



# Main Street Veterinary Services

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## Introduction to Holistic Pet Care



Formulating a successful holistic plan to keep our pets healthy relies on more than simply striving to keep them free of disease; it also involves maintaining a balance between each interdependent function of the body to reward optimum health.

Further, professionals practicing CAVM (Complementary and Alternative Veterinary Medicine) recognize that the relationship between patient and physician extends to the animal's

guardian, thereby providing the empowerment tools necessary to play an active role in the progressive health care of their cat or dog.

## Holistic Pet Care Treats the Mind and Body

By definition, the term holistic literally translates to part of the whole. Therefore, a holistic approach to medicine refers to viewing the whole body, while recognizing the synergistic significance of each of its mechanisms. For people, this means taking overall health history, genetics, diet, lifestyle and emotional well-being into consideration.

Holistic pet care, too, treats the entire animal—whether it's a cat, dog, horse, bird, or reptile—as more than a physical being. This awareness of the mind-body-environment relationship differs from the allopathic view typical of western medicine, which generally seeks to treat the symptoms of disease but may not address its underlying cause.

## Holistic Pet Care is Preventative

Since our pets cannot tell us when they're not well, a holistic approach to pet care becomes even more meaningful. For instance, the appearance of arthritis in an aging pet, or the onset of diabetes at any age, may not be readily apparent until the condition becomes advanced. In fact, many pets may seem to be perfectly healthy, even while these conditions may be present—at least until symptoms cease being subclinical and tissue or organ damage becomes clearly evident.

Since holistic pet care may involve incorporating a natural, whole food diet, adequate exercise and balanced nutritional supplementation, many such conditions may be prevented in the first place, as well as the necessity for non-routine medical procedures or unwanted side effects from certain medications.

## Holistic Pet Care is Complimentary and Integrative

It should also be understood, however, that a holistic approach to pet care does not endeavor to exclude conventional or complementary treatments at the risk of therapeutic snobbery. Instead, holistic pet care invokes the careful selection of a combination of therapies—both conventional and holistic—in a complementary or integrative manner.

That being said, most holistic veterinarians mindfully choose to forego referring to any treatment as being ‘alternative,’ a term which has gained much popularity in the last two decades and which suggests that holistic methodologies firmly replace conventional treatments. This is simply not the case. In fact, depending on the nature of the affliction, conventional therapy may be indicated to best treat a pet. At other times, under different circumstances, an animal may best respond to a holistic or integrative course of treatment.

## Holistic Pet Care Specialties

The world of holistic pet care embraces many different modalities, from botanical therapies to acupuncture and even energy work. However, no one modality necessarily takes preference over another, nor is every animal ‘cured’ by one more than another. Rather, it is often the combination of therapies that offer the most benefit for your dog or cat. Some common holistic methods of achieving wellness include:

- Traditional Chinese Herbal Medicine
- Supplements
- Homotoxicology
- Acupuncture
- Chiropractic
- Natural Nutrition
- Titre Testing

## Nutrition is Essential to Holistic Pet Care

Processed foods can be problematic for pets just like they are for people. Prior to convenience foods becoming widely available after World War II, pets were commonly fed table scraps and raw bones. However, with the advent of canned and bagged pet food, certain enzymes and nutrients may be lacking along with wholesome, quality ingredients. In fact, allergies, skin disorders and other health problems have become common in pets today, a phenomenon often attributed commercial pet food. ~~In addition, the lifespan of many breeds of dogs, in particular, have decreased by half over the last 30 years, again thought to be the result of compromised nutrition.~~

The old adage, ‘you are what you eat’ applies to animals as much as it does to humans. No quantity or quality of treatment—holistic or conventional--will have lasting impact on the health of your pet if your pet’s diet is not meeting your pet’s nutritional needs. Therefore, balanced

nutrition is an important factor to address when developing a holistic health care regimen for your pet.

## Who Uses Holistic Pet Care Methods?

According to a 2006 survey conducted by the Animal Cancer Center of Colorado State University, 65% of the 254 pet owners surveyed revealed that they use complimentary therapies to treat their pets for a variety of conditions, including:

- Cancer
- Diabetes
- Allergies
- Heart disease
- Arthritis
- Respiratory infections
- Gum disease
- Behavioral problems
- Obesity
- Age-related problems (such as macular degeneration)

In response, more veterinarians are becoming board certified specialists to treat certain types of disorders. In fact, according to the American Animal Hospital Association, this trend has increased 76% over the last ten years. Further, many of these veterinarians are now specializing in CAVM (Complementary and Alternative Veterinary Medicine) to offer complimentary therapies—from herbal medicine to acupuncture—to treat common as well as advanced conditions in their patients.

## How Does a Veterinarian Qualify as a Holistic Practitioner?

Unfortunately, holistic techniques are generally not taught in any depth at most veterinary schools. However, several organizations have launched in recent years to assist students entering the field to become trained in holistic veterinary medicine. For instance, the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association offers seminars, courses, lectures, reference materials and a mentoring program to help candidates become practicing holistic veterinarians. These organizations also encourage established veterinarians to enhance their services by offering a pathway to learning how to use holistic modalities.

## Is Holistic Veterinary Care Expensive?

The cost of holistic veterinary services is no more expensive than contemporary veterinary care. Overall, holistic services usually cost less in the long run. This is due to the fact that holistic pet care is largely preventative, using balanced nutrition and supplements to promote good health and form a first line of defense against disease.

Holistic veterinary care is also far less intrusive than standard care, which keeps costs low. For instance, treating an animal suffering from cancer or inflammatory disease with holistic remedies, such as botanical therapies, homeopathy or massage, is much less costly than surgery or prescription drugs. As an added benefit, there are few side effects associated with holistic veterinary care than most contemporary methods of treatment.

