

Three Questions to Ask Before Going Natural

Ask yourself these questions before considering a complementary treatment for your dog.

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Deciding that you want to try a holistic approach to your dog's care is just the first step. Now you need to make it happen. Before you embark on your holistic quest, here are three questions to ask yourself:

Am I ready for the commitment? By its very definition, holistic medicine doesn't do quick fixes. Instead, it seeks to correct health problems by bringing the body into overall balance. The longer your dog has been out of synch, the longer it might take his body to heal itself. If you're not ready for such a wide-lens focus – or if you are banking on overnight changes – you might be disappointed. And remember that this new approach could mean bedrock changes in your dog's diet, vaccine schedule, and lifestyle – and a time and money commitment from you.

How will my regular vet react? Some conventional veterinarians are not comfortable with the idea of working with a holistic counterpart. You can do a lot to set the tone of the collaboration and foster a spirit of cooperation instead of igniting a turf war. Communicate fully and honestly with your regular vet, and let him or her know what alternative treatments you are pursuing. Educate yourself fully about the approach the holistic practitioner is taking, and keep your regular vet in the loop. If at any point you feel belittled or "guilted" by your vet's reaction to the course you want to take, ask yourself if it's time to re-evaluate the relationship, and perhaps seek out a new practitioner who is more open-minded.

Do I have a good support system? It helps to talk with others who have "been there, done that." The Internet is a good place to find such moral support if you know where to look. An excellent starting point is message boards that specialize in natural dog care. From raw feeding to natural cancer care, there is a discussion group for virtually every area of holistic dog care and concern. Just remember that most people are sharing their experiences but aren't experienced, qualified practitioners.

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