

Dr. Shawn's Basic Course on Integrative Pet Care Introduction to Integrative Medicine for Pet Owners



By Dr Shawn Messonnier, DVM

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Please send all suggestions and comments about this ebook to shawnvet@sbcglobal.net. We are continually looking for better ways to present natural pet care information.

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Dr. Shawn's Basic Course on Integrative Pet Care

Introduction to Integrative Medicine for Pet Owners

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Introduction

Welcome to my course on an integrative approach to caring for your pet!

This course comes about as a result of talking with many pet owners who desire to learn about and do something more than simply medicating their pets forever. As I discuss in my books, articles, newspaper column, and award-winning radio show, **YOU** are responsible for your pet's health. The more you can learn, the healthier your pet, the less you will spend on veterinary bills to treat illness, and the greater the chance your pet will outlive the "typical life expectancy" (currently 8-10 years of age for larger and giant breeds of dogs, 10-12 years of age for medium sized dogs, and 12-15 years of age for smaller dogs and cats.)

This course is designed for you to take at your leisure. There are no tests, no grades, and no homework! It is designed to be **FUN** and informative.

When you complete this home-study course, you should be able to:

- Understand the integrative approach to health care
- Read a pet food label to help you choose the best diet for your pet
- Prepare a homemade diet for your pet
- Understand the proper use of commonly prescribed nutritional supplements
- Understand the side effects of commonly prescribed nutritional supplements
- Know the proper use of vaccinations and alternatives to annual vaccinations

Future modules will help you learn to:

- Know how to use conventional medications properly as part of an integrative health care program
- Learn how to properly use conventional and alternative methods in controlling internal and external parasites
- Understand acupuncture
- Understand homeopathy and homotoxicology
- Understand flower essence therapy
- Understand animal massage and acupressure
- Understand animal reiki
- Understand magnetic therapy
- Understand all aspects of selected animal diseases (their causes, conventional therapies, and complementary therapies)

I've also included a list of some of my commonly used and favorite supplements. Most of these can be easily purchased on my website, www.petcarenaturally.com. While these supplements are safe to use, I always recommend letting your veterinarian know about anything your pet takes, especially if your pet is ill.

It is not the intent of this introductory course to make you a veterinarian, nor encourage you to diagnose and treat your pet. Rather, the course is meant to provide information that will serve as a launching pad for a discussion between you and your veterinarian.

For those of you who do not currently use a holistic veterinarian, you may locate one at the website of the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association, www.altvetmed.org.

Finally, continue to visit my website, www.petcarenaturally.com, **FREQUENTLY**. It's constantly updated with new articles and Q&A's, as well as products and books I personally recommend.

Feel free to give me your feedback on this course, as well as future courses or modules you'd like me to offer. Simply email me through my website, www.petcarenaturally.com.

Enjoy!

Dr. Shawn

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Lesson 1

Understanding the Integrative Approach to Pet Care

*“You Are the Primary Guardian of Your Pet.
Let Knowledge Empower You.
Heal the Pet, Prevent Disease.”*

Understanding the Integrative (Holistic) Approach to Pet Care

At my hospital, Paws & Claws Animal Hospital, I integrate conventional therapies (when appropriate) with complementary (alternative) therapies that may include acupuncture, magnetic therapy, homeopathy, homotoxicology, nutritional therapy, and Chinese or Western herbal therapy. When possible, our approach is to minimize conventional medications (saying “NO” to drugs) when appropriate. While each pet is different, the following general approach (“5 Goals, 4 Steps”) will apply to most pets.

5 Goals of a holistic (natural, integrative) pet health care program:

1. Prevent Disease
2. Say NO to Drugs
3. “Heal” the Pet, Rather than “Treat” the Disease
4. Offer “Hope for the Hopeless”
5. Save Money on Pet Care

Goal #1 - Prevent Disease

This goal seems simple enough; let's prevent disease so that your pet never becomes ill. I would actually prefer to see healthy pets rather than ill ones. It's obviously not practical or possible for a pet to never become ill, but we can do a lot to minimize illness. While vaccines may be appropriate at times, a holistic approach appreciates the fact that most of the diseases we see in practice are chronic degenerative diseases. Conventional medicine really does a poor job of preventing and treating these disorders, as it is better suited to treating acute problems like infectious disease. A holistic approach utilizes several steps in order to prevent disease. First, feeding a natural diet, free of harmful chemicals and byproducts, minimizes cell damage. Minimizing vaccines and the unnecessary use of medications and toxins, is also important. Finally, a well-prescribed supplement regimen can reduce inflammation and oxidation in your pet's body, decreasing the chances of your pet developing chronic diseases (readers can check out some of the supplements I use in my practice at www.petcarenaturally.com)

