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## Introduction

Over the last few years, the veterinary profession has seen a major paradigm shift. Slowly, the focus is moving away from vaccinating all pets with every vaccine available and taking a look at each pet's individual needs. This is a major change in our thinking. Around the turn of the century, the focus was on preventing and treating infectious diseases. As a result, doctors discovered the benefits of vaccines and various pharmaceuticals to help them achieve these goals. Now however, the leading cause of illness and death in pets is not infectious disease but rather chronic, degenerative problems such as kidney failure and cancer. Immune diseases are also occurring with increased frequency. The focus is slowly (and some might say with great hesitation) shifting among conventional doctors from focusing on infectious disease to focusing on these degenerative organ and immune problems.

Holistic, integrative doctors are leading the way in this paradigm shift. We are focusing on total pet care, looking at diet, environment, exercise, supplementation to improve the health of the pet, and decreasing the use of chemicals and conventional medications when possible to try to minimize the incidence of these degenerative and immune disorders.

8 Weeks to a Healthy Pet was written to help pet owners and doctors adapt to this new way of thinking. If we must shift our focus from treating disease to healing pets, I wanted to find a simple, effective, and when possible less expensive approach to achieve our goals. The 8 Week program, which was inspired by a similar program from integrative medical doctor Andrew Weil (author of 8 Weeks to Optimum Health,) will help you do just that. By following this program, you will do everything possible to achieve "optimum health" for your dog. It has been my experience that owners who follow the steps in this program truly have healthier pets, and are often able to decrease the ultimate cost of pet health care. I invite you to try the program and would love to hear your results!

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# An Overview of Non-Conventional (Integrative) Medicine

Before getting into the 8 Week program, I'd like to spend some time sharing with you my thoughts on this holistic/integrative approach. By understanding a few terms, the value of the 8 Week program will become apparent.

## Understanding the Holistic Approach to Health Care

When it comes to pet care, there are 2 basic schools of thought. First we have the Western or conventional approach. This is most likely the approach your doctor uses. Like me, most veterinarians are trained at veterinary schools which emphasize a conventional approach to medicine. With this approach, the doctor is trained to properly diagnose and treat disease in your pet. The conventional approach begins with an examination of the pet and questioning of the pet owner in an attempt to take a thorough history. Often, due to rushed, overbooked schedules, the doctor trained in the conventional approach may rush through this part of the diagnostic process. This rushed approach means that an entire health history is impossible to attain, which may negatively affect the pet's care. Following the examination and patient history, conventional diagnostic testing may be necessary to allow the doctor to obtain more diagnostic information to help him pinpoint the diagnosis and select the proper therapy. Commonly used conventional diagnostic testing include blood and urine testing, cultures, radiographs (X-rays,) EKG, ultrasound, surgical and non-surgical biopsies, and additional diagnostic imaging (such as CT scans or MRI scans.) Following this testing, the cause of most illnesses becomes apparent, allowing the selection of the proper therapy. Most conventional therapies are limited to surgery, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy. The most commonly used (and I would argue overused) chemotherapies include antibiotics such as amoxicillin and enrofloxacin, non-steroidal antiinflammatory agents (such as Rimadyl<sup>®</sup> and EtoGesic<sup>®</sup>), corticosteroids (prednisone and prednisolone,) and antihistamines (diphenhydramine, hydroxyzine.)

This conventional or Western approach is neither good nor bad, but rather one approach most doctors utilize due to their training. The focus is on treating disease. A few doctors trained in the conventional approach are now focusing on preventive medicine where part of the goal is to minimize disease. I have trained myself to take this approach as have many of my colleagues. Even though I have expanded my approach to incorporate a non-conventional (integrative) approach as well, conventional medicine has many benefits. While an integrative approach is, in my opinion, the ideal approach, conventional medicine has many positive aspects. For example, surgery is often necessary to save life and cure disease. If your pet has a fractured (broken) leg, acupuncture will not heal this affliction (although it can be used in the healing process following proper surgical stabilization.) Likewise, if your pet is bleeding to death, a conventional approach which recommends blood transfusion is needed. No herb or homeopathic will save a pet which is in imminent danger of bleeding to death (although herbs and homeopathics may assist the pet's recovery following proper conventional medical treatment.) Therefore, as you delve into 8 Weeks to a Healthy Pet, let's not forget the benefits that can come with proper and responsible use of conventional therapies.

The opposite approach is a non-conventional approach. Many call this an Eastern approach, as this is the approach used by doctors outside of the Western hemisphere (the Orient, India, etc.) Unlike the Western or conventional approach, this system is focused on healing the patient rather than treating the disease. This system is not simply concerned with the physical aspects of the patient but also with the spiritual and emotional aspects (admittedly, it is more difficult to deal with spiritual and emotional aspects of a pet. However, in using the Eastern approach to heal a pet we try to make the environment

of the pet as wholesome and healthy as possible through behavior modification and various herbs and flower essences. Additionally, helping the pet owner heal her own emotional and spiritual side has positive aspects for the pet.)

