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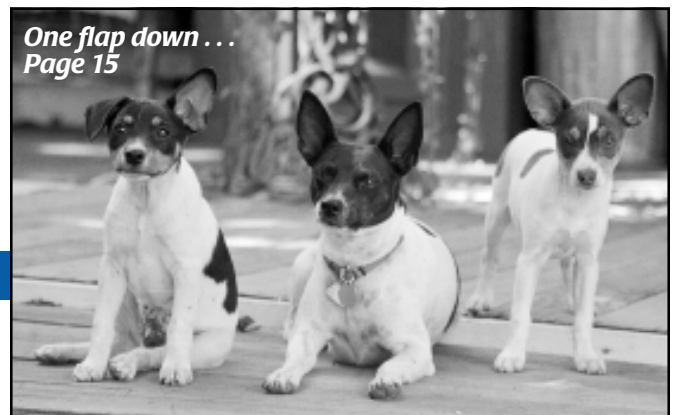
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To Respectfully Disagree

In favor of toning down critical rhetoric.

BY NANCY KERNS

Last month, a reader or two chastised me about not giving props to New York shelter operator Sue Sternberg. We had run an article about minimum mental health guidelines for shelter dogs, and a few people felt it was unfair that Sue's name had not been mentioned as an early and ardent contributor to that cause. I extended my apologies – Sternberg's work in that area is well known – and added that I respected her work.

In doing so I apparently stepped on the third rail of the dog world!

The moment the September issue was put online (this generally occurs a week or two before the printed version appears in your mailboxes), I was receiving scathing letters about the *other* thing Sternberg is known for: the temperament tests she developed and promotes. These tests are intended to help shelter workers decide (in the common event of having more dogs than space, staff, and funding to care for them) which dogs are most likely to succeed in adoptive homes, and which should be euthanized as unadoptable or overly difficult to rehabilitate.

Judging from the letters I have received, some of you *strongly* believe that *no* dogs should be euthanized by shelters. Some of you believe that even if some dogs *must* be euthanized in shelters, they shouldn't be selected using Sternberg's criteria. Of course those opinions, and others, are perfectly valid.

However, the anger and hatred expressed in some of the letters I have received actually shocked me. One of the letters I received referred to "atrocities" and the "reign of terror that Sue Sternberg carries out..." My expression of respect for Sternberg was deemed

"unconscionable and certainly out of character for your publication..." In fact, several people thought it warranted the immediate termination of their subscriptions!

Personally, I think it's reasonable to have respect for someone even if I don't agree with everything they espouse. (In fact, I can't think of a single trainer or veterinarian with whom I agree about *everything*.) I also think it's relatively rare to find a topic, person, or company that deserves unadulterated opprobrium.

Keep this in mind when you read about disasters in dog food manufacturing (page 7). There have been a few famous incidents in which improperly processed foods actually killed dogs – and probably many more that nobody ever knew about in which dogs were made very ill. (We published an article in the July 2000 issue about a dog who was made ill from food containing aflatoxin, a toxin excreted by mold that grows on grain. It doesn't smell bad, nor will the food necessarily look moldy, so a dog will keep eating it – and getting sicker.)

My take-home point in this article is that owners need to be aware that it's *possible* for a dog's food to make him sick, so if he *does* get sick, they *stop* feeding him whatever they were feeding him, investigate, and make sure it's safe before feeding the same type of food again.

Believe me; I'm not an industry apologist. But my point is certainly *not* to condemn the pet food industry, or put any company that has ever had a manufacturing accident out of business. I'm sure that the company executives, like Sue Sternberg, actually *like* dogs and would like to see as many of them as possible living long, happy, and healthy lives. *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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Mind Games

Occupy your dog's brain to get through periods of restricted activity.

BY PAT MILLER

We recently had our new Cardigan Welsh Corgi spayed. When we picked Lucy up from the vet hospital, we were handed an instruction sheet that included the dreaded phrase, "Restrict activity for 10 to 14 days." In the few short weeks that this little dynamo had been a member of the Miller family, I had already realized how difficult it would be to keep Lucy under wraps.

We were lucky that it was only 10 to 14 days. Many canine injuries and ailments require much longer incarceration. Our 75-pound Cattle Dog mix had knee surgery (a tibial plateau leveling osteotomy – TPLO) several years ago. We had to keep Tucker quiet for a full six weeks following his operation! Fortunately, he was older and more



An ideal trick to teach dogs who are on severely restricted activity is "Play Dead!" Trainer Sandi Thompson lets Tater see she has treats, and then waits for Tater to offer an approximation of "dead."



Once Tater offers "dead," Thompson shapes the behavior into a longer and more realistic-looking "dead" by clicking and giving Tater treats for an increasingly longer and more motionless performance.

settled than our adolescent Corgi, and our vet supplied us with tranquilizers to keep him quiet for the first few days, but it was still a large-scale challenge.

What *do* you do when your vet tells you your dog can't run around for a period of time? You get creative. You can, of course, arm yourself with an endless supply of stuffed Kongs and other such interactive toys (see "Toys to Keep 'Em Busy," May 2004), but even those get old after a while.

You can, and should, use calming massage techniques to help your dog adjust to confinement, but that's rarely enough.

You can beg your vet for tranquilizers (for the dog, not for you!) and she may give you a few to get you through the first critical days of a leg repair or other major surgery, but probably not enough to get you off the hook.

Eventually, you're likely to have to do something to tire your dog out. The good news is that mental gymnastics can be just as tiring for a dog as physical exercise, and if you can keep your dog's brain occupied, you *can* make it through the torture of "restricted activity."

Free shaping

Canine incarceration is the perfect oppor-

tunity to introduce your dog to some free shaping exercises. Shaping is the process of taking a complex behavior and breaking it into little pieces, then marking and rewarding each piece until you work up to the whole behavior.

With free shaping, you do *no* luring whatsoever. You simply take a behavior that the dog offers you and gradually shape it into something by marking (generally with an audible marker such as a click! of a clicker or an exclamation such as "Yes!") and rewarding increasingly large, intense, or extended examples of the behavior. You can use this method to mark *any* behavior your dog happens to engage in – a sneeze, a blink, a yawn, putting his ears up or down – and put it on cue.

Free shaping has several benefits in addition to exercising your dog's brain. It teaches you to be patient, gives you a real opportunity to watch your dog think and solve problems, and it encourages your dog to offer behaviors.

You have to be a bit of a student of animal behavior to appreciate free shaping. I never introduce it in my "basic good manners classes," since most dog owners need to be committed to training beyond basics in order to have the patience and under-

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WHAT YOU CAN DO . . .

- **Teach your dog some of the basics, like sit, down, stay, and targeting, before a lay-up, so he's prepared to play more advanced stationary games with you.**
- **When you know in advance your dog will be on restriction, stock up on puzzles and other interactive toys well ahead of time so you're not scrambling to find them at the last minute.**
- **Install a good foundation of loose-leash walking so you can take your dog for walks when he's ready for limited exercise, without worrying that it will be a big struggle (see "Loosen Up!" WDJ November 2000).**

standing to do this. If you are a Whole Dog Journal reader, you probably are committed, so let's get started!

Any one of a number of random movements

Here is a good exercise for dogs who are on total restriction. Your goal is to get your dog to offer one of these behaviors on cue – Nose Lick, Head Turn, Ear Flick, or Paw Lift – without any luring or prompting on your part. Here's how:

- Sit on a chair with your dog in front of you. If he wants to jump on you, put him on a tether and sit just beyond his reach.
- Wait for him to offer one of the four behaviors.
- When he does, click (or use some other

reward marker, such as a mouth click or the word "Yes!"), and then quickly give him a treat. Once you have clicked and treated one of the four behaviors, stay with that one; don't click and treat randomly for any of the other four.

- Wait for him to repeat the chosen behavior. When he does, click and treat.
- Keep doing this until you see him start to offer the chosen behavior deliberately, in order to make you click and treat.
- Put the behavior on an "intermittent schedule of reinforcement." That is, click and treat *most* head turns, but occasionally skip one, then click (and treat) the next offered one. Gradually make your schedule longer and more random by skipping just one more frequently, and sometimes

skipping two, then four, then one, then none, then three – so your dog never knows when the next one is coming.

This makes the behavior very durable – resistant to extinction. Like playing a slot machine, your dog will keep offering the behavior because he knows it'll pay off one of these times! It's important to put the behavior on an intermittent schedule before raising the shaping criteria so he doesn't give up when you are no longer clicking each try.

- Decide if the behavior is fine as it is, or if you want to shape it into something bigger. A Paw Lift, for example, can be shaped into Paw On Your Knee, Shake, High Five, or even Salute. Head Turn can be shaped into a Spin. Ear Flick could become Injured Ear, while Nose Lick might become Stick Out Your Tongue.

101 Things to Do With a Box

I first heard about this brain-teasing, free shaping exercise from Deb Jones, PhD, a wonderful positive trainer in Stow, Ohio.

Have your clicker ready. You are going to click and treat your dog for *any* behavior related to the box. With no preconceived idea about what behavior you want, set a cardboard box on the floor in front of your dog. Many dogs will sniff a new object with interest – click and treat when he does. Then watch him closely, and continue to click and treat any box-related behavior. See what your dog will give you!

If you're not getting a lot of box behavior, click and treat even tiny movements – looking at the box, moving toward, or even looking in the general direction of the box.

Be careful you don't cheat! It's tempting to "help" your dog by pointing toward the box, or moving around it. Don't! You can help by looking at the box instead of looking at your dog, and you can stand on the opposite side of the box, but anything more than that is too much. Remember, you want your dog to

learn to think – and he won't learn if you hold his paw and show him what to do; he'll just wait for you to bail him out.

"Crossover dogs" (dogs whose early training was force-based, and whose later training was reward-based) can be particularly slow to offer behaviors because, when they were subject to punishment for doing the "wrong" thing, they learned it's easiest to stay out of trouble by doing nothing. Free shaping exercises are great for helping crossover dogs get over that inhibition – providing you don't help them too much, but rather take your time and let them think things out for themselves.

When your dog offers a lot of box-related behavior, then you can decide to shape it into something "official" if you like. If you are more of a type-A, goal-oriented kind of person, this

may help you make more sense of the Box game. Be willing to think *outside* the box, though – there are lots of behaviors your dog can do beyond just jumping in and sitting in it – although, if it doesn't interfere with whatever physical condition your dog is recovering from, it sure is cute!



At first, Tater just looks at Sandi. Eventually, though, she gets bored and turns toward the box. Sandi clicks the clicker and gives Tater a treat. Ah! Immediately Tater understands there is *something* she is supposed to do with that box. She tries a number of things – walking around it, tipping it with her nose, scratching at it, looking in it. We liked Tater in the box best!



■ Determine the “average” response your dog is giving you. If you want to shape Head Turn into Spin, envision a 360-degree circle around your dog. Perhaps your dog is offering head turns anywhere from 5 degrees to 75 degrees, but the average is 45 degrees. Now you are going to click and treat only those head turns of 45 degrees or better.

Over time, your dog’s average will move up as you click only the better attempts. When that happens, raise your criteria again – perhaps it *was* a range of 30-95 degrees, and now you’ll click only those head turns that reach 60 degrees or better. Keep raising the criteria – gradually, so you don’t lose your dog’s interest – until you have a complete Spin.

■ Now give it a name (Spin!) and start using the verbal cue just before your dog offers the behavior. Eventually you will be able to elicit a Spin with the verbal cue – all by free shaping.

You can figure out how to do this with the other three behaviors. If your dog has to be kept confined for a long period, you might have time to teach all four, one after the other. Lucky you!

More shut-in games

There are a number of other low-activity games you can play with your shut-in dog, such as:

■ **Targeting/object discrimination.** Teach your dog to “Target” on cue by giving him a click and treat every time he touches his nose to a designated spot, such as the palm of your hand or the end of a target stick (see “Right on Target,” WDJ March 2001). As soon as he can do that easily, add the cue “Touch!” just before his nose touches your hand (or the stick).

When he will target on cue, transfer the targeting behavior to an object, by holding the object in your hand and asking him to “Touch.” When he’s targeting well to the object, give it a name: “Bell, Touch!” or “Ball, Touch!” When he knows the names of several different objects, you can have him pick out the one you ask for (see “Higher Education,” April 2004).

