllum oil, jojoba, borage seed oil, aloe vera, and St. John’s wort.

“My success stories include my own dog, Sabrina,” she says. “She got a hot spot on her neck, and as soon as I noticed it I

used the Hot Spot Mist along with lavender hydrosol to keep drying it out. It disappeared in less than 48 hours and left a nice healthy scab.”

### Additional therapies

Physical symptoms are easy to address, but conditions like obsessive-compulsive disorders, boredom, frustration, and anxiety are more challenging.

Obviously, it can make a difference to give a bored dog something interesting to do, an anxious dog the reassurance of a stable, predictable routine and positive training, and a frustrated dog plenty of interesting outdoor exercise. Any dog can be treated with energy-balancing techniques like Tellington TTouch, massage, Reiki, and other hands-on therapies. See “Licking a Big Granuloma” (May 1999) and “Putting Out Hot Spots” (September 1999) for success stories involving acupuncture, acupressure, and chiropractic adjustments.

Flower remedies, also called flower essences, can help, too. Kris Lecakes Haley, a Bach Flower Remedy practitioner in Arizona, has found that white chestnut and

chestnut bud flower remedies effectively address repetitive chewing and licking, while crab apple and beech help with allergy-driven skin eruptions.

In *Bach Flower Remedies for Animals*, Helen Graham and Gregory Vlamis recommend walnut for eruptive conditions like hot spots and agrimony for anxiety that manifests in skin conditions. Flower remedies work best when diluted with water and applied frequently to the mouth, ears, nose, abdomen, and paw pads or sprayed in the air near the dog. See “Flower Power,” March 1999, for more information about flower essence remedies.

With the help of improved nutrition, effective topical treatments, rewarding routines, active outdoor exercise, and emotional support, any dog can enjoy a happy, healthy life free from hot spots, lick granulomas, and other skin problems. ❖

*A long-time contributor to WDJ and author of The Encyclopedia of Natural Pet Care, Natural Remedies for Dogs and Cats, and other books, CJ Puotinen lives in New York with her husband, a Lab, and a tabby cat.*

## Putting Out Hot Spots

### PRODUCT RESOURCES

**Acqua Vita**, Toronto, Ontario. Essential oils and hydrosols. (866) 405-8855 or [acqua-vita.com](http://acqua-vita.com)

**AnimalSynergy**, Phoenix, AZ. Bach Flower Remedies prepared by Kris Lecakes Haley. (602) 738-3030 or [animalsynergy.com](http://animalsynergy.com)

**AromaDog**, Leicester, MA. Hot Spot Anti-Inflammatory Spray prepared by Faith Thanas. (508) 892-9330 or [aromadog.com](http://aromadog.com)

**FrogWorks**, Littleton, CO. Jake’s Remedy prepared by Frances Fitzgerald Cleveland. (303) 973-8848 or [frogworks.com](http://frogworks.com)

**Jean’s Greens Herbal Tea Works**, Schodack, NY. Medicinal herbs, Woodland Flower Essences, and FES (Flower Essence Services) flower remedies. (518) 479-0471 or [jeansgreens.com](http://jeansgreens.com)

**NATR**, Eureka, CA. Hot Spot/Livestock Formula and other pitch salves. (800) 422-4716 or [natrhealth.com](http://natrhealth.com)

**Natural Rearing**, Jacksonville, OR. Juliette de Bairacli Levy’s NR brand herbal products formulated by Marina Zacharias. (541) 899-2080 or [naturalrearing.com](http://naturalrearing.com)

**Nature’s Gift**, Madison, TN. Essential oils and hydrosols. (615) 612-4270 or [naturesgift.com](http://naturesgift.com)

**Nutrition Coalition**, Fargo, ND. Willard Water. Free sample. (800) 447-4793, (218) 236-9783, or [willardswater.com](http://willardswater.com)

**Pet Alchemist**, Lawrence, KS. Hot Spot Mist, formulated by Joan Clark. (785) 887-1030 or [joanclark.com](http://joanclark.com)

**Proper Nutrition**, Reading, PA. Seacure. 10 percent discount, free ground shipping for WDJ readers. (800) 555-8868 or [propernutrition.com](http://propernutrition.com)

**Prozyme Products**, Chicago, IL. Digestive enzyme powder for pets. Free sample. (800) 522-5537 or [prozymeproducts.com](http://prozymeproducts.com)

**Trophy Animal Health Care**, Pensacola, FL. EMT Gel and EMT Gel Spray. (800) 336-7087 or [emtgel.com](http://emtgel.com)

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*Bach Flower Remedies for Animals*, by Helen Graham and Gregory Vlamis. Findhorn Press, 1999.

*The Complete Herbal Handbook for the Dog and Cat*, by Juliette de Bairacli Levy. Faber & Faber, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, 1991.

*Dr. Pitcairn’s Complete Guide to Natural Health for Dogs and Cats*, by Richard H. Pitcairn, DVM, PhD, and Susan Hubble Pitcairn. Rodale, 2005.

