

## Holistic & Complementary Veterinary Medicine

*Bolton Veterinary Hospital*

In recent years, pet owners and veterinarians have taken a greater interest in a holistic approach to health care. By definition, **a holistic health exam should**

**include discussion of all aspects of the pet's lifestyle:**

Their medical history, diet, activity level, and their social interactions with humans and other pets are all taken into consideration. A holistic approach to medical care may incorporate both **traditional diagnostics and therapeutics**, such as prescription diets, medications, and dental care, as well as **complementary and alternative modalities**, such as acupuncture, herbal supplements, massage therapy and more.



The scope of complementary and alternative veterinary medicine is vast, and **not all modalities are believed to be equal in their efficacy**. In some cases, research has been conducted to fully understand how or why a given therapy works. In other cases, the effect a therapy is supposed to have is largely unsupported conjecture (and in some cases it may just be a sales gimmick!). **This article is meant to help you understand which therapies are potentially useful.**

### Acupuncture and Acutherapy

- Traditional Chinese medicine, as it has applied to human health for centuries, is used as a basis for veterinary acupuncture.
- Specific points on the body are examined and stimulated by use of acupuncture needles. Additional means of stimulation can include pressure, moxibustion (application of a heated substance), injections of saline or B-vitamins at specific points, low-level laser therapy, and more.
- Acupuncture and related therapies are accepted as an effective mode of therapy in human medicine, and they are widely believed to be effective in animals as well. The American Veterinary Medical Association recognizes acupuncture and acutherapy as an accepted and "fully integrated" approach to therapy.
- Veterinarians may elect to pursue formal training in traditional Chinese medicine and the use of acupuncture outside of the standard veterinary school curriculum. Ask your veterinarian if they (or their colleagues) have been trained to perform acupuncture, low-level laser therapy, or related practices.
- At Bolton Vet, Dr. Cassandra Oswald and Dr. Michelle Pesce are formally trained in veterinary acupuncture. Many Bolton Vet doctors routinely make use of low-level laser therapy. You may search for an acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Veterinary Medicine practitioner local to you at [www.tcvm.com](http://www.tcvm.com).



### **Veterinary Chiropractic**

- The scope of veterinary chiropractic includes the evaluation, manipulation, and adjustment of specific joints. It does NOT include prescribed medication or supplements, surgery, or injections, and it cannot be considered a replacement for standard veterinary care.
  - Clinical and anecdotal evidence suggests that veterinary chiropractic can be beneficial, but formal research is limited.
  - Veterinarians may elect to pursue formal training in veterinary chiropractic outside of the standard veterinary school curriculum. Ask your veterinarian if they (or their colleagues) have been trained to perform chiropractic medicine.
- At Bolton Vet, Dr. Cassandra Oswald is currently pursuing training in veterinary chiropractic. You may search for a certified veterinary chiropractic practitioner at [animalchiropractic.org](http://animalchiropractic.org).

### **Veterinary Physical Therapy & Massage Therapy**

- Veterinary physical therapy is the use of noninvasive techniques, such as low-level lasers (see photo to right), electrical sources, magnetic fields, and ultrasound; rehabilitative exercises; hydrotherapy; and applications of heat and cold for the rehabilitation of injuries.
- Veterinary massage therapy includes only the use of a person's hands and body to massage soft tissues.
- Physical therapy and massage therapy techniques may be performed by a veterinary technician under the supervision or referral of a licensed veterinarian who is providing concurrent medical care.
- Many veterinarians, particularly those who perform orthopedic surgeries, will make recommendations for physical rehabilitation and can instruct a pet owner in basic protocols and techniques.
- Physical rehabilitation techniques are incorporated in a modern veterinary school curriculum, but veterinarians may elect to pursue further training independently.
- Local to Bolton Vet, formal physical therapy programs include [Wizard of Paws](#) in Colchester CT and [Pieper Memorial's physical therapy department](#) in Middletown, CT. Many Bolton Vet doctors routinely make use of low-level laser therapy.