■ **Take It.** This behavior is a piece of the retrieve, but you can do it without the run-after-and-retrieve part (see “Does Your Dog Get It?” September 1999). It’s also useful for teaching your dog to pick up dropped items and carry things for you. Just show your dog something you know he’ll want –

like a treat or a favorite toy – and ask him to “Take It!” Odds are he will, happily. When he’s good at taking his favorite things, try a slightly less-beloved toy, and work your way down to non-toy objects. Click and treat each “Take It!” When he’s good at “Take It!” you can gradually extend the amount of time before you click and you’ll begin teaching him to “Hold It!”

■ **Give.** This is also part of the retrieve, and is useful for getting your dog to let go of “forbidden objects” without a fuss. Give your dog something he’s *allowed* to have and that he likes a lot, like his favorite toy. Then offer him a handful of yummy treats and say “Give!” When he drops the object to eat the treats, pay them out slowly and pick up the object with your *other* hand while he’s occupied eating. Then, when he looks up, say “Take It!” and give him back the object. Double bonus – he gets the yummy treats *and* he gets his toy back!

Practice this until he’ll give up the object on cue. Next time he gets his chompers on a forbidden object, play the “Give” game and he’ll give it up without playing keep-away. (*Note: If your dog is a resource guarder, this may not be a safe game to play. In that case, you’ll need to modify the resource guarding behavior first. See “Thanks for Sharing,” September 2001.*)

■ **Leave It.** This game teaches your dog to take his attention away from something *before* he has it in his mouth (see “Off Limits,” January 2002).

Start with a “forbidden object” that you can hide under your shoe, such as a cube of freeze-dried liver. Show it to your dog, say “Leave It!” and place it securely under your foot so he knows it’s there but can’t get it. Let him dig, chew, and claw at your foot to his heart’s content (wear sturdy shoes!) until he loses interest. The *instant* he looks away, click and treat. As long as he’s not trying to get the liver, keep clicking and treating. This is called “differential reinforcement for any other behavior” (DRO) – you are rewarding any behavior *other than* trying to get the treat.

When he’s leaving your foot alone, uncover the liver cube slightly, and continue your DRO. If he tries to get the treat, just quietly (but quickly!) cover it back up with your foot and wait for him to remove his attention again.

When he’ll reliably leave liver on the floor and he’s ready for more strenuous activities, generalize the behavior to other

situations by using a leash to gently restrain him from real-life temptations while using DRO to reward him as soon as he removes his attention from the cookie in the toddler’s hand, the ham sandwich on the coffee table, or the dog on leash on the other side of the street.

■ **Puzzle Games.** There are a number of interactive toys on the market that require your dog to think and perform a mechanical puzzle-solving skill (see “Toys To Keep ‘Em Busy,” May 2004). Unlike stuffed Kongs and Buster Cubes, your dog will need your active participation with these games. As soon as he solves the puzzle, he’ll need you to put the toy back together so he can do it again. They are great fun, and one more way to encourage your dog to quietly think and tire his brain.

■ **Tug.** Gentle games of Tug, with strict rules, may be a useful way to burn off some incarceration energy. (See “Tug: Play it By the Rules,” page 12 of this issue). Check with your veterinarian first to be sure this won’t be a problem for your dog’s particular condition.

Benefits of down time

There are lots of other low-activity exercises and games you can play with your dog to help pass the long hours and days of restricted activity. It’s a great time to work on counter-conditioning and desensitization if he’s at all touchy about nail trimming, grooming, or any other handling procedures (see “Touch Me, Touch Me Not,” WDJ August 2004).

You can also spend this time transforming him into a tricks champion, teach him ‘Possum, Relax, Rest Your Head, Crawl, Reverse, Speak, Count, Nod, Shake Your Head, Kisses, Hugs . . . the list is virtually endless. If the two of you put your minds to it, at the end of a six-week lay-up, or even a shorter bout of nasty weather that keeps you shut indoors, you and your dog should be very well educated! 🐾

Pat Miller, CPDT, is WDJ’s Training Editor. She is also author of The Power of Positive Dog Training, and Positive Perspectives: Love Your Dog, Train Your Dog. For book purchase or contact information, see “Resources,” page 24.

Thanks for Sandi Thompson of Sirius Puppy Training, Berkeley, CA, for demonstrating for us. See page 24 for contact info.

When Foods Go Bad

Know how to protect your dog from commercial food disasters.

BY NANCY KERNS

The idea is shocking to many dog owners: Their dog's food can make him sick? Of *course* it can – all foods, whether intended for humans or pets, can be dangerous if they were improperly manufactured or stored. It's interesting, however, how few people suspect their dog's food when he becomes ill, especially if they have been feeding the same food for years and years.

It's nice that some companies have engendered such loyalty – to be held above suspicion in the face of evidence to the contrary! – but the fact is, manufacturing accidents can and do happen.

Far more frequently, though, foods can become harmful to your dog's health due to poor handling or storage practices.

If you are aware of the potential dangers of tainted dog food, and know how to prevent them or rapidly respond to them, your dog should be safe from harm.

Manufacturing problems

Despite the fact that we've all heard horror stories about glass shards found in jars of baby food or deep-fried rodents in an order of takeout chicken, few people seem to be aware that their *dog's* food could contain hazards, too. But accidents do happen. Every pet food maker has war stories to tell about disasters they averted (sometimes at great cost) and smaller-scale quality-control failures that cost them clients. A partial list of the most common things that can go wrong in the production of dog food include:

- Spoiled or tainted ingredients are used, including rancid fats, spoiled proteins, and/or moldy grains. Some molds excrete toxins (collectively called mycotoxins); some mycotoxins, such as vomitoxin, can make dogs very ill. Others, such as aflatoxin, can kill. (See "Hidden Killers in Dog Food," WDJ July 2000.)

- Ingredients are included in excessive

(toxic) amounts, including vitamin/mineral premixes, preservatives, coloring agents

- Ingredients that are not supposed to be in a formula are included by error (this is dangerous to a dog with a severe allergy to an ingredient that is not on the product label)

- Foreign object contamination: plastic, glass, metal, rodents, insects, pesticides, cleaning agents

- The food doesn't "cook" at adequate temperatures to result in a complete bacterial kill

- The plant's equipment is not cleaned adequately or frequently enough, resulting in contaminated product

- An inadequately dried dry food, resulting in the growth of mold in the bags.

Even so, dog owners should understand that manufacturers are highly motivated to produce the best, most consistent products possible. Problems that escape detection until they end up in a dog's bowl somewhere are the stuff of manufacturers' nightmares. This is especially true for companies who aim their efforts at the top end of the pet food market. Failure to deliver a less-than-perfectly manufactured product is especially wounding to those who have spent fortunes on "human grade" ingredients and whose literature promises the best results.

And, fortunately, most of the potential manufacturing problems are prevented or corrected and kept from harming dogs by the manufacturers' mile-long list of hazard analysis and quality control procedures. Frankly, inspections of manufacturing plants by state officials are infrequent, but it behooves plant operators (especially facilities that manufacture high-quality, high-priced foods) to pursue certification by more stringent inspectors, such as the American Institute of Baking.

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WHAT YOU CAN DO . . .

- **Buy fresh food. Check the "best if used by" date on the bag.**
- **Visually inspect the food – it shouldn't be dusty or moldy. Smell it – it shouldn't smell rancid. Discuss any irregularity with the maker before you decide whether to feed it.**
- **Store dry food in its original bag, in a cool, dry place. Ideally, keep the bag in an airtight container.**
- **If your dog has an adverse health event that could possibly be related to the food, withdraw the food immediately. Contact the manufacturer and report the event as well as the product's date-code. If the symptoms are serious, get your dog to a vet, fast, and put your vet in contact with the manufacturer.**
- **Pay attention if your dog is reluctant or slow to eat his food. It may be rancid or oxidized.**

However, if you are aware that problems with dog food production can and do occur, you can take steps that may prevent those problems from inflicting harm to your dog.

If it doesn't look right . . .

First and foremost, it's important to **withhold any food from your dog that doesn't look right**. The presence of foreign objects, a coating of powdery or hairy mold, and

even a significant deviation from the food's usual color can signify something amiss with the food's production.

If you see anything unusual about your dog's regular food, call the maker's toll-free number, printed on the bag or can of most commercial foods, and talk to a representative about it. (If the package does not list a phone number for the maker, call the retailer that sold you the food and enlist his help in reaching the manufacturer. Usually, the retailer will have a number for his salesperson, who will work quickly to put you in touch with his employer.)

The company should be able to provide an explanation and offer remediation. First, though, they will need to confirm that you do, in fact, have some of their food. To do this, they will need information from the product label so they can determine when and where the food was made. For this reason, **you must have and keep the bag or**

can until you have fed all the product it contains.

The importance of this cannot be overstated. "Without the date-code information (from the label), the manufacturer is totally blind," says Russell Armstrong, president and co-founder of VeRus Pet Foods, of Abingdon, Maryland. In fact, he adds, every food maker has had the experience of trying to deal with a dog owner who insists their pet became ill after eating the company's food, but who can provide no proof of ever having purchased it.

If, in contrast, an owner is able to provide a food maker with the date-code information from the food in question, the maker can check its database for any other reports of problems with that batch. If an investigation is needed, the maker can even go to its storehouse of samples from that batch and have them examined and/or tested for the irregularity seen by the dog owner.

"I require my manufacturers to pull samples from every 1,000 pounds of product," says Frank Cook, vice president of Natural Balance Pet Foods Inc., of Pacoima, California. "Usually, for our products, our co-packer (contracted manufacturer) runs about 80,000 pounds (in a batch). I have them pull two samples every 1,000 pounds. One is tested, and one is shelved for the lifespan of the product. Should there be any problem with that product down the road, we always have a sample to test."

Often, in the case of a foreign object in the food or food that is suspected in making a dog ill, the maker will ask the consumer to send the remainder of the product back to the company for testing and analysis. This needs to be done, but the consumer should be a little cautious, warns Armstrong. "I think it's important to send the manufacturer some of the food – or the foreign object, if that's what the trouble is.

"Adverse Events" in the American Pet Food Industry

1995, NATURE'S RECIPE

Nature's Recipe is currently owned by Del Monte Foods Company, who picked up the brand in a giant merger between pet food subsidiaries of Del Monte and H.J. Heinz; the latter picked up the pieces of the company left over from a gigantic recall of product in 1995 due to the presence of vomitoxin found in some of its foods. In the face of hundreds of complaints of vomiting from dog owners, the company recalled over 16,000 tons of food, from all over the U.S., Asia, and Europe, at a total cost of over \$20 million dollars.

1998, DOANE PRODUCTS COMPANY

Today, the company is known as Doane Pet Care, a result of a merger between Doane Products and Windy Hill Pet Food. Now, as then, Doane is one of the largest makers of private-label pet food in North America and Europe. They make store-brand foods for hundreds of customers in the U.S., including mass market retailers (most notably Wal-Mart), and giant grocery store chains (including Kroger, Albertson's, Safeway, Winn-Dixie, and Food Lion). They also make food sold under their own label, Trail Blazer Dog Foods.

In 1998, Doane Products Company announced a recall of all dry dog food produced at its Temple, Texas, plant between July 1 and August 31 of that year. Aflatoxins had been found in the food, and ultimately were found to be responsible for the death of at least 25 dogs. Given that Doane is a high-volume manufacturer, the recall affected 54 different brands and varieties of dog food – a total of some 1.3 million bags of food.

2003, GO! NATURAL

In October 2003, Petcurean Pet Nutrition, of British Columbia, initiated a voluntary recall of all its Go! Natural dog and cat foods, after it received reports of seven dog deaths that followed

consumption of Go! Natural. Fifteen tons of product were recalled from more than 60 retail stores, and the company conducted an immediate public relations drive, via television, radio, and newspapers, to alert veterinarians to potential problems, and to make sure pet owners stopped feeding and returned any food they may have already purchased.

Five different lots of the food were implicated in the illness or death of a disputed number of dogs and cats. An FDA report subsequent to that agency's investigation noted reports of illness or injury in at least 48 dogs and 10 cats, including deaths of at least 14 dogs. The incident was investigated extensively by the FDA, Petcurean, and Merrick Pet Foods, Inc., of Hereford, Texas, a co-packer who was manufacturing Petcurean's product temporarily while the Canadian company waited for the embargo of Canadian beef-based products to lift. Investigators tested the recalled food, food from affected pets' homes, and samples retained at the manufacturing plant, and reviewed information from all the veterinarians involved.