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*Holistic Guide for a Healthy Dog*, by Wendy Volhard and Kerry Brown, DVM. Howell Book House, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 2000.

*Natural Remedies for Dogs and Cats*, by CJ Puotinen. Gramercy Books/Random House, 1999.



# Go Barefoot

*Try this acupressure session to maintain your dog's health.*

BY AMY SNOW AND NANCY ZIDONIS

**W**hat if animal healthcare practitioners were only paid if animals were healthy? In times of old in China that is the way it worked. The Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) doctors, known as “barefoot doctors,” would go from village to village and receive housing, food, and payment only if the community was healthy.

The reasoning was simple: If the community was not well, and that often included the animals, it meant the barefoot doctor was not doing a good job, so why should they reward him? When the community was well, they lavished him with riches, food, and elegant accommodations.

When you think about it, paying a healthcare practitioner as a reward for good health makes sense. This approach reinforces good health rather than “rewarding” illness. Paying our medical doctors and veterinarians only when we were all healthy would turn conventional healthcare for ani-

mals and humans on its head. It must be said, though, that conventional healthcare practitioners have begun to see the virtue of focusing on health and creating illness prevention programs.

## Focus on health

Chinese Medicine has always focused on health. From a TCM perspective, most illness is understood as a breakdown of the immune system. When the body’s natural defenses are not strong, external climatic pathogens, such as wind, cold, and heat can “invade” the body and illness can occur. To maintain the body’s defense system the animal must live a balanced, healthy lifestyle.

Supporting a healthy lifestyle for our dogs means natural nutrition, daily exercise, adequate rest, social interaction with other dogs and humans, and avoidance of toxins and stressful environments.

To further contribute to the dog’s health, a TCM practitioner would recommend some

form of bodywork. Dog trainers and healthcare practitioners can readily offer acupressure sessions to support the animal’s health – but so can you, the dog’s guardian! Go barefoot!

## A health maintenance acupressure session

Acupressure is noninvasive, safe, and available to everyone. The theoretical basis of acupressure is the same as any other form of Traditional Chinese Medicine: Health is achieved by maintaining the natural balance of energy and other vital substances so that the body’s natural ability to defend itself will be strong. In TCM, life promoting energy is called *chi*, pronounced “chee,” and also written as “*qi*” or “*ki*.”

There are invisible energetic pathways, or channels, throughout the dog’s body. Along these energetic pathways there are specific pools of energy known as acupressure points, or “acupoints.” By us-



**TWO-FINGER TECHNIQUE:** Nancy Zidonis places her middle finger on top of her index finger and gently applies pressure on St 36 on the outside (lateral side) of Spencer’s hind leg. She keeps her other hand on his body to stay aware of his response to her point work and to provide a connection between them.



**THUMB TECHNIQUE:** Amy Snow uses light thumb pressure on GV 14 at the base of Spencer’s neck. Her other hand rests comfortably on his body to stay connected to him and feel for his response to the acupressure. The hand that is not used for point work serves as an anchor and is called the “mother hand.”

ing gentle thumb or two-finger pressure on these acupoints we can actually influence the flow of energy along the pathway.

Acupoints have particular energetic attributes. Some acupoints are known to enhance the flow of blood, while other acupoints reduce heat. The selection of an acupoint for inclusion in an acupressure session is based on the point's energetic characteristics. Note that each acupoint can have several energetic attributes.

For a health maintenance acupressure session we want to select acupoints that have the particular characteristic that will support the smooth and harmonious flow of *chi*, Blood (in TCM, this means all nutrient-rich fluids), and other body fluids in the dog's body. This session is like providing your dog with a general, overall tune-up in order to prevent any immune system weakness.

### Acupoint selection

In the West, we have taken the liberty of naming acupoints after the energetic pathway or channel on which they are located, as well as numbering them. Each of the major pathways is named after a specific organ system to which it is energetically related.

For instance, the first acupoint included in our health maintenance acupressure session is identified by Western TCM practitioners as Large Intestine 4. The translation of the Chinese name for this acupoint is "Joining Valley," which is more poetic and descriptive since LI 4 is located on the top-side of the webbing of the dog's dew-claw. The webbing sort of looks like a joining valley, doesn't it? If the dog's dew-claw has been removed, just place your thumb or fingers on top of where it was.

Some of the energetic characteristics of Large Intestine 4 (LI 4) are that it tonifies (i.e., increases the energy of) protective or defensive *chi* while facilitating the smooth flow of *chi* throughout the dog's entire body.

Large Intestine 11 (LI 11) is the next acupoint selected for this acupressure session. LI 11 is known to facilitate the flow of *chi* and Blood, plus it invigorates Blood, thus improving the circulation of nutrients. The translation of the Chinese name is "Crooked Pond" and it is located in the cubital crease of the dog's elbow.

Stomach 36 (St 36) is a very powerful point that has many energetic characteristics and it is selected for this session because it is one of the most "tonifying" (enhancing) acupoints on the body. St 36 is used to restore collapsed *chi*, build defensive *chi*,

and defuse pathogenic factors. Its name, "Leg 3 Miles," refers to the energetic properties this point provides, that is, even if exhausted, by stimulating St 36, the animal's legs can go another 3 miles.