Like the Western approach, a full physical examination is performed and a thorough history is taken. Usually much more time is spent on this aspect of the visit than with the Western approach. Doctors with an Eastern philosophy know that the body can give us a lot of clues to help us determine what is wrong with it. Rushing through this aspect of the visit would cause us to overlook important information that can help us achieve the proper diagnosis and treatment. One thing I have learned since incorporating this Eastern approach in my practice is that literally, the pet's body and the owner's astute observations add volumes of information to the database I need in order to get the diagnosis. After prescribing what I believe is the proper therapy, I teach the owner's to listen to the pet's body to determine the success or failure of the therapy.

An excellent example of this is the approach to the dog or cat with allergic dermatitis (atopic dermatitis.) I use a variety of herbs, whole food complexes, proper diet, and regular topical decontamination through the liberal use of hypoallergenic shampoos and conditioning rinses. Because allergic dermatitis is a genetic disease, I can't cure my allergic patients. There is simply no way to change a pet's DNA or alter its genetic makeup, so we have to manage the allergies and minimize the allergic response which causes the pet to itch and develop secondary bacterial and yeast infections. Even with the proven therapies I use, many of these pets will still require the use of some conventional medications (usually steroids) at various times of the year as the allergies really "kick in." By using the Eastern approach, I teach the owners the signs to look for in their pets before using the steroids. In other words, I tell the owners that their pets' bodies will tell them when it's time to use steroids and when it's time to stop the medicine. Unlike the Western or conventional approach that might dictate a certain prescribed period of time for drug therapy based upon pharmacological research, the Eastern or non-conventional approach treats the pet as the pet's body dictates. We use drugs as needed to heal the pet rather than simply treat a disease.

***This is a new approach for many of you, but believe me when I say it is a powerful approach that has proven itself for thousands of years.***

With the Eastern approach, a different set of diagnostic testing is used than would be found in with a Western approach. A purely Eastern practitioner will not rely on conventional testing like blood or urine tests. Instead, the Eastern practitioner looks for physical clues from observation various parts of the patient's body. For example, the Eastern doctor might use tongue diagnosis in his practice. By observing the color of the tongue as well as any saliva adhering to it, he can obtain certain clues about the illness. Feeling the pulse of the patient gives more information than simply the heart rate. Looking at the color of the sclera (what is referred to as the white part of the eye) may also allow the Eastern practitioner a clue as to the patient's medical condition. Muscle testing (applied kinesiology) is a popular non-conventional test that many Eastern practitioners use. This relies on testing various muscle groups for strength or weakness to allow the doctor to pinpoint the problem. Chiropractors commonly employ applied kinesiology to help them determine which vertebral segments are out of alignment (subluxated) and require adjustment. Applied kinesiology can even be used to determine the proper therapy for a particular patient. For example, one dog that is determined to have a bladder problem using applied kinesiology might be treated with the herb uva ursi, whereas the next dog determined to have a similar problem might be treated with the homeopathic remedy Cantharis. While both pets may have the same problem using applied kinesiology, each may require a different therapy as determined

by applied kinesiology. While not all integrative doctors use these Eastern diagnostic tests, the integrative doctors usually have a greater range of testing to use to assist them in diagnosing the sick pet than their Western counterparts.

An extremely important aspect of the Eastern approach is to personalize the therapy for the patient based upon our diagnostic testing as just mentioned. Let's use the example of allergic dermatitis to show the difference in treatment between a Western approach and an Eastern approach. If you take your allergic pet to a conventional doctor, the treatment options for allergies are limited. The Western doctor might use shampoo and fatty acid therapy (fatty acid therapy was at once considered a non-conventional therapy but thankfully most conventional doctors are now incorporating their use in the treatment regimen,) but most commonly will use a corticosteroid such as prednisone (at the recommended dose of 0.25 mg-0.5 mg/pound of body weight daily for 7-10 days) or an antihistamine (such as Benadryl<sup>®</sup> at 1.0 mg/pound used twice daily.) The pet will get better for a short period of time, then relapse, at which point the drugs will be prescribed again (possibly even at a higher dosage.)

Now let's look at the treatment of this same allergic dog or cat using an Eastern approach. If medicines are necessary to make the pet comfortable the Eastern doctor may use the same prescribed dosage (although he will use the pet's response to the drug to tell him when to stop treatment rather than giving it for a certain amount of time simply based on a recommended treatment time) or may use applied kinesiology to determine the proper dosage and treatment regimen. The Eastern doctor also has many more therapies available for treating the pet. These can include acupuncture, homeopathy, herbs, diet, nutritional supplements, ayurvedic, chiropractic, magnetic, flower essence, TTouch, and essential oil therapy. He can use any of these therapies (picking ones based upon his personal experience or once again by using applied kinesiology) to help the pet heal, and he will observe the pet's response to determine the proper dosage and treatment interval.

This approach, which relies heavily on owner involvement and observation, is a very personal (holistic) approach that does what is best for the pet and focuses on healing the pet and not simply treating the disease.

### **Understanding Commonly Used Terms**

Other terms often used to describe this Eastern approach include alternative medicine, complementary medicine, holistic medicine, natural medicine, and integrative medicine.

The term "alternative" simply means "something else." So calling the non-conventional approach "alternative medicine" means that we choose to use some alternative therapy than a conventional therapy. Most holistic veterinarians don't like the term alternative medicine. With rare exception, doctors don't choose a treatment as an alternative to a conventional therapy. Usually we will combine a conventional therapy, when appropriate, with a non-conventional one. We don't consider our therapies alternatives because we don't want to turn our backs on conventional medicine when conventional medicine can help...

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