None of the investigations found any factor or combinations of factors that could have been responsible for the animals' dramatic illnesses and deaths. No toxins were found, nor were any nutrients found to be present in the food at toxic levels. Only one irregularity in the composition of the food was found – elevated levels of the preservative BHA in four lots of the suspect food. But the FDA report also stated that "no adverse effects would be expected, even at these elevated levels" of BHA.

Petcurean moved production of its foods back to Canada (the move back to Canada was planned prior to the incident). No other foods made by Merrick were implicated. A California law firm is representing a number of owners in a class action lawsuit against Merrick, Petcurean, and its major U.S. distributor, Pet Food Express, Ltd.

But you should realize that once you send it away, you don't have it anymore, and if a legal problem arises, you are going to wish you had your evidence back," says Armstrong.

His recommendation is to send just some of the suspect food back to the maker. In the case of a foreign object, take pictures or other documentation. "That way, if the manufacturer fails to test it, or reports that everything was perfectly fine, and you are skeptical or concerned whether you are getting the right answer, at least you have some product that you could send out for testing yourself," Armstrong advises.

Armstrong takes the approach that well-informed customers are the happiest and safest customers, so he encourages owners to let the company know about any anomaly seen in VeRus' products. In the best case scenario, he says, a call to the maker will calm the consumer's fears and educate them a little more about their dog's food.

"Even small things are worth a call to the maker," he says. "For example, if you notice discoloration in the product – it could be indicative of mold or rancidity, or it could be something innocuous. A change from winter wheat to summer wheat (or vice versa) can cause minor coloration changes; switching from dark meat to white meat can cause a kibble to change in color. Even changing the die on the extruder that shapes the food can make the appearance of the kibble change in size and color. Manufacturers should be able to give answers to those sorts of questions easily," he says.

Ceasing to feed the suspect food and contacting the manufacturer can also help the maker identify a lethal problem more quickly, potentially saving dogs' lives. L. Phillips Brown, DVM, technical advisor for Newman's Own Organics, of Aptos, California, says that all reputable pet food makers maintain a database of information about every report made by a client.

Look for Fresh Products

We've said this before but it bears repeating: When buying naturally preserved foods (like the kind we recommend in WDJ), look for products bearing "best if used by" dates that are at least a year away. Most dog food manufacturers use "best by" dates that are 18 to 24 months from product manufacture. You (and your dog!) want fresher products than that.

Some companies print dates of manufacture on the label, in addition to the "best if used by" dates and their coded information; we *love* that. And don't buy food that is close to its "best if used by" date.



Plastic Containers, Right and Wrong

The best way to store dry dog food is in its original bag, which is placed in a clean, airtight container to prevent insect or rodent contamination. Many people like to dump food out of the bag into another container. If you feel you must, make sure you buy a container made of FDA-approved food-grade plastic. All other plastic containers can leach the vitamin C out of the food into the plastic, speeding oxidation of the food and reducing its nutrient content.

See americanplasticscouncil.org for more information about food-grade plastics and safe food storage containers.

As the keeper of the "adverse events" database for Newman's Own Organics, Dr. Brown is in the perfect position to detect any trend that developed with a defective product, and take immediate action to analyze the problem. "The faster people contact us and let us know about problems, the quicker we could solve them, if need be," he says.

If it doesn't smell right . . .

If a food *looks* fine but *smells* bad when you open it – and, especially, if your dog seems reluctant or slow to dig into it – it's likely that the food's preservative and antioxidant agents have not performed as well as they should. The fats in the food may be rancid, making it unappealing, but not necessarily unhealthful. Oxidation of the fats in a food can result in a chemical chain reaction that leads to a rapid spreading of free radicals (peroxidation or auto-oxidation). The absorption of essential fatty acids and fat-soluble vitamins is significantly reduced in oxidized foods – defeating the purpose of buying that costly nutritious diet!

If a food is giving off a strong, chemical or rancid odor, it's probably not dangerous to feed to your dog, but it's certainly not what the manufacturer intended. "If it doesn't smell right, you shouldn't feed it," advises Armstrong. "My experience is, if a food is rancid, a dog won't eat it, even if he's a real chow hound."

Armstrong and several other pet food company executives admit that *all* makers of naturally preserved foods struggle with the task of preventing rancidity and oxidation in their products. "The one downside of natural preservation systems is that sometimes shelf life is shortened," says Dr. Brown. "Still, it's better than putting chemicals and artificial preservatives into our animals' tissues."

"In my opinion, the good food makers are all using natural preservatives, *not* BHA, BHT, or ethoxyquin. It *is* harder to preserve your food with natural preservatives, however; and it *is* more expensive," agrees Cook. "But there are a number of reasons for rancidity besides the failure of the manufacturer to get enough vitamin A or C in there. I'd guess that 99 percent is a storage issue. It could be a problem at the distribution level, such as improper stock rotation. It could be improper storage at the retail level, or, most likely, a problem in your home storage method."

Proper storage is important

No matter what type of preservatives are used in your dog's food, it can quickly turn rancid if exposed to oxygen and hot temperatures. Every dog owner should know proper food storage procedures, but very few take the time to locate (or allocate) a storage space in their homes that won't expose the food to dangerously high temperatures. Dog food is supposed to be stored "in a cool, dry place." That's *not* the garage, in many parts of the country.

"Where I live in southern California, my garage gets up to 110 degrees," says Cook. "Put that food into a plastic container out in the garage and you are just asking for trouble."

Plastic containers seem to be the bane of dog food manufacturers. Every representative we spoke to had horror stories that shared elements of plastic storage containers and sick dogs. They recognize that storing the food and scooping from the bag

can be a hassle, especially with big bags, but suggest that the bag is the best, safest place for the food.

“Dog food bags were designed to prevent anything from either entering into the food or exiting from the food,” explains Armstrong. “And the wrong type of plastic can actually speed the decay of the food. Some plastics can actually absorb much of the vitamin C out of the food; it leaches out and is sucked right into the plastic material. This, of course, affects the shelf life of the food; with the low levels of antioxidant vitamin C, the fat starts to oxidize and this accelerates the spoilage. It’s kind of like when you put tomato sauce in a plastic storage container, and you see the red residue in the plastic even after you wash it. That tells you the plastic is not ‘food-quality.’”

Cook emphasizes the hazard of unwashed plastic containers. “Many people dump new, fresh food on top of the remnants of old, rancid food. Those remnants of oxidizing old food can speed the oxidation of the new food,” he warns. Cook also prefers that owners keep dry food in its original bag, but if they have a food-grade plastic container, he recommends that they wash it out well and allow it to dry thoroughly before putting fresh food in it.

According to Armstrong, metal containers (such as trash cans) don’t necessarily cause spoilage, but they can affect the taste of the food. “It’s always best to leave the food in the bag, even if you keep the bag in a metal can to prevent rodents from getting in it,” he says. Plus, this solution keeps the date-code information handy. “If your dog has any sort of health problem while eating that food, you can quickly find the information the manufacturer will need to know to help identify the problem,” Armstrong advises.

What you should expect from the food maker

“Honesty.” That’s what Armstrong says is what an informed consumer should expect from a company to whom they are reporting an adverse health event possibly linked to its food. “The company should be as straightforward with the dog owner as possible. If they have received other reports similar to the one the consumer is making, they should tell the owner about the other reports,” he says. Comparing information may help the owners’ veterinarians treat affected dogs.

In return, however, Armstrong expects the consumer to be able to report critical

data about the food in question. “First, we need the date code from the bag of food,” he says. “If it’s a date code we’ve had any complaints about, we’ll let them know. Next, we’ll want to know where they bought the food – which store exactly, so we will be able to contact that store and alert them to possible problems. We’ll also need to know how long they’ve had the food, how much they have fed to their dog, and what the dog’s symptoms are. If they took their dog to the veterinarian, I need to know the vet’s name and phone number because I need to contact them.”

After gathering all the needed information, and asking for some of the suspect food (if needed), Armstrong tells the dog’s owner what he is going to do about the problem. “I let them know we’re going to send the food out for testing with the comparative product samples, and that I’ll let them know what the findings were. If they would like to return that bag to their retailer and exchange it, I encourage them to do so, but I ask them to please retain some of the product and the date-code information.”

Sometimes the problem is obvious, and tests are not needed to identify the cause of distress in the dogs that ate affected product. This was the case in one of the largest adverse events in the pet food industry, the Nature’s Recipe vomitoxin affair in 1995. Frank Cook, now vice president at Natural

Balance Pet Foods, Inc., was then the vice president of Nature’s Recipe. “We identified the problem immediately,” he says. “It wasn’t difficult to recognize it as vomitoxin (a toxin excreted by a mold growing on grain) because vomitoxin makes the dog vomit. And our consumers were all saying, ‘Hey, my dog is throwing up!’”

Cook and the other executives at the company announced a massive recall of the food – some 16,000 tons of food that were scattered all over the U.S., Asia, and Europe, at a total cost of over \$20 million dollars. They also hired a public relations firm (actually, the same outfit that helped Johnson & Johnson get through the Tylenol tampering murders in the early 1980s) to help them handle the resolution of the prob-

lem. The PR firm suggested that Nature’s Recipe should vigorously protect its good name by rushing uncontaminated product to every consumer who might possess affected product. “Every time someone called in with a complaint, we FedExed them a fresh bag the very next day,” says Cook. “It was very costly, and the event set the company on its heels, but it survived, and I think the reason it did was because we reacted so rapidly.”

Cook wryly admits that being an executive at the company during the event wasn’t the high point of his career, but adds, “We learned so much – and the whole industry learned with us. We learned a lot about the value of customer service, and how people will stick with you if you make things right as quickly as possible.”

The incident is undoubtedly why Cook is such a stickler for pulling so many

Repeat Offenders?

There’s a big difference between a company whose products are frequently problematic and one that has suffered a one-time adverse event, no matter how tragic. We propose that the victim of a single event disaster may well be in the best position to learn every possible technique to prevent further accidents, and should not necessarily be punished by consumers, especially if the remediation efforts were swift, sincere, and generous.

In contrast, we’ve heard of companies that ship products with the same problems with their products year after year, and that offer little if any remediation to customers who complain. If we bought a bag of expensive, premium food and it was moldy, we’d expect an immediate replacement and an explanation. If, some months later, this happened again, we’d probably switch brands for good.

samples from his current company’s production line, and why Natural Balance’s date-codes include a *time of day* in addition to the date. “If you pull a sample only from the beginning, middle, and end of a run, there is a lot of room for error in between,” he points out.

Cook also imposes stringent rules for the manufacture of his company’s product on his co-packers (manufacturers hired to produce his products). “My products don’t leave the manufacturing plant until the results of all the tests are in, to ensure there was no fat rancidity and the product meets all our specifications. I don’t think a lot of companies go that far, but having been on the other side of the fence, I wouldn’t do it any other way,” he says. 🐾

Calling All “Calming Formulas”

How to choose the best product for your stressed-out dog.

BY GREGORY TILFORD

Based on the number and variety of herbal “calming formulas” I see in pet stores, there must be a lot of stressed-out pooches out there. Or maybe it’s just that the pet product industry is tapping into the frustrations of consumers who cannot tolerate their high-energy dogs. Regardless, there are more herbal calming formulas for dogs lining pet store shelves than ever before.

But are these products really effective? Are they safe?

The good news is that most of the herbal calming products found at reputable pet supply stores are very safe. Most contain what herbalists like myself consider to be the old calmativ standards: valerian root, passionflower, skullcap, chamomile, and other herbs that have been widely used in animals for many years with few, if any, adverse effects.

Some products also contain natural calming agents that are not herbs, such as

NaturVet’s “Calming Moments” chewable tablets, a product that combines chamomile and passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*) with L-tryptophan (a safe and naturally occurring amino acid).

Common sense dictates that if your dog already receives pharmaceutical drugs that affect central nervous system functions (such as anticonvulsants or antidepressants), or if he is scheduled for any type of anesthesia within the next day or two, herbal calming formulas are best avoided, as they may interact with those types of drugs.

But are they effective?

The question of efficacy is not as easy to answer. Despite the apparent safety of most herbal calming products, questions remain as to whether many of them contain enough active ingredients to actually do the job of bringing about a more restful state. Many contain so many “inactive” ingredients, such as grain byproducts, binders, and flavoring agents, that the active (and usually more expensive) herbal components of the product are present in only minute amounts.