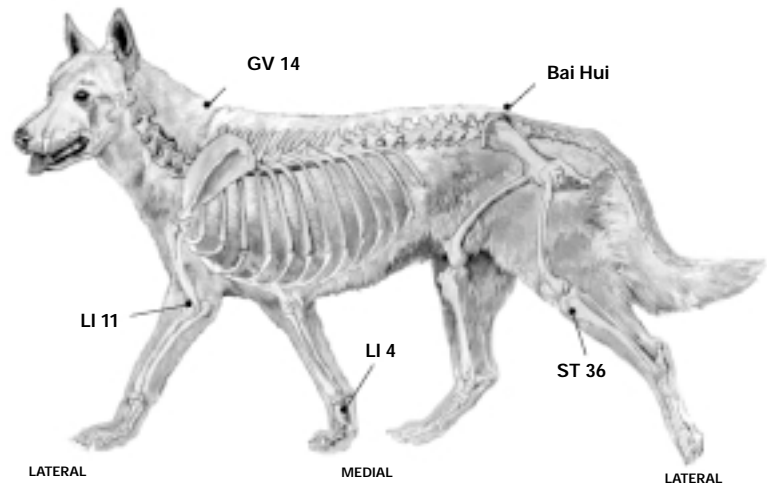
We need to address the spirit of the dog in this session, too. Governing Vessel 14 is known to calm the spirit and clear the mind. Additionally, GV 14 regulates and facilitates the flow of *chi*. The point is located on the dorsal midline in the depression at the base of the dog's neck where there really is a "Big Vertebra" for which it is named.

Most dogs love acupressure on the next point, *Bai Hui*. It is a traditional point for animals in particular. It is known to distribute Liver *chi*, which helps regulate the emotions, while it warms and restores col-

lapsed *yang* energy. Located on the dorsal midline at the sacrum – where it feels flat between the hips, the *Bai Hui* point is translated from the Chinese as "Point of 100 Meetings" is also known as the dog's "Heavens Gate." One explanation for calling it "Heaven's Gate" for the dog is that the dog's sacrum is the closest to heaven when he is eating and that's when he is in heaven!

By placing your thumb, or two fingers, or even scratching on each of these five acupoints bilaterally (on both the sides of the dogs) in turn, you will be able to support your dog's immune system by balancing his energy and strengthening his body's natural ability to defend itself against illness. Focusing on health gives your dog real strength. 🐾

## Points for Health Maintenance



POINT	LOCATION
LI 4	Located at webbing of dewclaw.
LI 11	With elbow flexed, located at the lateral end of the cubital crease.
ST 36	Located just lateral to (behind) the tibial crest on the lateral aspect of the hind leg.
GV 14	Located on the dorsal midline at the depression between the 7th cervical and the 1st thoracic vertebrae.
Bai Hui	Found on the dorsal midline, at the lumbosacral joint.



Amy Snow and Nancy Zidonis are the authors of *The Well-Connected Dog: A Guide to Canine Acupressure*, *Acu-Cat: A Guide to Feline Acupressure*, and *Equine Acupressure: A Working Manual*. They founded *Tallgrass Animal Acupressure Institute*, which offers a practitioner certificate program and training programs worldwide, plus books, meridian charts, and videos. Contact them or purchase these products at (888) 841-7211 or [animalacupressure.com](http://animalacupressure.com).



# A World of Hurt

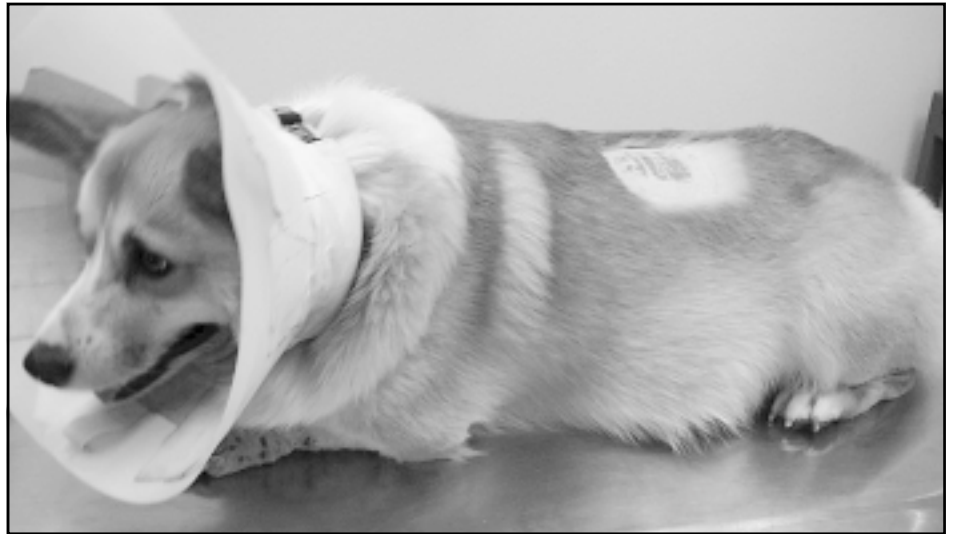
*All about canine pain and pain management.*

BY RANDY KIDD, DVM, PHD

**P**ain may be the most enigmatic of all the disease symptoms of man or beast. It is a sensation we all have experienced at one time or another and in varying degrees. But, few of us can explain adequately how a particular pain feels, fewer still can give a reasonable explanation for why pain occurs; and despite all the recent scientific research that has gone into pain, we still have a minimal understanding for how it occurs – or truthfully, for how to consistently prevent or alleviate it.