### **Veterinary Homeopathy**

- Veterinary homeopathy incorporates an interesting strategy: Tiny amounts of substances that are capable of *causing* clinical signs in healthy animals are administered to sick/injured animals with those same clinical signs. The therapy is believed to work because the doses administered are *extremely dilute*.

- The human and veterinary medical communities' understanding of how homeopathy may work is not complete. It is among the less scientifically-supported modalities (that is to say, it may not be effective at all).
- Many pet owners are not aware that HOMEOPATHIC medicine is not the same as HERBAL medicine (see below for more on herbal medicine...)
- Clinical and anecdotal evidence suggests that veterinary homeopathy can be beneficial, but formal research is very limited.
- Buyer (or Googler) beware, homeopathic products are not FDA-regulated, so *there is no guarantee a homeopathic product actually contains what is on the label (!!).*
- Since some of these substances may be toxic when used at inappropriate doses, it is imperative that veterinary homeopathy be practiced only by licensed veterinarians who have been educated in veterinary homeopathy.
- Veterinarians may elect to pursue formal training in veterinary homeopathy outside of the standard veterinary school curriculum.
- At Bolton Vet, Dr. Cassandra Oswald is formally trained in veterinary homeopathy. You may search for a Certified Veterinary Homeopath local to you at [theavh.org](http://theavh.org).



### **Veterinary Herbal/Botanical Medicine**

- Veterinary botanical medicine is the use of plants and plant derivatives as therapeutic agents.
- There are many examples of the use of herbal/botanical products in veterinary medicine:
  - Citronella oil (an extract of lemongrass) is widely recognized as a mild insect repellent.
  - Cranberry extract is frequently used to prevent recurrent urinary tract infections in humans and animals, and its mechanism of action has been studied and is well-understood.
  - Supplements containing Milk Thistle are generally considered a standard of care in the treatment of some types of liver disease.
- Buyer (or Googler) beware, there are many herbal products and "natural" supplements that are quite costly, yet not necessarily effective. Supplements are not FDA-regulated, so *there is no guarantee a herbal product actually contains what is on the label (!!).* Your veterinarian can recommend trusted brand-name supplements.
- Since some of these botanicals may be toxic when used at inappropriate doses, it is imperative that veterinary botanical medicine be practiced only by licensed veterinarians who have been educated in veterinary botanical medicine. Safe dosing of herbal medications is just as important as safe dosing of prescription medications.
- Veterinarians may elect to pursue formal training in veterinary botanical/herbal medicine outside of the standard veterinary school curriculum. You may search for a Certified Veterinary Herbalist at [www.vbma.org](http://www.vbma.org).

## **Nutraceutical Medicine**

- Nutraceutical medicine is the use of micronutrients, macronutrients, and other nutritional supplements as therapeutic agents.
- Research in this field is ongoing. There are many examples of the use of specialized nutrition or nutraceutical products in veterinary medicine. Some are believed to be more effective than others:
  - There is a great abundance of carefully formulated prescription dog and cat diets to treat or help control a wide variety of diseases, including allergies, obesity, joint pain, kidney failure, and liver disease.
  - Glucosamine and omega-3 fatty acids are widely recognized as dietary supplements for joint support and prevention of arthritis
  - St. John's Wort is believed to have analgesic (pain-relieving) and anxiolytic (anxiety-relieving) properties; yet at an excessive dose, this plant extract can be toxic, potentially causing skin ulceration and dermatitis.
  - Some skin conditions are responsive to zinc supplementation, however, excessive dietary zinc can also be quite toxic.
- Nutrition and veterinary nutraceutical medicine are incorporated in a modern veterinary school curriculum, but veterinarians may elect to pursue further training independently.

## **References / Further Reading**

The [AVMA Guidelines for Complementary & Alternative Veterinary Medicine](#) can be found online via search of this title.

The International Veterinary Acupuncture Society - [www.ivas.org](http://www.ivas.org)

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