In a way this is good; calmativ herbs are much weaker in effect than conventional sedative drugs, and are therefore generally much safer and forgiving to the uninformed user. In fact, in my experiences as a consultant to more than 200 veterinarians over the past 10 years, I have yet to see any serious adverse effects from the use of valerian, skullcap, passionflower, oat flower, or even kava kava in dogs.

None of this is to say that herbal calming formulas are ineffective. To the contrary, even some of the most dilute formulas can be quite effective at taking the edge off exciting events. Some dogs respond quite well to very small doses of calmativ herbs.

There are literally hundreds of studies documenting the gentle sedative activities of dozens of calmativ herbs. Most of these activities are attributed to plant chemistries that interact with the body to mildly alter various nervous system functions.



Herbal calming products abound on pet supply store shelves, but which one should you select for your dog?

However, the efficacy of an herbal calming formula is influenced by several other factors as well. While quality, composition, and concentration of active ingredients all factor into the equation, we also must consider the physical and behavioral nature of the recipient dog, the causes of his anxiety, and the context in which a product is used as important aspects of how an herbal calming formula will act within the body.

Choosing the best product

So, you are probably wondering: *Which herb works best? What form of product is best? How much should I give?*

While each is a valid question, the question “*Which product is most appropriate for my individual?*” is the most important. And in finding an answer that works for you and your dog, you should think along four lines:

■ Each and every herb has its own range of special attributes and medicinal properties that makes it unique.

Not all calmativ herbs are alike. Some, such as chamomile, lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*), and valerian are especially well suited to calming a nervous stomach. Skullcap (*Scutellaria laterifolia*), an herb that many of my veterinarian friends use for

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WHAT YOU CAN DO . . .

- **A holistic healthcare perspective dictates that you should consider your dog’s entire lifestyle before administering any product to calm him. Why is he stressed? Is he getting enough exercise? Is his diet too “hot”? Solve these and other problems before using supplements.**
- **Read the labels, and choose a product with the simplest formula (as opposed to “kitchen sink” formulations).**
- **Always follow the suggested dosage instructions.**

treatment of canine epilepsy, is better suited to cases of nervous jitteriness, muscle twitching, or hypersensitivity to touch.

Passionflower can be used in a manner similar to that of skullcap, but it's better than skullcap when dealing with emotional upset, such as separation anxiety or fear aggression that is associated with jealousy of another animal.

■ No single herb will work effectively in each and every animal, because no two dogs are alike. One herb will work well for calming dog "A," but actually aggravate the emotional condition of dog "B."

Eastern and Western herbalists regard valerian as a "hot" herb, known to warm the body and "heat the constitution" of the animal. When given to a dog with a hot temperament, or one who is chronically hot, itching for no apparent reason, or displaying a bright fire-red tongue, valerian can actually make the dog even more hot and irritable. Consider this *before* purchasing a product like Veterinarian's Best "Travel Calm Formula," which contains two "hot" herbs: valerian root and ginger. Both of these are great herbs for alleviating travel-induced anxiety and nausea, but they may not be the best choices for hot-natured dogs.

Some formulas balance the heating effects of valerian or other warming herbs by combining them with an assortment of other "cooler" calmatives such as passionflower, oat flower, and skullcap.

■ In weighing the choices of which form of product (i.e., tablet, liquid, powder, etc.) to buy, there are two primary considerations. You want a product that is easy to administer, and one that offers optimum availability of active components.

Not Really an Herbal Product, But It Works

When dealing with an anxious or over-excited dog, I usually reach *first* for Rescue Remedy, a Bach flower essence formula, before resorting to herbal remedies. (The same formula is sold under different names by different manufacturers, such as Flower Essence Services' "Five Flower Formula" and Ellon USA's "Calming Essence.")

For those who are not familiar with Rescue Remedy, it is what open-minded holistic types call an "energetic medicine." Flower essences contain very dilute, almost undetectable traces of the plant flower residues they represent, which means the products are extremely safe. There is absolutely no possibility of harm in trying Rescue Remedy in your first attempt to calm your dog. A small bottle goes everywhere with me, and I use it liberally for my dogs (and even myself) whenever needed. When Rescue Remedy *doesn't* work (about half the time), I will opt for a stronger and calmative herbal remedy.



"Buzz" May Be Bad for Herbs

Sadly, clever marketing has made certain herbs larger than life. Despite the potential value of trendy "super herbs," market performance and popularity do not always equal sound medicine.

St. John's wort (*Hypericum spp.*) is one example of a useful herb that attained worldwide recognition – followed by much abuse. Widely publicized as a potential alternative to antidepressant drugs, it has been pushed as a panacea against anything that vaguely resembles chronic depression. It has even been touted as a "mood elevator" by pharmaceutical companies who add it in scant doses to their daily vitamin product; how the FDA lets them get away with that is beyond me!

St. John's wort *might* work in certain individuals (human or animal) who suffer from depression that *may be* attributable to serotonin-related or other brain chemistry imbalances. To say that it will work against the emotional or behavioral imbalances in a broad audience of dogs is a stretch. In my opinion, St. John's wort is better suited to relieving nerve pain. I do not consider it effective for cases of acute (sudden-onset) anxiety – such as that caused by fireworks, a trip to the veterinarian, or a stay at the kennel. It simply does not act that way.

Kava kava (*Piper methysticum*) is a good example of how human misuse can get a great herbal ally in big trouble. Despite thousands of years of safe, daily use in people and animals, kava has become the casualty of irresponsible use and resultant bad press. Drug- and alcohol-recreationists appreciated its warm, relaxing effects and abused the herb (often in combination with alcohol or other drugs), resulting in liver damage and even death.

It's a shame that the herb has been abused. When used prudently, kava is a safe and wonderful remedy for acute muscle tension and pain. Provided there are no preexisting liver problems or potentially hepatotoxic drugs (such as Rimadyl or other NSAIDs) in concurrent use, Kava can be safely administered by veterinarians for short-term treatment of post-operative pain, after the effects of anesthetics have subsided. However, regardless of its safety when used properly, I will not use it on a daily basis in dogs; when used long term, kava *can* stress the liver.

Obviously, if you must chase your dog and force-feed him a vile-tasting product, you will be working against the goal of calming him. And if you are feeding him a product he relishes because of all of the dried meats, grains, and flavoring agents it contains, you might have to feed your dog large amounts before it has any effect.

My preference, of course, is biased by the fact that I own a company that produces a sweet-tasting, alcohol-free tincture blend that I feel offers optimum potency and acceptable palatability in most dogs.

Regardless of which type of product you prefer, follow the manufacturer's recommendations for how much to administer.

■ If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Buyer beware.

I strongly believe in herbal medicine, but even *I* think it's wise to be a little bit skeptical of extraordinary claims made by manufacturers. And if a calming formula contains an ingredient you don't recognize, *don't buy it* – at least not until you do some research into *exactly* what the stuff is. 🐾

Greg Tilford is well known in the field of veterinary herbal medicine. An international lecturer, he is author of four herb books, including All You Ever Wanted to Know About Herbs for Pets (Bowtie, 1999) which he co-authored with his wife, Mary. See page 24, for purchasing information.

Tug: Play It by the Rules

This game can cause trouble if it's not well directed. But it can also teach your dog a number of important skills.

BY PAT MILLER

Some trainers say you shouldn't play tug with your dog. Not me! Those of you who enjoy this energy-eating aerobic activity with your dog will be pleased to know that I personally think it's a fine game to play, as long as you're using appropriate tug toys and playing with rules.

Tug, in case you've never had the pleasure of playing, is a fun and exciting game, in which you hold one end of a tug object while your dog pulls with all his might on the other end. Variations include dog-dog tug, tug human around on a wheeled object (such as an office chair), and self-tug (in which the dog tugs an object such as a Kong on a rope that is secured to a sturdy post or tree).

Arguments against tug

Here are a few of the reasons you may have heard for *not* playing tug with your dog, followed by my responses:

Reason: It encourages your dog to be dominant.

Response: It has nothing to do with dominance; it has to do with play and exercise. As with many other doggie games, you can easily create a structure that reminds your dog that you control the good stuff – in this case, the tug toy – which enhances your high-ranking position in the social structure, rather than undermining it.

Reason: It encourages your dog to be aggressive.

Response: Dogs can become very aroused playing tug. You can easily prevent this by stopping the game whenever your dog begins to become overexcited. Use a phrase such as "That's all!" as you stop the game, and you will soon have a cue you can use in any situation where you want your dog to stop what he's doing and calm down.

Reason: It teaches your dog to put his teeth on your clothes and skin.

Response: Dogs *can* make poor decisions about where to put their teeth when they're engaged in a rousing game of tug. You can use this perfect opportunity to *decrease* the likelihood that your dog will bite in play by teaching him that teeth on human skin makes the fun stop. If you say something cheerfully (such as "Too bad!") and call a short time-out anytime your dog's teeth stray into forbidden territory, it will teach him to keep his teeth to himself.

Arguments for tug

And now, my far more numerous reasons for playing tug with your dog:

■ **It's great exercise.** It's a lovely indoor activity, perfect for relieving pent-up energy for a dog who's shut in on a stormy day, or a sub-zero winter week. A low-key version of the game is also useful for occupying a dog who's on physical restriction following surgery or an injury.

■ **It can be used to teach retrieve.** A dog who is less-than-enthusiastic about putting retrieve objects in his mouth can sometimes be motivated to do so by encouraging him to play tug. When he gets aroused about tugging, you take advantage of his enthusiasm to shape the retrieve.

■ **It can be used to teach recalls.** Is your dog less-than-sterling about coming when called? Get him hooked on tug – then stick a tug toy in your pocket when you go hiking. When he's a short distance from you, call him, show him the toy, and watch him beeline back to you for a tug session. Stick the toy back in your pocket (or pack), let him wander off a bit again, and repeat.

Stop before he's tired of tugging, so he's always strongly motivated to return. Practice this with your dog on a long line at first,

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WHAT YOU CAN DO . . .

- **Teach your dog and other family members to play tug by the rules so you can use the game to work off excess canine energy and to teach him self-control and good manners behaviors.**
- **Don't allow anyone who does not know and honor the rules to play tug with your dog.**
- **Use your dog's tug toy to redirect him from inappropriate behaviors and keep his attention on you around distractions and stressors.**
- **Choose your tug toys carefully to give you and your dog the best and safest tug experiences.**

to be sure it will work! (See "Long Distance Information," WDJ February 2001.)

■ **It's a useful distracter.** Lucy, our new Cardigan Corgi, used to take delight in tormenting our Scottie, who hikes with me on a long line because his recall is not reliable. The long blue leash snaking through the grass would catch Lucy's eye, and she'd latch onto it and drag poor Dubhy around.

A tug toy was perfect for redirecting her desire to grab and pull his leash. (I may, however, teach her to grab his leash and bring Dubhy back to me on those occasions when the recall doesn't work!)

■ **It can be a stress reliever.** Many dogs

develop a very positive association with the tug game.

One of my clients discovered a great application for tug while trying to do counter-conditioning and desensitization (CC&D) exercises in public with her dog-and-people-reactive Briard. When the stimulus (a dog and/or person) occasionally and unexpectedly presented itself too closely, Jobie was too stressed to take treats. Terry discovered she could whip out a toy for a gentle game of tug, use her dog's positive association with the tug game to reduce his stress enough to the point he would eat treats and then resume the CC&D.

■ **It's great for teaching self control.** As discussed in "arguments against," tug is a perfect activity for teaching your dog to control his energy and mouth placement, by teaching an "All done" cue to end the game, and using a "Too bad!" time-out when canine teeth touch human skin or clothing.

■ **It can be a "legal" outlet for roughhousing.** There is often at least one family member – usually male – who delights in playing rough physical games with the dog. Physical games that encourage body-slamming and mouthing *do* tend to reinforce inappropriate behaviors. Convince your roughhousing humans to play tug by the rules, and they'll help you reinforce desirable behaviors instead, while fulfilling their need to get physical with the dog.

■ **It can build relationships.** Doing things that your dog loves helps build a strong bond between you two. Playing tug with a dog who loves it can reinforce his focus on you, and his interest and pleasure in playing and training with you. While food rewards are an important part of positive training, life rewards – activities that are meaningful and

reinforcing to the dog – strengthen the relationship and give you options for using other rewards in addition to treats.

Rules of the game

These are general guidelines for making tug a positive training/relationship experience. The calmer and better-behaved your dog is, the less necessary it is to follow the rules strictly. The more rowdy and out of control your dog, the more closely you will want to adhere to them. By the way, don't be alarmed by your dog's growls during tug – it's all part of the game. As long as his other behaviors are appropriate, let him growl his heart out!