Now, couple all this with the fact that we are dealing with pain in an animal who can't talk to us, who can't tell us where or when or how it hurts, and we have further compounded the entire equation.

At its essence, pain is a language that says something is wrong. Ordinary or acute pain is a barometer of tissue health; much like an automobile's warning system, it raises an alarm whenever something has



**As he recovers from surgery, this Corgi wears an adhesive patch on his back, which continuously delivers an opioid narcotic, Fentanyl, to his system through his skin. It can take up to 12 hours to take affect, but the relief can last for four days.**

The Whole  Dog Journal™

WHAT YOU CAN DO . . .

- You should *always* be alert to signs that your dog may be in pain, but be especially attentive following strenuous exercise, dog-park or car accidents, or post-surgery. However . . .
- Don't display so much concern about your dog that you make him anxious! You can actually worsen his pain by getting him tense. Be kind and calm, but try not to hover.
- Employ natural pain relievers before pharmaceutical ones whenever practical.

penetrated the protective shield. Pain is a daily reminder that we and our best buddies are little more than a fragile collection of cells and fluids that can easily be pierced, burned, torn, or broken.

Pain sensors occur in most organs of the body – from bone to skin, from nose to tail, and from the gut to the muscles, tendons, and ligaments. Some areas of the body are highly innervated with pain sensors – the areas around joints, for example, and areas that surround vital organs. Other areas, such as a dog's foot pads, are relatively free of pain sensors.

## Anatomy of pain

Nearly all areas of the body are supplied with pain receptors – actually, sensory neurons. These neurons are activated by inputs that are often very specific for the receptor involved – receptors geared to respond to cold, heat, or tissue damage, for example.

Some receptors are more attuned to feeling somatic pain that originates on the skin or deeper in the musculoskeletal system. Other receptors respond to visceral pains

that result from inflammation, compression, or stretching of the chest, abdominal, or pelvic viscera.

Pain scientists have further defined pain receptors as being nociceptive (pain caused by an injury to body tissues), neuropathic (from abnormalities in nervous system), and psychogenic (pain that is related to emotional or psychogenic concerns).

The important part of all this is to understand that there are many kinds of pain; each kind of pain feels different; and each kind of pain will require a slightly different form of therapy.

After one or more of the pain receptors have been stimulated, the resulting sensation travels to the spinal cord where the pain messages release chemicals (neurotransmitters). These neurotransmitters activate other nerve cells in the spinal cord, which then processes the information and transmits it up to the brain.

Not all pain messages reach the brain. Some are filtered at the level of the spinal cord where they encounter specialized nerve cells, called “gate keepers.” Strong pain

messages, such as when an animal touches a hot stove, open the “gate” to wide open, letting the message take an express route to the brain. Weak pain messages, however, such as from a minor scratch, may be filtered out or blocked by the gate.

We can affect the gate by altering the messages on the nerve fibers that transmit touch. For example, rubbing or heat decreases the transmission of pain signals. In addition, some of the pain killers, natural and otherwise, work by altering the way the gate opens or filters painful stimuli.

Pain messages can also be intensified in the spinal cord where certain nerve cells can act to “wind up” or “sensitize” the pain input so it has more impact on the brain. A recent injury creates an area of hypersensitivity in the area surrounding the trauma that helps to transmit a heightened pain perception to the brain; perhaps this acts as a protective mechanism that tells the body to try to prevent any further damage from occurring at the site of the trauma.

At the same time that all of this modulation of pain is going on, the instigator of the pain (a splinter, for example) may be causing local inflammation, and the products of inflammation cause more pain and swelling. Examples of inflammatory agents include bradykinin, several of the prostaglandins, and at least one of the enzymes that synthesize prostaglandins, cyclooxygenase 2 (Cox-2). The pain and swelling of inflammation may also act as a protective mechanism by isolating the injury, and the increased blood flow to the area speeds healing.

Once the pain message reaches the brain, it interacts with nerve cells there, and these reactions can either subdue the pain or ratchet up the animal’s perception of the pain. There are numerous sites in the brain where pain is processed, including the reticular formation (which is responsible for producing an increase in heart and respiratory rates and elevation of blood pressure), and the thalamus and cerebral cortex, where conscious awareness of pain occurs.

