

Keeping the wag in the tail: A holistic approach to healthy dogs

Dogs don't bite Jeanie Mossa Kraft. That's because the licensed herbalist and acupuncturist is like "Dr. Doolittle with needles. I've had people tell me that," she said. "They know what I'm doing is going to help their pet."

Mirroring doctors' house calls of decades ago, Ms. Kraft treats her furry patients in their homes through Four Paws Acupuncture, her private practice in Salem, Mass., which utilizes traditional Chinese medicine.

The 1974 graduate of The Catholic High School of Baltimore and St. Rita, Dundalk, takes special interest in pain and dysfunction syndromes for dogs, including hip dysplasia. She believes natural remedies aren't only for the two-legged and can keep the tails wagging.

"Dogs often benefit more from them than we do," said Ms. Kraft, "helping to keep your dog happy and healthy."

Turns out acupuncture is not just for humans and has been administered to animals for 2,000 years, according to Ms. Kraft. Many of her patients take a turn toward better health after treatments.

Ms. Kraft has suggestions for acupuncture, feeding, watering and massage when it comes to keeping "man's best friend" healthy.

When conventional (and expensive) medicine does not ease pain symptoms in dogs, owners can turn to traditional Chinese medicine, such as acupuncture, which Ms.

Kraft said was a time-tested, clinically effective holistic solution to the stresses and health problems of pets.

Acupuncture works through helping a body heal itself, with the theory that disease is the result of a blockage in energy flow along pathways in the body. Inserting needles into these pathways unblocks the energy and restores health.

“Though many people are squeamish about needles,” said Ms. Kraft, “most dogs don’t mind at all.”

Supplements such as alfalfa, essential fatty acids, and glucosamine also can help ease the pain of arthritis, hip dysplasia and other inflammation in dogs.

When it comes to “feeding Fido,” junk food exists for dogs as much as it does for humans. Knowing what not to feed dogs is as important as learning what good food should be dished out.

“‘You are what you eat’ applies to our four-pawed friends as well,” said Ms. Kraft who recommends brands containing free-range meats or fish. Because research has shown wheat to aggravate symptoms of arthritis and pain in dogs, dog food should not contain fillers, by-products, wheat, soy or corn.

When it comes to “watering Woofie,” sometimes chemicals can be found in tap water that are dangerous for humans and animals. Taking the time to fill a dog’s water bowl with fresh filtered water may save his life from cancer and other diseases, according to Ms. Kraft.

Be sure your dog has enough water, especially on hot days. Stainless steel or glass bowls for food and water are recommended.

“Plastic can attract bacteria and mold,” she said, “and can be toxic depending on

where the bowl was made.”

A massage can also add to a dog’s health.

Like people, most dogs enjoy a massage, which can have a calming effect. Ms. Kraft suggests first gently rubbing the ears and moving down the head. Stroke eye lids, muzzle, and nose. Work down the neck to the chest. Continue down the back, yet be respectful of a dog’s private areas.

For detailed information, visit www.FourPawsAcupuncture.com.