■ **Rule #1: You start the game.** Keep the tug toy put away, and get it out when *you* want to play. It's perfectly okay to get it out when you know *he* is in the mood, but it's your choice to start the game. You control the good stuff.

■ **Rule #2: No grabbing.** Hold up the toy. If your dog grabs or leaps for it, say "Oops!" and hide it behind your back. Then offer it again. When he is no longer keeping or grabbing, say "Take it!" and offer his end to him. Then give him the cue to "Tug!" or "Pull!" and the game is on. You control the good stuff and allow him to have it out of the goodness of your heart.

■ **Rule #3: You win most of the time.** "Winning" means you have the toy and your dog doesn't. At first, you may need to offer him an irresistible treat as you say, "Give!" He'll have to drop the toy to eat the treat, and you've won! As soon as he devours the treat, say "Take it!" again and offer him his end of the toy. Now he got *two* rewards for letting go of it – he got the treat, and he gets the toy back again! At least, he gets *his* end

of the toy back. Practice the "Give" part of the game numerous times during each play session. Eventually you will be able to fade the use of the treat, as he realizes that the reward for "Give!" is more tug.

■ **Rule #4: Use time-outs as needed.** If your dog gets too aroused and/or is putting his mouth on you or your clothing, use a "Too bad, time out!" when his arousal level starts to escalate to an unacceptable level, or the *instant* his teeth touch forbidden surfaces. Put the toy high on a shelf and sit down for a few minutes. Then you can, if you want, retrieve the toy and play again.

If you have a dog who allows his teeth to stray into forbidden territory frequently by creeping his jaws up the length of the toy, use a tug object with a clear demarcation near his end of the toy – a change in texture or material – and do a time-out immediately anytime his teeth cross that line. You control the good stuff, and his inappropriate behavior makes the good stuff go away.

■ **Rule #5: Supervise children.** Very young children should not play tug with your dog unless and until the dog is impeccable about his self-control, and then only under direct supervision. Middle to older children can play with moderate supervision *if* they can be relied on to play by the rules, and *if* your dog is under reasonable self-control and not likely to get into trouble. Children can control the good stuff too!

■ **Rule #6: You end the game.** You get to decide when tug is over, not your dog. End the game with a "Give, all done!" cue and put the toy away on a high shelf or in a secure drawer. It'll be there, ready and waiting, when you decide to play tug again. You control the good stuff.



Paws loves playing tug more than anything in the world. He growls and even barks (with his teeth clenched shut!) in a most fearsome manner, and is incredibly strong.



The game does not make him aggressive or "dominant" because he is allowed to play tug only if he adheres to the rules, especially the dictum against grabbing the toy without permission.

Variations on the theme

The most common style of tug consists of a dog on one end of the toy, a human on the other. You don't have to stop there, however. If you have two compatible dogs who love to tug you can give them each one end of a toy and let them go at it with each other.

The key word here is *compatible*. Because tug *does* create a certain level of arousal, dogs who are prone to getting into fights should not be encouraged to tug together. Don't equate growling and snarling with fights, however – a lot of that will go on when compatible dogs play tug together.

If you have two dogs who can tug together, try a threesome! Find a tug toy with one handle for the human and two ends for the dogs – a game the whole family can play!

At the other end of the spectrum, you can teach your dog to play tug by himself. You can run a rope through a Kong and knot it so the knot is inside the Kong, and then tie the other end of the rope to something sturdy. Encourage your dog to pick up the Kong and pull on the rope.

There are also a number of toys on the market that are made with elastic bands inside, meant to encourage a tug-loving dog

to pull harder and longer, even when there is just a tree or a post, not another playmate, on the other end of the toy. Of course, you lose the relationship value of tug with this variation of the game, but you might increase the exercise benefits! 🐾

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It's Important to Select a Good Tug Toy

Tug toys can come in all shapes, sizes, colors, and materials, but the best ones have these characteristics in common:

- They are long enough that your dog's teeth stay far away from your hand.
- They are made of a substance that invites your dog to grab and hold, and won't easily cause damage to teeth and gums.
- They are sturdy enough to withstand significant abuse.
- The "human end" has a comfortable handle or is otherwise easy to maintain a grip on.

Recently, we tested a sampling of tug toys made by Genuine Dog Gear (GDG), a Tampa, Florida, company that offers toys, leashes, and accessories for canine sports. All of its toys are exceptionally durable, and range in price from \$10 to \$25. The soft, stretchy braided toys "give" to teeth, minimizing potential for damage to teeth and gums. Most are machine-washable. I've chosen the following examples to illustrate the qualities, concerns, and appropriate applications of a good tug toy. The best online retail source for GDG products is cleanrun.com, or call GDG at (800) 292-6393 for phone orders.

Remember these are *not* chew toys, and will not stand up to unlimited gnawing! Remove them from your dog's reach when you are not supervising his play.

Jungle Tug: Both the 36-inch and 48-inch versions of this tug toy are made of a very tough micro-fiber fabric braid that won't shed or tear easily. The soft material and large knots on each end make it comfortable and easy to grip and hold for dog and human alike. While it is plenty long to keep canine teeth far from human skin, it lacks a clearly marked "forbidden zone" line. Therefore, it's a good choice for a toy to share with a dog who plays by the rules and keeps his teeth to himself – but not good for use with a dog who creeps up the toy or grabs wildly.



Two-Ball Stretch: This slender, stretchy nylon braid with a mini-tennis ball at each end is a terrific toy for a game of two-dog tug. Dogs are naturally drawn to the balls, but they are kept a safe distance apart by the length and stretch of the braid. It's not as good for human-dog tug, because the ball is hard to hold onto, and the nylon braid not comfortable enough to grip and tug.



Two Handled Knotty: The two handles on this 26-inch toy are useful for a dog who is good at snapping his head from side to side and snatching the toy from your hand. The handles help you steady his head and stay in control of the prize so you can win easily most of the time. However, the lack of a clear "forbidden zone" makes this toy risky if you have a "creeper," and the flat, stiff nylon can be a little harsh on hands.

Tuff Tug: My favorite pocket tug, this soft, 12-inch durable braided nylon toy is also great for polite tuggers. The soft handle is easy to hold, and dogs find the tassel at the end inviting. Like other small toys, this one should not be used with creepers and grabbers until they have learned the rules of tug play.



Moo Tug: Significantly different from the other toys, the Moo Tug is a 26-inch, round, braided, nylon rope threaded through a heavy rubber cylinder. It's perfect for our wild Corgi puppy, Lucy, who is both a grabber and a creeper. The handle is soft and comfortable to hold; the cylinder is an obvious and inviting "bite zone." A grab outside the cylinder ends the game – and Lucy's beginning to learn the rules. It's bulky, however – we're looking forward to the days of pocket tugs when the wild child is ready.



Ears To You

The next stop on our canine tour: the expressive, exceptional ear.

BY RANDY KIDD, DVM, PHD

In many ways it could be said that a dog “leads with its ears.” A dog’s ears are right up front, one of the most noticeable parts of his anatomy, and they are a conspicuous visual reminder that demonstrates and carries much of his character and personality. From the veterinary standpoint, the ears are a good place to begin a physical exam to check for both specific and general diseases.

The shape of the ear is characteristic of the breed, and there are many types of outer ears: large and drooping, as in the Bloodhound or Cocker Spaniel; erect and mobile, as in the German Shepherd or Border Collie; or small and button-like as in a Bulldog or Chinese Shar Pei.

The way a dog carries his ears gives us an insight into how he is feeling physically

and emotionally, and the “posture” of the ears is a language unto itself. In other words, by observing the carriage of a dog’s ears, we are given a way to “hear” what he is trying to tell us. In addition, abnormal carriage of the ears may indicate disease or nerve damage, and abnormal ear size (for the breed) may be an indication of multiple genetic defects.

The ear can be divided into four parts: ear flap (auricle or pinna); external ear canal (external auditory meatus); middle ear; and internal (inner) ear. The pinnae are highly mobile and can be controlled independently. More than a dozen separate muscles control the movement of the ear, and the entire area is richly supplied with blood vessels and nerves.

The pinna of the external ear is a funnel-like plate of cartilage that receives air vibrations and transmits them via the ear canal to the eardrum (tympanic membrane).

The ear canal is lined with both apocrine (ceruminous) and sebaceous glands which, in the normal animal, produce a protective coating of earwax (cerumen). In chronic otitis the sebaceous glands become fewer than normal, and the apocrine glands increase in number, in size, and in their production of secretions.

Note that the dog’s ear canal is considerably longer than its human counterpart, and after extending downward, it makes a sharp turn inward toward the eardrum. Thus, complete examination of the ear canal requires an otoscope with special (long and thin) cones. Few dogs tolerate anything being poked into the external ear canal, and dogs with painful ears (from infections or foreign bodies) almost never allow adequate examination without anesthesia.

The eardrum separates the external ear from the middle ear, and it is the area where vibrations sent from the external ear are focused and amplified. There are three small bones within the middle ear – the malleus, incus, and stapes – that transmit the vibrations from the eardrum to the inner ear.



There is absolutely *no* reason to routinely surgically remove a part of any dog’s ear. Dr. Kidd regards it as an inhumane and barbaric practice. “Not to mention,” he adds, “it makes no sense from a health or holistic living perspective.”

The inner ear consists of two main parts: the cochlea (end organ for hearing) and the vestibule and semicircular canals (end organ for balance). All these can be thought of as a series of tunnels or canals within the temporal bone. Inside the cochlea are specialized hair cells that pick up auditory vibrations and synapse directly with the auditory nerve.

Equilibrium is controlled by electrical impulses that are registered on hair cells located in the three semicircular canals. These signals transmit the current status of the body (head) in relation to the horizon (gravity).

The ear has two functions – hearing and balance – and either function can be disturbed by disease, old age, or nerve disruption from a number of causes.

What a dog hears

Hearing can be visualized as waves of energy traveling along molecules in the air, transformed into mechanical energy at the ear drum, then amplified by small bones and finally transformed into the electrical impulses in the auditory nerve – resulting in what the brain registers as hearing.

The Whole Dog Journal™



WHAT YOU CAN DO . . .

- **Frequently inspect your dog’s ears. Take a peek in there at least once a day. Investigate any abnormality quickly; ear problems can become dramatically painful with rapidity.**
- **Solving chronic ear problems requires a body-wide treatment, including improvements to diet. Start with a thorough physical at your holistic veterinarian’s office.**
- **While holistic home care is best for preventing ear problems, quick conventional veterinary diagnosis – and sometimes, treatment – may be needed to effectively treat a serious problem.**

Dogs have a much different range of hearing than ours, extending into a considerably higher frequency than we can hear. Sound frequency, the number of sound wave cycles every second, is measured in Hertz (Hz). The higher the frequency, the more sound waves per second, the higher-pitched the sound. Humans hear best at around 2,000 Hz; dogs hear best at 8,000 Hz – perhaps the reason they respond better to high pitched cues.

Another way of “seeing” ears

While Western medicine views the ears from the functional standpoint of hearing and balance, Traditional Chinese Medicine believes that the ears are connected to the Kidney Organ system. Poor hearing, common in the elderly patient, is thought to be a consequence of weakened Kidney Jing. (Jing is best translated as the essence or the substance that underlies all organic life.)

Thus, acupuncture practitioners will often treat hearing problems by needling acu-points related to the Kidney. In addition, both the Triple Burner and Gall Bladder meridians pass through the ears and are said to control them, so points related to these meridians may be added to an acupuncturist’s therapeutic protocol.

A system of “auricular acupuncture” has been developed that relies on needles inserted into specific parts of the ear to treat other anatomical parts of the body.

Natural home care

There are numerous methods of natural care that the dog owner can use to keep her dog’s ears and hearing healthy:

■ Food for ears

When we put together a diet to aid in the prevention and treatment of problems located in or around a dog’s ears, it is important to remember that many ear infections are associated with allergies. Choose high-quality foods that do not contain artificial preservatives, flavorings, or food colorings. Consider making a home-prepared diet, or if this is not feasible for you, move up to a higher-quality diet.

If your dog experiences chronic ear infections – and especially if the infections are associated with obvious symptoms of allergies, consider performing a food-elimination trial to investigate particular foods as a potential cause of the allergies.