The brain contains natural painkillers, including endorphins and enkephalins, which diminish the pain messages. But the animal’s emotional or psychological state may cause him to perceive the pain at a higher level. Consider the dog who once had a painful experience at the vet’s office. The next visit, because the dog has been anticipating more pain from the moment he walks in the door, he screams bloody murder at the mere sight of the needle.

## Pain Threshold and Pain Tolerance

Pain threshold and pain tolerance are rather confusing terms, and this confusion may be leading to an improper treatment of pain for our dogs.

To better explain threshold and tolerance, let’s say you fill a bowl with ice water, put your hand into the water, and then count the seconds it takes to feel the cold as painful; this point is your *pain threshold*. Next, wait to see how much time it takes until the pain of the cold forces you to take your hand out of the bowl; this point tells you what your *pain tolerance* is.

It is now thought that the threshold for most pains is much the same for all (human) individuals. That is, most (or all) humans will feel the cold at about the same time. The similarity of pain threshold holds true for all types of physical pain: acute or chronic, heat or cold, or any of the other manifestations of pain.

The difference between people comes primarily, if not totally, from their individual pain *tolerances*. People who have a high tolerance for pain might be thought of as stoics, and their stoical nature might allow them to leave their hand in the ice water for a long time; people with a low pain tolerance might jerk their hand back at the first contact with ice.

While these terms are used in the study of pain in humans, they probably also apply to dogs. And importantly, the way we use the terms may have a significant impact on how we understand and treat pain in dogs.

We typically say that some breeds of dogs or some individual dogs have a high pain threshold, implying that they do not feel pain until the painful stimulus is much higher than for other dogs. If, on the other hand, an individual animal’s apparent ability to withstand pain is due to his pain tolerance, it would mean that most (or all) dogs feel the pain at same level, but some dogs can tolerate pain better than others.

Since we can’t ask a dog when he feels the pain, we have to rely on when he shows some physical sign of trying to avoid the pain as our indicator. We have no accurate way of knowing whether this avoidance-signal is his pain threshold or his pain tolerance level.

The ability to tolerate pain does not mean that the harmful aspects of pain are not present; it means only that the animal has the ability to adapt to them – perhaps internalizing the aftereffects of pain into more chronic physical and emotional diseases. While this may appear to be a subtle difference in semantics, it makes a world of difference in how pain is



**The memory of past treatments and anticipation of the ear cleaner lowers this dog’s pain tolerance.**



**Some dogs don’t display overt signs of pain no matter what. They may benefit from pain relief anyway.**

perceived and treated by the practitioner.

From the practitioner’s point of view, the tendency is to treat only those animals who are exhibiting signs of pain, to forego pain control for those other animals with high pain tolerance, and to discount any of the long-term consequences of subtle or hidden pain on the rest of the body.

The bottom line: Practitioners need to be aware of pain and its consequences, and dog caretakers need to be more demanding that their primary practitioner considers pain control when dealing with cases of trauma, surgery (routine or otherwise), or chronic disease.

## Chronic pain

All the above describes *acute* pain; *chronic* pain has a slightly different pattern. Chronic pain is any pain that persists beyond the time expected for an injury or illness to heal. With chronic pain, no longer can the pain be viewed as the symptom of another disease, but as an illness unto itself. Any pain that has persisted for six months or longer is considered to be chronic.

Chronic pain may cause the same sensations as acute pain – jabbing, throbbing, stinging, burning, sharp, dull, tingling, or aching. (While we can't be certain dogs can perceive pain as we do, their reactions to it indicate that they probably do.) Further, pain may be constant or it may come and go. Chronic pain often accompanies chronic diseases such as arthritis, cancer, diabetes, or some skin conditions, but long-term pain may also stem from the aftereffects of an accident, infection, or surgery.

In addition, each and every critter (including each human) has his or her personal ability to tolerate pain. There are two terms used to describe the way an individual feels and responds to pain: **Pain threshold** is that point where we feel the sensation of pain; **pain tolerance** is that point where we feel we must remove ourselves from the source of the pain.

Now, while the pain threshold may be relatively constant, an individual's ability to tolerate pain is dependent on many factors. Different pain stimuli may affect an

individual in different ways. Someone who can stoically leave his hand in ice water for long periods, for example, may want to scream from the pain of a minor needle prick. And, that same person may have "good" days and "bad" days – some days he can endure needle pricks with almost no sensation; other days are his "scream at the needle" days.

Dogs are exactly the same. Some are pain tolerant for one type of pain, while that same dog will go absolutely nutty over another type of pain. And as individuals, they can have their good (stoic) days and their bad (wimpy) days. No one knows quite why this happens in humans or dogs, but added emotions – fear, depression, anxiety, for example – may have something to do with a lowered pain tolerance.

Further, the very concept of pain and how we and our pets deal with it is related to the culture we were reared in, our gender, environmental factors, and the pain being suffered by others nearby.

Certain dog breeds are known for their stoicism under pain and others wilt at the mere thought of pain. In humans, men and women are apparently very different when it comes to pain tolerance, but this has not yet been shown in dogs.

