

Combining Alternative Medical Therapies

The underlying philosophy of all alternative medical therapies is the 'holistic' approach, in which the patient is treated as a whole being rather than as a collection of organs and parts. The patient is treated as an individual rather than as a diagnosis, and the treatment is determined by the way that he or she is responding to illness. Once treatment has begun, the patient's response must be accurately assessed, the cause of this response determined, and the treatment adjusted if appropriate.



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If multiple therapies are given to a patient at one time, it is impossible to know which treatment caused which response. The combination of treatments may have acted additively (each treatment worked without interfering with the other treatment), synergistically (the combination of treatments has produced a much greater effect than would be expected from an additive effect) or antagonistically (the treatments interfered with each other, cancelling out some or all of their effects). The alternative treatments most likely to act deeply on the immune system are acupuncture, herbal medicine (including Traditional Chinese Medicine), and homeopathy. As a general rule, acupuncture, herbal therapy, and homeopathy should only be combined under the advice of a properly trained veterinary professional to avoid interference between the various modalities and enhance the chances of a synergistic or additive reaction.

Caution must always be used when combining these therapies with conventional treatments, including surgery. The use of steroids or anti-inflammatory drugs can mask symptoms of value in prescribing homeopathic remedies, herbs, and even acupuncture. The action of homeopathic medicines is also believed to be interfered with by the use of potent compounds such as antibiotics, corticosteroids, pungent ointments, and strong-smelling products such as camphor or tea tree oil.

Veterinary practitioners trained in acupuncture, herbal therapy and homeopathy are the best sources of information on what conventional and alternative treatments will combine well and which ones should not be used together.

Treatments that may be combined

As a general rule, Bach flower remedies, massage therapy, physical therapy, chiropractic, nutritional therapy, and some supplements may be safely combined with most other forms of conventional or alternative therapy. Usually, mild products such as slippery elm, green tea, psyllium husks, and aloe vera juice will not interfere with other treatments. If it is necessary to identify how much each treatment is contributing individually to a patient, they may be given at different times or even on different days and the patient's response assessed.

To summarize, combining alternative medical therapies, either with other alternative therapies or with more conventional treatments, may improve the patient's health or speed the healing of lesions. However, combined incorrectly, these same therapies have the potential to interfere with healing or cause serious health consequences. Therapies should never be combined except on the advice of a knowledgeable veterinary practitioner. Ideally one veterinary practitioner should assume the responsibility of co-ordinating the pet's treatments and care, in cooperation with the pet's owner or caregivers.

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