Antioxidants are crucial for the effectiveness of the immune system, and they will aid circulatory and nerve health in the area

of the ears. Consider supplementing your dog’s diet with antioxidants such as vitamins A and E, Coenzyme Q-10, or any number of the culinary herbs, including rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*), thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*), and oregano (*Origanum vulgare*). Ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*), is high in antioxidant activity and has specific beneficial effects to the ear.

Zinc quickens the immune response; vitamin C is needed for proper immune function. Vitamin B complex is essential for healing and has been shown in humans to reduce ear pressure. Potassium helps maintain nervous system health and nerve impulse transmission. In humans, manganese deficiency has been linked to ear disorders.

Ear infections may be linked to hypothyroidism, so you may want to have your dog’s thyroid checked. If the test results suggest hypothyroidism, add to the diet one of the seaweed herbs such as bladderwack (*Fucus vesiculosus*), dulse (*Palmaria palmate*), or kelp (*Laminaria spp.*). Siberian ginseng (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*) is a good, non-specific herb that offers whole-body adaptogenic qualities that strengthen and balance all organ systems.

Your holistic practitioner can be of invaluable help in this area of supplements. She can help you select foods or products that contain the needed supplements, and she can help you calculate dosages that are appropriate for the weight of your dog and his current condition. (Preventative dosages, for example, are much less than those used to treat an ongoing disease.)

Most importantly, she can help you select a product and dosage protocol that provides enough of the supplement without creating imbalances and/or potentially toxic levels of any one supplement.

It’s very typical for a client to bring me a shopping bag full of supplements. When we read the labels and calculate the dosages, we invariably find duplications of many of the supplements. We almost always toss out about half of the supplements in the bag, and we’re still able to provide all the necessary supplements in appropriate dosages.

■ Ear washes

There are several natural solutions that can be used periodically to “wash” or “irrigate” a dog’s ears – to help maintain the normal flora of the ear, and thus help prevent ear diseases. Pour several teaspoons of the solution into your dog’s ear, gently massage around the base of the ear, and then (after he shakes his head) wipe off the excess fluids with a clean cloth.

How often you use an ear wash depends on the environment of your dog’s ear. Long, floppy ears tend to trap moisture, which provides an ideal growing place for microorganisms; small, upright ears that allow plenty of air circulation tend to stay cleaner and infection-free.

To prevent disease from occurring in the floppy-eared dogs, you may need to wash once a week; once a month is probably plenty for a prick-eared dog. When you treat disease, begin with treatments three or four times a day and taper off as the disease resolves.

General rules for ear washes: One of our goals is to keep excess wax and oil from building up and obstructing the ear canal – a simple saline mixture or dilute vinegar wash may be adequate for this. Herbal preparations often have many simultaneous benefits: they ease pain and are calming, many are anti-inflammatory, and most are antimicrobial, typically effective against a wide range of bacteria, yeasts, and fungi.

One of the most common pathogens found in chronic ear infections is a yeast, *Malassezia pachydermatis* (syn. *Pityrosporum canis*). This yeast is one of those oddball bugs; low numbers are normally found in healthy ears, but they can become pathogenic (cause disease) under certain conditions.

The idea is to keep the numbers of *Malassezia* down, and there are several ways to do this. An acid environment discourages their growth – occasionally use a dilute vinegar wash. Bacteria thrive in an oily, waxy environment, so keep the ear canal clear of excess wax and oil buildup. Many herbs have anti-yeast properties (See herbal section for more information). *Acidophilus* directly competes with yeasts, and an occasional lactobacillus “ear irrigation” will keep the yeast numbers down.



One flap down? It takes some pups a little longer to develop the upright ears typical of their breed.

■ Ear massage

There's almost nothing that will endear you more to your dog than a daily ear massage. (Well OK, a timely food dish may be a *little* more endearing.) It's not just that dogs love the ear massage, you'll be helping improve blood and nerve supply to the region *and*, according to auricular acupuncture theory, you'll be enhancing all the Organ systems of the body simultaneously.

A good ear rub is easy to master, too. Simply rub gently around the entire base of the ear. Hold the base of the ear with one hand, take the earflap between fingers and thumb of the other hand, and rub in a circular fashion – from the base of the ear to its tip. Gently stretch the ear from base to tip. Try this on yourself to see how good it feels, and to sense how energizing it is.

Holistic and alternative medicines for ears

■ Acupuncture

Two aspects of acupuncture are worth mentioning here: 1) auricular acupuncture – inserting needles into the pinna of the ear to treat conditions of the entire body, including the ear, and 2) acupuncture used to treat ear conditions such as infections and hearing loss.

Auricular acupuncture is a recent addition to the classical acupuncture that has been used for centuries, and its methods have not been as well defined as the classic system. In addition, because there are so many anatomic expressions of a dog's ear, it has been difficult to define the precise locations for insertion of the needles. Observations do show, however, that dogs and humans have similar reflex responses – a sudden jerk of the head or a grimace – when needles are placed in certain ear locations. These can be effective diagnostic clues.

Traditional Chinese Medicine considers the ears to be an important crossroad of the principle Yin and Yang meridians of the arms and limbs, and the earflap is thought to interconnect with all the internal organs and systems.

For conditions of the ear, most acupuncturists will use local and general tonifying and immune-balancing points. Kidney, Triple Heater (TH), and Gall Bladder (GB) meridian points may be added, depending on the symptoms. TH-5 and GB-20 have been used to stimulate declining hearing.

■ Homeopathy

Homeopathic remedies are directed toward

the general and specific symptoms. Specific symptoms would include the appearance and type of ear discharge, along with other noticeable symptoms such as vesicular skin irritations, red eyes, or gastrointestinal problems. General symptoms would include symptoms such as the time of day when the irritation seems worst and the patient's general emotional attitude during and before a disease condition exists.

Check with your homeopathic practitioner for specific remedies, potencies, and frequency of use, since these depend on the acuteness and/or severity of the disease, the age and general condition of the animal, etc. Homeopathic remedies should not be relied upon to work quickly, and their effectiveness is often dependent on the skill and experience of the practitioner.

■ Herbs

There are many herbs that are excellent for preventing and/or treating ear conditions. Herbs that have antimicrobial activity typically act against a broad spectrum of microbes – bacteria, yeast, and fungi. Many are also calming, anti-inflammatory, and act to ease pain. Some herbs taken internally enhance the immune system, and their antimicrobial activity may enhance other treatments, but the real benefit of herbal remedies is their use in solutions that are used directly in the ear canal. Some examples of ear-important herbs include:

The flowering tops of **mullein** (*Verbascum thapsus*) have antimicrobial properties with a special application for infections of ears, and they appear to have a calming and soothing effect. In addition, the seeds contain rotenone, an insecticidal agent. The most common way to use the flowers is in the form of an oil infusion.

Oregon grape root (*Mahonia spp.*) is especially useful for treatment of problems related to the ears, eyes, and mucous membranes of the vaginal and urinary tract. Oregon grape root has antimicrobial activity against bacterial, fungal, and yeast infections. For ear infections or ear mites, an oil infusion of fresh or dried roots can be made, and a clove of garlic can be added if desired.

Marshmallow root (*Althaea officinalis*) is good medicine for alleviating irritations, thanks to its high content of soothing and protective mucilaginous compounds. It is a good herb to consider when treating skin

conditions, urinary tract problems, upper respiratory and gastrointestinal disease, as well as for ear conditions.

Marshmallow root has antimicrobial and immune-enhancing properties, and animal studies have shown that it is active against *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, *Proteus vulgaris*, and *Staphylococcus aureus*, all of which can create especially nasty and chronic ear infections

Witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*) is an herb with strong astringent properties, and at the same time it seems to be soothing to external tissues. It is thus an excellent choice for the inflamed ear canal that may have become swollen. It has also been used externally to treat earflap hematomas.

Any of the herbs above can be used individually or in combination; garlic can be added if desired.

Ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*) is the world's most-used treatment for memory loss and degenerative diseases of the brain and central nervous system. It stimulates circulation and has an affinity for the ears, where it is used in human medicine to enhance hearing and to reduce ringing in the ears (tinnitus). It is taken orally. For animals, use the dosage listed on the package, adjusted for the weight of the animal.

■ Chiropractic

Chiropractic may enhance hearing and the success of other therapies aimed at curing ear diseases. In 1895, D.D. Palmer, one of the founders of early chiropractic in this country, claims to have cured a person of his chronic deafness by one simple adjustment of the patient's neck. The re-adjusting of misaligned vertebrae may enhance blood and nervous supply to the ear and surrounding areas. Moreover, ear infections often cause tenseness around the neck and jaw, and the resultant tension may eventually twist the vertebrae out of alignment, causing further pain and discomfort.

Ear diseases and therapies

■ Otitis externa

Dogs with ear infections typically shake their heads and dig at their ears, and they may roll along the ground to relieve the itch. A whiff of the ear canal usually reveals the source of the itching, and the odor can vary from foul and rank to sweet and fruity. There

may be a visible discharge, varying from clear and serous to purulent (pus-filled) to black and corrosive. The character of the discharge is an important consideration when using homeopathic remedies.

Ear infections can be caused by a number of microorganisms (bacteria, yeasts, and fungi), parasites (mites), and foreign bodies (foxtails, etc.). There are often predisposing factors to instigate the infection, including long, pendulous ear flaps that trap moisture and heat and help provide an ideal environment for bugs to grow; allergies; and accumulation of ear wax and oils in the ear canal creates an environment that encourages *Malassezia* yeast to grow; secondhand smoke (a higher number of ear infections in children are seen in households where there are smokers, and I would bet that it's true for dogs, too).

Finally, some chronic diseases (for example, hypothyroidism, hyperadrenocorticism, and again, allergies) apparently predispose dogs to an increased frequency of ear infections. Interestingly, pet dander is one of the most common allergens thought to precipitate otitis in humans.

Otitis externa almost always tends to become chronic, recurring time after time, no matter what conventional Western medicines are used. The bottom line is this: otitis externa is not, generally speaking, a one-time occurrence. In almost every case there is an underlying condition that must be addressed in order to control the otitis.

Conventional therapy includes removal of any foreign body present; cleaning the ear canal; then the use of antibiotics, steroids, decongestants, and antihistamines. Surgery and even hearing aids have been used to counteract hearing loss.

After a thorough inspection of the entire ear canal, cleansing, and removal of foreign bodies, most of the conventional therapies listed above are just what we try to avoid with holistic medicine.

In most cases, treatment can be accomplished with any of the alternative medicines – which often are more effective than the Western medicines anyway.

However, it must be remembered that alternative medicines typically take some time to work, and severe cases of otitis externa can penetrate the eardrum and

progress into otitis media/interna – which can ultimately lead to permanent hearing loss. Judicious use of antibiotics may be indicated; always check with your veterinarian – and get a second opinion if you think it's necessary.

My caveat for the use of antibiotics is to make absolutely certain that the antibiotics being prescribed will be effective against the organisms causing the infection. Never use an antibiotic randomly; have a culture and sensitivity run before any antibiotic therapy, or at the very least, make sure your vet has looked at a swab of the ear under the microscope. Most of the bugs can be identified fairly accurately with simple stains that most vets have in their clinics.

Holistic therapy includes a focus on prevention rather than cure. Moreover, if disease is present, holistic medicine uses the whole-body approach (nutrition, recognizing and treating other diseases, etc.) as well as specific medicines – homeopathic, acupuncture, herbal washes, etc. – used to alleviate symptoms or applied directly to the ears.

■ Otitis media and otitis interna

Be suspicious of otitis media or otitis interna if your dog has difficulty balancing, stumbles and falls, staggers or trips when first getting up, or if he tends to circle in one direction.

These two diseases are nothing to mess with. Most cases of otitis media and interna are the result of an extension of otitis externa through the eardrum. Their presence indicates a good possibility that the eardrum is broken and that the infection is severe and has been ongoing for some time.

If you see any of the symptoms that indicate a lack of balance (such as staggering or falling), see a veterinarian for an accurate diagnosis. You may need antibiotics to get ahead of this disease process.

■ Mites

Ear mites (*Otodectes cyanotis*) can occur in dogs, although not as often as in cats. Ear mites are small parasites that roam freely in the ear, and they can drive a dog crazy. (Think about the noise you might hear as dozens of little buggers crawled around in your ear, and you'll be sympathetic.) The

mite-infested ear typically has a dry, crumbly, blackish (like coffee grounds) exudate that can be seen in the ear canal; the mites are (barely) visible to the naked eye.