Experimental evidence from trials on mice show that brain waves of those mice that were sitting placidly in a cage nearby, closely mirror the brain waves of the mice that were in obvious pain. Empathetic pain

is apparently a very real phenomenon.

Dogs *do* associate past painful experiences with the environment where they occurred, which is why the vet's office may not be one of their favorite places. I have found, though, that we can create a holistic and comfortable environment, even in a vet clinic where many of the dog's previous experiences were painful. All it takes is a soft rug to sit on instead of the cold metal tabletop, and perhaps some calming aromatherapy or flower essences added to the environment. Furthermore, animals who have experienced pain relief from past acupuncture or chiropractic treatments seem to be the most calm and accepting patients I have ever seen.

One more point: animals definitely react to the way their caretakers are acting, and if the caretaker seems to be overly concerned, his dog will respond in kind. Remember that emotions, even emotions of the folks or animals that are nearby, can alter pain receptors and pain pathways to make the pain seem worse. The calmer the caretaker remains, the calmer – and more pain free – the dog.

## Aftereffects of pain

Pain does not end with the pin prick; it is one of the primary stressors within the body. Pain interacts with and affects almost all body systems: musculoskeletal, immune, hormonal, and even the arrangement of the nerves themselves.

Pain disrupts normal function. A primary example here is that any pain of the muscles, joints, or bones will affect the gait and comfortable posture of the affected individual. Gastrointestinal pain may alter intestinal motility and/or the pain may change the amount or kind of digestive enzymes being supplied to the gut. And a normally balanced hormonal output can be altered by pain.

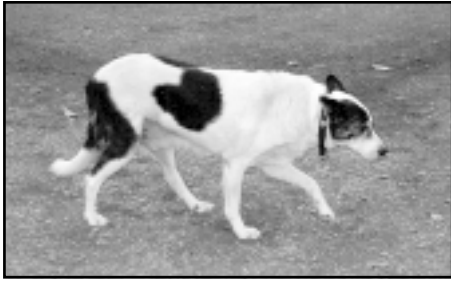
Any kind of pain, even minor pain, can be disruptive to normal sleep patterns. Loss of sleep, coupled with the anxiety of not knowing what is going on with one's body often leads to depression. While I'm not sure we can say dogs suffer from true depression as we understand it, they can certainly have the appearance of a "depressed" animal when they are in pain.

Chronic pain of any segment of the musculoskeletal system may lead to **compensation**. Out of necessity, wild animals are particularly adept at accepting pain, learning how to compensate for this pain, and moving on so they can perform the functions (however limited these functions



**Jenny Taylor, a holistic veterinarian in Oakland, California, uses aromatherapy in the exam rooms in her practice. And whenever possible, she examines and treats dogs on the floor, rather than the table. She finds that these techniques, as well as the acupuncture she often uses, reduces her patients apprehension and thus pain.**





**Dogs with back or hip pain may start pacing when they walk, swinging forward lateral pairs of legs instead of using the diagonal pairs.**

become) that keep them alive. Four-legged animals thus quickly learn how walk and run on three legs to avoid putting pressure on the one sore leg. This compensatory gait is beneficial early on, but if it lasts long enough, the body begins to form a fibrous (and eventually bony) protective shield that spans over the sore joint.

In addition, the animal's patterns of posture and gait will be altered, and these alterations may occur far away from the original site of pain. As an example, a dog's sore hind leg may cause it to bend his neck to create a balance that reduces the painful pressure on the sore leg. Animal chiropractors are well aware of how compensation often affects areas of the body that are far away from the initial site of the injury, and chiropractic adjustments are often necessary at the "faraway" site as well as at the site of the injury.

## Recognizing pain

Symptoms that may indicate your dog is in pain include:

### ■ Behavioral changes

Licking and yawning are signs that a dog is nervous. Dogs who hurt do not want to be picked up, or even be touched, so they may lick their lips or yawn whenever you or anyone else tries to approach them. Dogs in pain are typically restless. If they can move without pain – for example, after a painful surgery – they will be up and down, up and down; they pace; they can't sleep; and they can't seem to get comfortable in any one position.

Some dogs will want to hide from any contact that might possibly hurt, and they may become aggressively grouchy to avoid that contact. Fear biting is common with dogs that hurt. Other animals may whine and want to be constantly held.

All these behaviors are a result of the animal being out of control of its own body

– a forerunner to becoming depressed, mentally and physically.

### ■ Abnormal gait or posture

Pain anywhere in the feet, joints, muscles, tendons, ligaments, or spinal column may cause the dog to have a noticeable limp.

However, dogs are so adept at compensating for the pain (see above), it may be difficult to detect an abnormal gait pattern. Pain may also be detected by observing a stiffness or reluctance to move or rise from sleeping, or when climbing stairs or trying to jump onto the couch or bed.

Pained animals may stand off center (trying to ease the pressure from the painful leg), carry their head or tail off center, or sit or lie down (or get up) only on one side of their body. Animals with hip or knee pain may "bunny hop" (a gait of the hind legs that looks like, well, like a bunny hopping), or they may "puppy sit" – a posture where they sit on their butts with hind legs extended to one side.