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Goal #2 - Say NO to Drugs

One of the most important aspects of a holistic health care plan for your pets is saying NO to drugs whenever possible, and finding alternatives to traditional medications. Drugs certainly have their place in the treatment of many diseases, and we shouldn't totally abandon their use. In my opinion, they work best for *acute* problems (such as serious infections and the occasional flare-ups of chronic problems like allergies and arthritis.) More *chronic* problems (and often minor acute problems) respond best to alternative therapies like herbs, homeopathics, magnetic therapy, chiropractic, and acupuncture. Chronic use of conventional drugs is often more expensive than alternative treatments, and side effects are much more commonly encountered when using conventional medications than when alternative therapies are used. Additionally, many pets treated with chronic drug therapy develop side effects from these drugs, or even another disease from the drug therapy! This means that even more drugs are used to treat these secondary disorders, leading to further increases in side effects or second or third diseases. Finding natural, alternative therapies is a safer, healthier approach for treating the pet with chronic problems. When drugs need to be used in treating diseases in pets, especially chronic diseases, the LOWEST dose of the drug that provides relief should be used for the SHORTEST

amount of time. This approach minimizes side effects, and also gives the pet the “correct” amount of drug it needs at that time.

Goal #3 - Heal the Pet Rather Than Treat Disease

In veterinary school, which focuses only on conventional medicine, doctors learn to properly diagnose and treat signs and symptoms, and hopefully diseases. While there is nothing inherently wrong with this approach (even holistic doctors need to diagnose the correct problem before they can treat it,) if our ONLY concern is treating the disease then we are failing our patients. The holistic approach focuses on the PATIENT and not the DISEASE. This is a radically different view of medicine. Healing the patient means, as much as is practical, restoring it to a normal, healthy condition. A normal, healthy patient is, for the most part, disease free. Notice I have not talked about curing disease. We can restore health even in pets which harbor a fatal disease such as cancer. They can be “healthy” as long as possible, fighting off the cancer, keeping it in remission, and “living with their disease.” Talking about cancer as an example, Dr. Kevin Hahn, one of the contributors to my latest book, *The Natural Vet’s Guide to Preventing and Treating Cancer in Dogs* (New World Library, 2006,) admonishes us not to forget that “there is a pet attached to that tumor.” Rightly so, his focus (and that of doctors who take a holistic view of health and disease) is on treating “pets with cancer” rather than “treating cancer.” This different approach is the essence of developing a holistic approach to caring for yourself as well as your pets.

Goal #4 - Offering Hope for the Hopeless

Offering “Hope for the Hopeless” is actually my favorite of our 5 goals. Many cases of illness are considered hopeless by conventional standards. Maybe there are no therapies for the specific problem (an example is liver cancer,) or maybe the pet has not responded to the appropriate therapies. Before you give up, before you euthanize your pet, consider alternative therapies. I have seen way too many pets that were deemed “untreatable” by conventional doctors that responded well to a holistic approach. While not every pet can be cured, many can heal enough to live a good quality life and coexist with their diseases. One of my favorite cases is Deluxie, who was 2 years old at the time I saw her. She was correctly diagnosed with polyarthritis and treated by her conventional veterinarians, one of whom was a specialist in internal medicine.

Unfortunately, the treatment made Deluxie sick, and she also developed diabetes due to her therapies. Her doctors told the owners that no more could be done for her and that she should be euthanized. Fortunately, Deluxie responded to a number of holistic therapies. She is doing great at this time. While she still has her polyarthritis, she has been in remission for several years and is taking minute amounts of medications that do not make her ill. Pets like Deluxie are a prime reason why I remain committed to a holistic, integrative approach to pet care. It's particularly rewarding to help pets that conventional medicine cannot help. These cases are not considered "hopeless" when viewed from a holistic perspective.

Goal #5 - Saving Money on Pet Care

I'm often asked if a holistic pet care program costs more than a traditional pet care program. In general, the answer is "no." It's usually less expensive to prevent problems rather than treat them. Additionally, using natural therapies usually, but not always, costs less than conventional drug therapy. There are several reasons for this. Supplements are usually less expensive than drugs, especially if generic medications are not available. Chronic drug therapy usually requires frequent laboratory monitoring of the pet to ensure side effects have not developed; this is usually not necessary with natural therapies. Drugs can cause secondary diseases, which require even more drugs to treat these diseases; this doesn't happen when using natural therapies. For those times when a natural approach costs more, keep in mind that your pet will usually be healthier and live longer with this approach. It's impossible to put a price on that! And finally, I always encourage pet owners to use pet health insurance, which can cut the cost of any preventive or therapeutic program. If you want to save money on pet care.....

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