

Establishing a Healthcare Regimen for Your Dog

Should you choose holistic care, conventional care or both?

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When choosing a health care regimen for our dogs, we have many decisions to make, including which veterinarian to choose; what type of health care, holistic or conventional, is best for our dogs; when to seek help; and when to look for a specialist.

Choosing a Veterinarian Your veterinarian is your number one partner in dog care, so finding one isn't a task to be taken lightly. Choose a veterinarian before you need one. If there's an emergency, you don't want to have to rely on someone with whom you're not familiar. Lining up a veterinarian for your dog in advance is especially important if you prefer a holistic approach to canine health, choose not to vaccinate annually, or have a dog with special needs. Finding the right veterinarian can involve both referrals and personal interviews.

Word of mouth is a good way to get veterinary referrals. If you're moving to a new city, your own veterinarian may be able to refer you to a colleague there. Or ask friends, neighbors, and coworkers about their veterinarians, including what they like about the hospital, and even what they don't like. A referral from someone you trust is a good start.

What you look for in a hospital depends on what is most important to you. Look for one that suits your needs, provides the level of care you want, has friendly and knowledgeable lay staff, and has a vet who provides the type of care you're looking for. Some questions to ask are: Is this a high-tech clinic or a family practice? Will I get referrals for specialty care if needed? Is emergency care available?

When you have the names of a few veterinarians, set up appointments to meet them and tour their hospitals. Interview several veterinarians and ask about their philosophy on things that are important to you such as how they feel about raw or homemade diets or how often they recommend vaccinations. The hospital tour and a meeting with the veterinarian and staff will help you make the right decision. Not every hospital even if it's a good one is going to be right for everyone.

Ask if the veterinarian is affiliated with a professional organization such as the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) or a holistic or homeopathic veterinary medical association. The AAHA, for instance, has a set of standards that veterinarians must meet in such areas as surgery, anesthesia, dentistry, and recordkeeping. Hospitals must be inspected regularly to maintain their accreditation.

There may be a time when you will want a second opinion or need to have your dog seen by a specialist. You may like your veterinarian very much but simply want another perspective. There's nothing wrong with that. It's okay to ask your own veterinarian for a referral. A good vet will be happy to refer you to a specialist, and may do so automatically in the case of a serious diagnosis. Another option is to ask for a referral from a friend or colleague who has a pet with a similar problem.

Next step: Complementary Therapies/Holistic Medicine

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