### ■ Vocalization

How an animal "talks" about his pain is perhaps the most variable of any of his symptoms. Some animals will not vocalize, no matter how much pain they are in. (These are the dogs we typically say have a high pain threshold. In reality, these "stoics" likely still feel the pain, but they have a high tolerance to that pain.) Other dogs tell you straight away they are in pain: whining, crying, moaning, groaning, yipping, growling, and/or howling. Again, the amount of verbal complaining you hear from the dog depends on the individual, not necessarily on the amount of pain he is experiencing.

### ■ Other pain symptoms

Animals who are experiencing abdominal pain are often reluctant to move. They may refuse to eat, and they may moan or bite at their abdomens or flanks. They may also vomit or have diarrhea. Chest pains cause shortness of breath and possibly an increased heart rate, both of which result in an inability to exercise. Some dogs don't want to eat when they hurt. Increased heart and respiratory rates are fairly consistent symptoms of pain, but they may not be evident to the casual observer.

There are two symptoms of pain (and relief from pain) that my clients have taught me over the years. One has to do with the dog's eyes. A dog's caretaker often notices that a dog in evident pain has "cloudy" eyes, or eyes that seem "empty," as if there is

nothing behind them. In my practice, I used chiropractic adjustments, acupuncture, herbs, and nutritional supplements, and after treatments, the caretakers would often report that their dogs' eyes "brightened up," that they were clearer, or seemed to have more "energy."

The other is a comment I've heard frequently after I had begun treatment on a canine patient: "I've got my dog back!" Interestingly, as a practitioner, I was not often able to see any noticeable difference in the patient; the dog might have almost the same amount of limp as when I began therapy. But, there was something about the dog that the owner recognized – something that told him that the dog was more "normal" than before.

## Conventional pain medicine

Analgesics are medicines that are meant to relieve pain. There are three major categories of conventional medicines for pain control: local anesthetics, opioids, and non-opioids. This last category includes a large class of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), but also covers common but not fully understood drugs like acetaminophen and aspirin, which defy categorization.

Local anesthetics provide pain relief by blocking pain stimuli from reaching the brain and spinal cord. They differ from the opioids and NSAIDs in that they abolish pain rather than diminish it. An example of a local anesthetic is lidocaine.

The action of enkephalins and endorphins on pain receptors is the body's intrinsic pain-suppressing system; it is the activity of these two hormones that makes the body feel good after jogging, sex, or an acupuncture treatment. Opioids (or opiates) bind to enkephalin receptors along the pain pathways in the central nervous system, which effectively prevents the transmission of pain signals. Examples of opioids include morphine, codeine, methadone, Demerol, and Darvon.

Most of the NSAIDs work by blocking the action of the pain-causing prostaglandins, and some of them achieve this by blocking the action of the prostaglandin-producing cyclooxygenase enzymes (Cox-1, 2, and 3). Examples of NSAIDs include ibuprofen and naproxen. Aspirin is considered by some to be an NSAID, but others disagree.

While all these have been shown to be very effective, *most* of the time, there can be a tremendous variance among individu-

als. In fact, some of the analgesics may have an opposite effect on some individuals, actually causing *more* pain. In addition, each analgesic has a pretty potent list of adverse side effects. Not long ago, on an electronic bulletin board about veterinary complementary and alternative medicine, a number of veterinarians exchanged stories about their experiences with delayed healing for wounds or surgical incisions when the animal is given NSAIDs. In all cases, you will need to discuss with your veterinarian the potential risk/benefit ratio whenever you are choosing an analgesic for your dog.

## Natural pain relievers

Fortunately, there are many alternative ways to approach pain control, and in my experience these are often not only less dangerous, they also can be more effective.

As a general rule, alternative medicines take longer to act, and may not have the depth of activity that conventional medicines do. However, they are typically much safer to use, will not be addictive, and tend to have a much broader spectrum of activity – that is, they may help to relieve several kinds of pain, and they may also help alleviate some of the emotional components of pain as well as its physical aspects.

Your holistic vet should be able to advise you on the best applications, dosages, and methods of use for the alternative forms of pain control.

■ **Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM):** Practitioners of TCM believe that pain is caused by a blockage of the flow of *chi* or “energy.” Thus when a joint hurts, for example, it is because the flow of *chi* is stuck there, causing pain. TCM uses acupuncture needles (and herbal remedies) to help recreate a normal flow of *chi* through areas of pain. In addition, acupuncture causes the release of enkephalins and endorphins, the body’s natural pain relievers.

■ Those who employ **chiropractic** believe that joints that are stuck – so that their normal range of motion has been altered – change the response of the pain receptors in the area, often causing pain. Also, a “stuck” spinal vertebrae that can’t move properly may also alter the pain messages being sent to the brain. Chiropractic adjustments are intended to restore the joint to its normal motion so that all nerve impulses are restored to normal.