Mites are generally easy to treat – oils cover the breathing apparatus of the adults and eventually kill them. Some herbal remedies have anti-parasitic activity (Mullein, for example) and can be added to an oil-based treatment.

The life cycle of the mite is three weeks, so treatments should extend through at least this three-week period. Usually dogs acquire their ear mites from cats, so if there are any cats in the family, treat them at the same time you are treating the dog. Puppies seem to be more susceptible than adult dogs, suggesting an immune component to the disease; consider enhancing the immune system if mites are detected.

■ Auricular hematomas

The etiology of these often large, blood filled blebs, located between the skin and ear cartilage, is often unknown. [Editor's note: That wasn't a typo: A "bleb" is "an elevation of the skin filled with serous fluid."] Sometimes hematomas will develop when a dog has been shaking his head hard or often – probably due to one of the interior ear problems discussed here. The dog shakes his head so hard that small blood vessels in the ear flaps burst, causing a bleb.

Conventional treatment consists of lancing and drainage, perhaps injections of steroids, and possibly surgery to enhance drainage and healing. About 50 percent of all hematomas recur after the first conventional treatment, and about 30 percent recur after being treated the second time.

Yarrow, used as a tea internally and externally as an oil-based ointment, may be helpful in helping to maintain arterial integrity. Witch hazel, applied topically, may also be of benefit.

■ Foreign bodies

When a foreign body has gotten in a dog's ear, it is almost always in one ear only. The dog will generally hold his head to one side (with the affected ear held down), cry and dig at the ear, and rub it against the ground. The symptoms usually come on acutely, and they can be quite dramatic.

The only way to know if there is a foreign body inside the ear canal is to look down into its depths with a special instrument. My experience has been that this almost invariably requires anesthesia. With proper chemical restraint, it is easy to find



Prevent ear-piercing drama: Warm the ear cleanser or treatment before putting it in your dog's ear.

Easy Does It: Mild Solutions for the Basically Healthy Ear

#1: Squirt about a teaspoon of hydrogen peroxide (the 3% type) in each ear. Let the dog shake and wipe off the excess.

#2: Mix 1 cup water, ½ teaspoon sea salt, 1 teaspoon tincture of calendula, if desired. Warm to 101 degrees F. Gently flush using an ear syringe.

#3: Mix 3 drops white vinegar with enough pure water to fill a one-ounce dropper bottle. Warm the solution to 101 degrees. Add about six drops per ear. Note: This should feel good. If the ear is inflamed, it may hurt. If pain is evident, dilute with water by half. If the dog still objects, use the calendula formula above.

#4: For an acidophilus treatment, start by cleaning the dog's ears. Mix the contents of one capsule of powdered acidophilus into an ounce of pure water, or use dilute a small amount of liquid acidophilus with water. Pour this solution into the ear. Allow the dog to shake his head, but leave the residue in the ear. Since the ear canal is not a normal habitat for them, the acidophilus organisms will eventually die. (The acidophilus organisms compete with other yeasts, and eventually kill them.) This treatment can be repeated periodically.

#5: Almost any herb with antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, and/or immune-boosting activity can be used for the main part of an herbal wash, but mullein, marshmallow root, calendula, chamomile, lavender, and Oregon grape root are excellent choices.

Use the active part of the herb (for example: marshmallow

root, mullein *flower*, which can be harvested along with the mature cob) and cover several ounces of this with pure, organic almond or olive oil. Let this mixture sit for several days. Strain it, and use the strained oil, several drops per ear.

Herbal mixtures may contain one herb or several. For additional antibiotic activity, you can add a clove or two of garlic to the original mixture. If inflammation or swelling is present, mix with equal amounts of distilled liquid witch hazel. Add several drops of liquid vitamin E per ounce of fluid as a preservative and keep in a cool, dark place. Make and use a fresh mixture after a week or two.

#6: To treat a mite infestation, use a simple soothing oil applied directly in the ear canal. Repeat every three days for four to six weeks. Mullein has insecticide activity and can be added to the oil mixture; other herbs may also be helpful, including: yellow dock (*Rumex crispus*), thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*), rue (*Ruta graveolens*), or rosemary (*Rosemarinus officinalis*). The high sulfur content in garlic may be helpful in killing mites.

There are dozens of commercial ear care products, many of which are "natural." My favorite has long been Halo's Ear Wash product – several herbs in a witch hazel base. I've heard good things about DermaPet's Ear/Skin Cleanser, which is a two percent vinegar, two percent boric acid solution. Animals' Apawthecary has a nice product (Herbal Ear Rinse) which contains cider vinegar, aloe vera juice, vegetable glycerin, witch hazel, organic goldenseal root, calendula flowers, and olive leaf.

a foreign body and remove it, and to cleanse the ears thoroughly and treat them with a soothing herb while we're there.

■ Hearing loss and deafness

There are a number of factors involved in hearing loss and deafness: infections; trauma and loud noises; many drugs; old age; genetic susceptibility; neural damage; etc. The most common form of hearing loss is called "conductive" hearing loss and it is caused by a blockage of the ear canal – from foreign bodies, infections, or an excessive buildup of cerumen (earwax).

Exposure to loud noises can cause "sensory" hearing loss, and this loss becomes progressively worse as the exposure continues over time. Dogs who are subjected to loud rock or rap music (and *no* animal should suffer this kind of torture!) will gradually lose their hearing, and the loss can be permanent. Quick impact, high-level noise such as gunshots can also cause hearing loss, and it has been recommended that hunting dogs wear ear plugs, much as the hunter does.

There are many drugs that can cause

hearing loss, including aminoglycoside antibiotics such as gentamycin and amikacin; loop diuretics such as furosemide (Lasix); several anti-cancer drugs; and even high doses of aspirin. Be sure to check with your vet *before* any drugs are used – to be sure they will not cause hearing loss (and to be sure your vet has actually read the package insert for the drug).

Diseases such as diabetes, kidney failure, and hypothyroidism may be associated with hearing loss.

As a dog ages, much like his human counterpart, his hearing diminishes. The first signs of hearing loss may be a hesitation to obey commands, or a reluctance to go into strange territory. Old age hearing loss is usually a slow, progressive change, and you may be able to slow it somewhat with good nutrition, antioxidants, and adding some ginkgo to the diet.

An old dog may initially lose only the ability to hear certain frequencies (usually in the upper ranges), so speaking to him in low tones may be helpful. Some people have found that percussive sounds such as clapping can be heard by fairly deaf dogs, so

they clap to draw the dog's attention to hand signals. Realize, too, that hearing loss can create behavioral changes – some old dogs can be startled easily and may snap or bite when surprised.

"Neural" hearing loss is the least common form, and it can be caused by head trauma, blood clots or ruptured blood vessels, or brain tumors.

There is a test called the BAER (Brain Auditory Evoked Response) test that will accurately record hearing loss, and it can be used to detect partial loss, unilateral hearing loss, and total, bilateral deafness. This test is especially beneficial for testing puppies of breeds known to have a high incidence of deafness. Check with your veterinarian for more information. 🐾

Dr. Randy Kidd earned his DVM degree from Ohio State University and his Ph.D. in Pathology/Clinical Pathology from Kansas State University. A past president of the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association, he's author of Dr. Kidd's Guide to Herbal Dog Care and Dr. Kidd's Guide to Herbal Cat Care (see page 24).

The Importance of Integration

Keep your options open when directing your dog's healthcare.

BY SHANNON WILKINSON

Every day the already dazzling array of options for caring for your dog grows even more. There are myriad modalities in the realm of holistic care, including complementary and alternative options, as well as conventional veterinary medicine, with its low- and high-tech diagnostic and treatment procedures. Which way do you go when your dog has a health concern?

Choosing caregivers

There are a number of ways to integrate holistic and conventional care for your dog. Some veterinarians practice "integrative medicine," using both holistic modalities and conventional care, in a fully equipped clinic. This situation is the easiest to manage because you are only working with one practitioner. "Unfortunately, some practitio-

ners with [full] clinics are sometimes more conventional than you would hope," says holistic veterinarian Eugene Aversa, DVM, of Santa Fe, New Mexico.

There are an increasing number of veterinary practices that include vets who practice conventional veterinary medicine, as well as vets who use holistic therapies. While you may work directly with two or more vets, these integrated clinics simplify sharing information between the vets. They facilitate active involvement of all parties in the care of your dog.

Unfortunately, these clinics tend to be the exception and not the rule. If you aren't lucky enough to live close to such a clinic, it's best to form your own team of veterinarians who are willing to work together. If you are already working with a veterinarian, and you have a strong relationship, open



The author's dogs, Booker (nearest) and Tyler both have Addison's disease. Acupuncture, chiropractic, herbs, supplements, homeopathy, and other holistic treatments have helped so much that Booker's dosage of conventional medication is very low, and Tyler is able to maintain his health without *any* medication.

The Whole  Dog Journal™

WHAT YOU CAN DO . . .

- **Choose caregivers with whom you are able to communicate openly regarding your chosen healthcare practices. If your vet doesn't know that you feed a raw diet or that your dog benefits from herbs, his ability to treat the dog appropriately may be compromised.**
- **Conventional medical practices are generally the best providers of emergency care. Look for a conventional emergency clinic before you need one.**
- **Keep an open mind about all your dog's healthcare options. Don't dismiss alternative or conventional care out of hand.**

a dialogue with him or her about bringing another practitioner into the mix.

"The thing to do is find a [conventional] veterinarian who's open minded to holistic and complementary approaches – more and more are," says Allen Schoen, DVM, who practices integrative holistic animal health care in Sherman, Connecticut. Keep in mind that it is just as important that your *holistic* veterinarian is open to *conventional* diagnostic procedures and treatments if you decide to pursue them.

Regardless of whether your primary veterinarian is holistically oriented or very conventional, know his or her limitations regarding care for your dog. What are the clinic hours – is there any availability for emergencies? Does your veterinarian have surgery facilities? What about access to labs and other diagnostic procedures?



Editor Nancy Kerns' dog lived for several years with a serious heart condition. The effectiveness of a combination of herbal and conventional medicine to treat the condition was confirmed by high-tech – a Holter monitor worn by the dog for 24 hours. (Note: The recorder for the monitor was removed from its vest-pocket for this photo.)

How some choose

For Janine Adams, of St. Louis, Missouri, her first call is almost always to holistic veterinarian, Dr. W. Konrad Kruesi. “Unless it’s a life-threatening emergency, I always try to contact Dr. Kruesi before I do anything,” she says. A holistic practitioner based in North Clarendon, Vermont, Dr. Kruesi provides Adams with critical initial guidance on what diagnostic tests to ask for, what treatments to consider immediately, and which to forego.

Adams second call is to her local, conventional veterinarian, Dr. Patrick Tate. He acts as the eyes, ears, nose, and hands for Dr. Kruesi, and runs blood work and any other diagnostic tests that might be necessary. Adams says, “I’m fortunate that both of my vets are very open and willing to work with each other within these parameters.”

After a thorough exam and necessary diagnostic tests at Dr. Tate’s clinic, Adams shares all of the results with Dr. Kruesi. He then formulates the holistically oriented treatment.

Lauren McCall, of Portland, Oregon, usually opts for a trip to her conventional veterinarian for diagnosis and treatment recommendations. Then, depending on the situation, may choose to go with the allopathic recommendations or consult a holistic veterinarian.

“While I generally think holistically, I’m

not opposed to a short, sharp shock [with medication] to get the situation under control, then treat the issue holistically,” explains McCall.

When her Bernese Mountain Dog, Byron, was recently diagnosed with cancer, this was the exact approach McCall used.

First she took Byron to her conventional veterinarian, who used standard conventional methods for diagnosing the tumor. Then she consulted with a veterinary oncologist to determine the optimal treatment plan for Byron. The tumor was surgically removed, and Byron’s diet was changed and supplemented. However, McCall opted not to pursue further conventional treatments.

“The oncologist wasn’t sure that chemotherapy would be of much benefit to Byron, and it would likely be very difficult for him physically and emotionally. We decided to consult with a holistic veterinarian and pursue an alternate treatment in an attempt to prevent the recurrence of the cancer,” she explains. So far, six months after diagnosis, he remains cancer-free.

In Connecticut, Dr. Schoen focuses on complementary and alternative modalities, but he requires that all of his clients also have a conventional primary care veterinarian. “Whenever possible, I like to have a ‘Western’ diagnosis for a client,” says Schoen. With that, he can then help the client explore the options of conventional versus complementary treatments, including the risks and benefits of each.