■ I’ve had phenomenal results when us-

ing the **combination of acupuncture and chiropractic** for treating pain. The most dramatic results have come when treating musculoskeletal dysfunctions such as arthritis, but results when treating some deep or abdominal pains have also been very rewarding.

■ **Homeopathy:** One of the best of the natural pain medications, especially for bruises, sprains, or trauma to the eyes, is the homeopathic remedy Arnica. Hypericum, Bryonia, and Ruta are also excellent for many painful conditions.

■ There are several **herbal remedies** that have a long history of use for alleviating pain. Gastric pain may be eased with antispasmodics such as caraway, ginger, valerian, and wild yam. Willow bark contains the substance that is the active ingredient in aspirin. Herbal oats act as a nervine – a substance that balances the nervous system. Capsicum (red pepper) is an effective topical remedy for painful skin lesions, and it can be taken internally to help ease painful, arthritic joints.

■ **Others:** Supplements such as glucosamine, omega 3 and 6 fatty acids, B vitamins, inositol, and lipoic acid have proven beneficial for treating pain. It has been shown that glucosamine decreases the amount of NSAIDs needed to control pain in joint conditions, at least in humans, and it is likely that many of these supplements have similar beneficial properties.

Don’t forget that there is almost always a mental or emotional component to pain, so calming herbs can be extremely helpful. Flower essence remedies are directed toward emotional distress. For example, the remedy Agrimony works well for the dog who appears to be distressed due to pain. And sometimes a calming aroma, such as lavender, wafted throughout dog’s resting places in the house, clears and calms the mind made nervous from pain.

## Conclusion

There is evidence from medical research on humans that preventing pain is more productive than trying to stop it, that pain diminishes the body’s ability to heal, and that the recovery from any painful illness can be sped along with the addition of pain relievers. We have learned that beginning pain preventative therapy early, before the pain begins, is more effective than if we wait until the patient “tells” us he is in pain.

We also know, because humans can talk to us and tell us, that any surgery and many chronic diseases are painful, including arthritis, diabetes, and certainly cancers. Some of these can be *extremely* painful. We know that severe pain can incite the inflammatory response and a stress reaction, which then induce the release of cortisol, diminish the immune response, induce tissue breakdown, and cause energy mobilization. Taken together, these and other responses to pain can actually shorten the patient’s lifespan as well as diminishing his remaining quality of life.

And so, putting all this together, it just makes sense to begin pain control whenever there is the likelihood of pain (surgery, trauma, arthritis, cancers, etc.). We need to begin it early on and continue it as long as periodic reassessments indicate that pain may still be present.

But in almost all cases, natural remedies are preferred – because they are non-addictive, likely to provide a broader spectrum of activity (reaching more pain mechanisms than conventional medicines, which are programmed to work at one site only), and there is no known rebound or tolerance effect (opiates, after prolonged use, may actually produce more pain rather than relieving it).

Finally, and probably the most important, many of the natural remedies actually enhance healing, whereas conventional pain relievers typically retard the healing process. Examples here include acupuncture, which enhances the immune response; chiropractic, which returns joints to a more normal function, thus allowing the animal to move his joints and restore healing circulation and joint fluids; herbal remedies, which often contain healing antioxidants; and supplements (such as glucosamine), which help to regenerate joint cartilage.

Having said all this, it is still important to use whatever pain reliever works. If you and your holistic vet feel that your dog needs a more potent analgesic, then by all means use it. Ongoing evaluation is most important, to help you determine which analgesic works best to relieve your dog’s pains. 🐾

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*Dr. Kidd's Guide to Herbal Dog Care* and *Dr. Kidd's Guide to Herbal Cat Care* are published by Storey Books, (800) 441-5700 or storeybooks.com

*The Encyclopedia of Natural Pet Care* and *Natural Remedies for Dogs and Cats*, by WDJ contributor CJ Puotinen, are available from DogWise, (800) 776-2665 or dogwise.com. Puotinen is also author of several books about human health including *Natural Relief from Aches and Pains*, available from your favorite bookseller.

### HOLISTIC VETERINARIANS

American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association (AHVMA), 2214 Old Emmorton Road, Bel Air, MD 21015. (410) 569-0795. Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for a list of holistic veterinarians in your area, or search ahvma.org

### TRAINING AND INSTRUCTION

Pat Miller, CPDT, Peaceable Paws Dog and Puppy Training, Hagerstown, MD. Train with modern, dog-friendly positive methods. Group and private training, Rally, behavior modification, workshops, intern and apprentice programs. Call her at (301) 582-9420 or see peaceablepaws.com

The Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT) has references to member trainers in your area. Call (800) 738-3647 or see apdt.com.

Please note: APDT is dedicated to building better trainers through education, promoting dog-friendly methods, and encouraging their use. APDT's membership is composed of trainers from across the spectrum of training philosophies. Membership does not necessarily ensure all members employ similar training methods, nor does APDT set standards of skill or competence. APDT encourages (but does not require) its members to use training methods that use reinforcement and rewards, not punishment, to achieve desired behavior.

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*How to identify and select healthy and irresistible treats.*

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*How to get your new puppy off on the right foot in your home.*

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