Dr. Schoen believes it is crucial to remain unattached to any particular modality or therapy, as he quips, “Don’t let your dogma kill my karma.” Instead, he always asks himself, what’s best to help this animal?

A Glossary of Holistic Healthcare Terms

Conventional, Allopathic – These terms are used to describe the type of care provided by most conventional Western veterinarians. The definition of “allopathic” is treatments that create effects different than those caused by the disease to address the symptoms. Conventional veterinary medicine uses primarily pharmaceutical drugs and surgery to treat illness.

Holistic, Alternative, Complementary – These terms encompass a wide variety of modalities that are used to help the body heal itself, rather than just alleviate symptoms. Holistic refers to considering the entire animal, mind, body, and spirit, in developing treatment plans. “Alternative” may mean treatments that are used in lieu of conventional care. “Complementary” treatments are used as a useful adjunct to conventional medical care.

Homeopathy – This form of medicine uses specially prepared “remedies” – very dilute natural substances – to encourage the body to heal itself. It is based on the idea that like cures like, so the remedies are chosen based on what symptoms they would cause in a healthy individual.

Integrative – This involves incorporating the best of conventional and holistic diagnostics, techniques, and therapies to provide the most appropriate care in any situation.

New Mexico's Dr. Aversa also looks for a conventional diagnosis with a patient, to determine the best course of treatment in any particular situation. "Most of the time it's pretty clear which road to take," he explains. Just because you get a Western diagnosis, he says, doesn't mean you have to use the conventional treatment.

Dr. Aversa may opt for a completely holistic regime, including homeopathy, nutrition, and chiropractic care, or, if appropriate, focus more on a conventional treatment, although he nearly always adds in some level of holistic therapy as support.

Chronic health conditions

When Janine Adams' late Poodle, Kramer, developed several autoimmune conditions, her conventional veterinarian was running out of options and recommended that she seek advice from a holistic practitioner. After some exploration, she began working with Dr. Kruesi.

Many dog owners converted to holistic care after dealing with chronic health conditions, for which their conventional medical practitioners had no answers. Or, side effects from the allopathic treatments were too detrimental.

For instance, in the case of allergies, Dr. Schoen is likely to try natural approaches first, such as diet changes and supplementation, rather than the conventional allergy treatments including steroids and antihista-

mines. "Although, each animal is different and each client is different," he says.

While many chronic health conditions can be successfully treated with holistic or alternative care, Dr. Aversa says, "there are plenty of instances where chronic disease or circumstances require conventional care."

This is the case with my dogs. Both have Addison's disease, an autoimmune condition that destroys the adrenal gland, rendering it unable to produce certain hormones. Booker requires conventional medication, as well as regular blood tests, to stay alive. At the same time, he's received acupuncture, chiropractic adjustments, herbs, nutritional supplements, homeopathic remedies, and other holistic treatments over the years to improve his health.

By combining conventional and holistic approaches, Booker's medications have been reduced to less than one-third the normal dose for a dog his size. And he's a happier, healthier dog than if he were just receiving treatments from one side or the other.

Acute crises

"In a true emergency, you shouldn't be putzing around with remedies at home," says Dr. Aversa. It's better to have a veterinarian, holistic or conventional, look at the animal, to ensure you aren't dealing with a

life-threatening condition.

When Adams' dog, Kramer, developed bloat she rushed him to the emergency clinic. At the clinic, they took X-rays and were successful in decompressing his stomach. He was kept under observation for the night, and released the next day.

In the morning, Adams consulted with Dr. Kruesi. He provided valuable advice to aid Kramer in a swift recovery, and also helped Adams and her husband decide against prophylactic gastropexy surgery (stomach tacking) to prevent torsion in the event of a future bloat episode.

Communication

Some people may be reluctant to tell their conventional veterinarian that they want to (or are already) consulting with a holistic veterinarian. And the opposite may be true as well, for those using a holistic practitioner who are interested in pursuing a conventional Western diagnosis or treatment protocol.

"It can be hard to stand up to an authority figure, but we are our animals' advocates," explains Adams. "Besides, when you are up front with your conventional veterinarian about how you prefer to treat your animals, you have the opportunity to inform and educate him or her – helping him or her understand another way of thinking."

When Adams moved back to St. Louis after a four year absence, she had completely changed the way she cared for her dogs. She contacted her former veterinarian, Dr. Tate, and explained to him that she now considered holistic veterinarian Dr. Kruesi to be the "primary" veterinarian for her dogs, though she needed a local veterinarian in St. Louis to provide physical exams and lab tests and any other services her dogs may need. Not only did Dr. Tate accept the parameters, he has referred clients to Dr. Kruesi. Not all doctors would be so accepting and accommodating.

The most important thing to remember is be informed in advance. This way you can make the best decision possible at the time. Know you have options – and, know your options! 🐾

Shannon Wilkinson is a TTouch practitioner, life coach, and freelance writer in Portland, Oregon.

We are sorry to report that Shannon's Great Dane, Booker, passed away at the age of 6, just before WDJ went to press. We extend our deepest sympathies to Shannon.

Get Emergency Veterinary Care, STAT!

Some conditions that require immediate emergency care:

- Shock (symptoms include pale gums or skin, weak pulse, shivering, cold paws and legs, drop in body temperature)
- High temperature (normal is 100.5 to 102.5)
- Severe wounds or profuse bleeding
- Poisoning (signs may include drooling, vomiting, depression, convulsions)
- Some seizures
- Heat exhaustion/heatstroke (signs include panting, glazed expression, bright red gums, increased heart rate, disorientation)
- Bloat (symptoms include distended stomach, inability to vomit, restlessness)
- Difficulty breathing or wheezing
- Sudden frequent sneezing (could be a foxtail)

If you're in doubt, call your local veterinarian or emergency clinic for advice.

Additional Resources

You owners on the front lines of raw feeding – you are the experts.

Thanks so much for “Fine Tuning” in your September issue. As usual, you covered topics I’m coping with every day. My one-year-old Golden, Midas, might as well be “Hannah” in disguise: he gets aroused by exactly the same things. Now I don’t feel so bad, knowing even Editor Nancy Kerns needed Pat Miller’s tips!

I urgently want to warn readers, though, about the CoQ10 you recommend in the article in the same issue about eye health (“Seeing Is Believing”). My mixed breed, who usually seems to have an iron stomach, got extremely nauseated from CoQ10. Unfortunately, that’s what I remembered that when I tried it myself; I’d gotten severe gas pains.

I looked online (and *not* at sites that sell the supplement) and in my books, but found sources that recommend it almost never give side effects – your publication included. I’d like them given, if known, for every herb suggested, even if they’re only known for humans. I keep thinking we could’ve gone to the vet and even gotten *treated* for a problem that’s really a side effect.

Thank you for your inspiring, reassuring articles; my dogs’ lives are much improved as I slowly smarten up. I’m sure I’m learning the things they’ve been wanting to tell me all along!

Joan Carney
Harpswell, ME

Joan, thanks so much for your letter. You’ve raised an excellent point about the potential side effects of supplements, herbs, and other complementary remedies. We’ll make sure we do a better job of including this important information in all of our articles.

A look at my reference books does indeed confirm that some people have reported that CoQ10 can cause headache, heartburn, fatigue, and increased involuntary movements at high doses. Mild diarrhea and skin reactions have also been reported.

I love how you guys talk about raw diet all the time! Kudos, and isn’t it great that more people are becoming aware of actually paying attention to the health of their dogs and cats. BUT! Although I know you weren’t comprehensive in your listings due to probably space constraints, you left off two important *big* sources for the raw world.

One is the book *Switching to Raw* by Sue Johnson. I sell raw diets in my store, and I sell books to help educate the people who buy the raw diet options. *Switching to Raw* is one of our best sellers. It is clear, concise, simple, easy to follow, and formatted in a way that makes a new person really feel comfortable sitting down and reading it. It is one of the most highly recommended books by people on the Internet.

The other important omission is the prepared raw diet called Bravo Raw Diet. Of all the diets to miss! This one is one of the very best. Not only do they pay close and strict attention to quality but they are one of the few companies that offers certified organic options for people like myself who chose by quality, not cost. They keep the costs as reasonable as they can by offering bulk purchase prices. They offer complete raw frozen diets as well as the constituent parts, just like the other sources you listed.

Judy Asarkof
especiallyforpets.com

We had more people write in and mention Switching to Raw than I could count. The book is available from its author, Susan Johnson, at switchingtoraw.com or by sending \$13.95 plus \$1.50 shipping/handling per book to Birchrun Basics, PO Box 215, Lavon, TX 75166. Bravo Raw Diet can be purchased by calling (866) 922-9222 or see bravorawdiet.com.



First of all, I want to tell you how much I enjoy WDJ, which I have been subscribing to for several years now. Not wanting to miss anything, I even bought *all* the back issues, and I’m happy I did!

The “Mixing It Up” article (July 2004) was a good way of addressing those of us who want to feed a raw diet to our dogs, but like the convenience of a product that is easy to use.

Unfortunately, you omitted what I feel is one of the best products of this type, the Wendy Volhard NDF (Natural Diet Foundation) available from PHD Products. As you mentioned in your “Choosing a Raw Food Guru” article (June 2001), NDF (which Volhard developed in recent years) is a dehydrated version of the original Volhard Natural Diet, which has been around for more than 30 years.

My 10-year-old Golden Retriever, Bda Ch OTCh Can OTCh Newcoast’s Wynton of Bermuda Am CDX, has been fed exclusively on this diet for many years after a kibble and raw diet.

As a supposedly geriatric dog at his age, Wynton is still successfully competing at a high level in obedience and just started doing agility! People cannot believe he is 10 years old. He certainly acts like a dog many years younger and still has a great deal of vitality. Aside from rabies, which is required for travel, he hasn’t been vaccinated in many years, and his blood work is still very good.

I attribute this state of health directly to the Volhard NDF diet and Wendy’s holistic approach to dog care. While it is very sad to see so many of our wonderful Golden breed dying young, I’m still looking forward to several more quality years together with my beloved companion!

For those readers interested, information about the NDF diet can be found at phdproducts.com (800-PHD-1502) or volhard.com.

Carl Shechtman
Pembroke, Bermuda

WHAT'S AHEAD

Tour of the Dog

Holistic veterinarian Randy Kidd looks up, in, through, and at a dog's nose.

Anesthesia-Free Teeth Cleaning

This sounds like a great idea, especially for older dogs. But is the service really as beneficial as a "regular" cleaning?

Dance with Your Dog?!

Musical freestyle is a super-fun sport for dogs and their people. Go ahead and giggle! Learn a few steps, and you'll be hooked.

Bloat: Facts and Myths

The latest evidence about the causes and prevention of bloat.

The Nose Knows

Training Editor Pat Miller explores all the things a dog can do for us using his superior sense of smell – and explains how to make your dog's nose work for you!

Canned Food

The best canned dog foods, and why they might be better for your dog than dry.

RESOURCES

BOOKS

WDJ Training Editor Pat Miller is author of two books: *The Power of Positive Dog Training* and the brand-new *Positive Perspectives: Love Your Dog, Train Your Dog*. Both books are available from DogWise, (800) 776-2665 or dogwise.com

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

All You Ever Wanted to Know About Herbs for Pets, by Greg Tilford and Mary Wulff-Tilford, Bowtie Press, 1999. Available from DogWise (800-776-2665 or dogwise.com) or animalessentials.com

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

Eugene Aversa, DVM, Santa Fe, NM.
(505) 989-3445

Dr. Allen Schoen, DVM, Sherman, CT.
(203) 438-8878 or drschoen.com

TRAINING AND INSTRUCTION

The Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT) has references to member trainers in your area. Write to PO Box 1781, Hobbs, NM 88241, call (800) 738-3647, or view its database of trainers at apdt.com

Pat Miller, CPDT, Peaceable Paws Dog and Puppy Training, Hagerstown, Maryland. 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

Shannon Wilkinson, life coach and certified Tellington TTouch Practitioner, Portland, OR. Learn gentle methods to positively influence your dog's behavior, health, and performance. Private sessions, group lessons, demonstrations, full- and half-day workshops. (503) 234-6361 or shannon.wilkinson@earthlink.net

HERBAL TINCTURES

Glycerin-based herbal tinctures formulated by herbalist Greg Tilford, a frequent WDJ contributor, are available in select health food and pet supply stores, or from Animal Essentials. Call (888) 551-0416 or see animalessentials.com (click on "buy products" and then "Animals' Apawthecary")

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