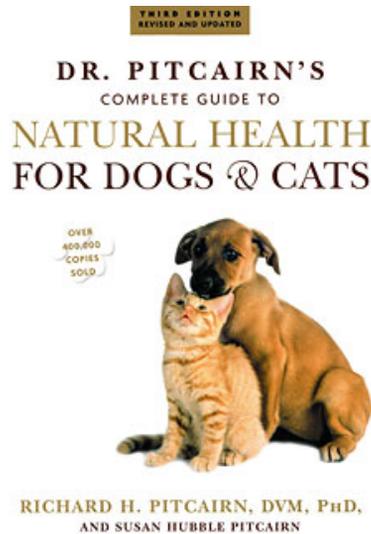


Pitcairn Richard H. / Pitcairn S.  
Dr. Pitcairn's Complete Guide to Natural Health for Dogs & Cats

Reading excerpt

[Dr. Pitcairn's Complete Guide to Natural Health for Dogs & Cats](#)  
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PART ONE

# NATURAL HEALTH FOR PETS

“SENSITIVE ASSAYS HAVE DETECTED RESIDUES OF OVER A HUNDRED DIFFERENT FOREIGN CHEMICALS AND METALS IN OUR TISSUES—COMPOUNDS AND SUBSTANCES THAT WERE VIRTUALLY ABSENT FROM THE ENVIRONMENTS OF OUR PREDECESSORS.”

—MARC LAPPÉ





## CHAPTER 1

# WE NEED A NEW APPROACH TO PET HEALTH CARE



“Why don’t you take care of this one?” my colleague asked me, with the look of someone about to unload an unwelcome problem. He pointed through the door to a little middle-aged dog sitting forlornly on the examining table. If his coat had ever been sleek, soft, and healthy, it was no more. Obviously, his hair had been falling out for some time, revealing large greasy patches that had an unpleasant odor. Even his spirits were low. Unfortunately, I’d seen cases like his all too often.

Waiting nearby were the dog’s equally dejected guardians, an aging couple who had “tried it all” and still cared enough about

their little companion to try once more. The dog's hospital record showed a long history of treatments—cortisone shots, medicated soaps, ointments, more shots, more salves—none of which brought any noticeable improvement.

“The poor little guy is just *so miserable*, doctor,” began Mrs. Wilson anxiously. “We would do anything if we thought it would help.”

It didn't take me long to decide that it was finally time to step off the beaten path and try out a new nutritional approach to this kind of case, an idea that had been brewing in my mind for some time. We were at a medical dead end and there was nothing to lose. But more importantly, I knew there was a good chance that what I had in mind might work. As I examined Tiny, I explained to the Wilsons why I thought an improved diet was their animal's best chance for recovery.

“Skin problems like his are probably the most common and frustrating of the conditions we try to deal with,” I told them. “Because the skin is such a visible area of the body, it can show the first signs of underlying problems, particularly those caused by inadequate diet. The skin grows very rapidly, making a whole new crop of cells about every three weeks. It needs a lot of nourishment, so when the diet lacks what's really needed, the skin is one of the first tissues to break down and show abnormalities like the kind we see here in Tiny.”

As we went on talking about the effects of diet and the shortcomings of highly

processed pet foods based on low-quality food by-products, the Wilsons saw that a change could make a big difference. So we worked out a suitable feeding program for Tiny, emphasizing fresh natural foods.

Starting now, Tiny would eat meat, whole grains, and fresh vegetables. In addition, the Wilsons would give him several supplements rich in nutrients important to the health of the skin as well as to the rest of the body—brewer's yeast, vegetable oil, cod-liver oil, kelp, bonemeal, vitamin E, and zinc. I also recommended that they bathe Tiny occasionally with a mild, non-medicated shampoo to help remove irritating, toxic secretions from his skin without burdening his body with harsh chemicals.

During the next weeks, my thoughts often went to Tiny, wondering how he was doing on this new treatment. A month after their first visit, the Wilsons returned to show the results of the treatment. Tiny was like a new dog.

“You wouldn't believe the difference!” Mrs. Wilson exclaimed. “He runs around and plays like he's a puppy again.” Tiny was indeed full of life, jumping around excitedly on the examining table. His coat was much healthier, and hair was rapidly filling in the previously bare spots.

It was very rewarding to all of us, but most of all to Tiny. For the Wilsons, there was the added benefit of realizing that their dog's health was now in their control and that keeping him well did not require monthly injections of cortisone or other medications.

## A NEW SENSE OF PURPOSE TAKES HOLD

Tiny's case was one of my first clinical attempts to apply the results of a long learning process concerning the vital role of nutrition in health. Now, after 27 years of seeing successes such as this with improved diet, the essential importance of nutrition in restoring health is obvious to me.

I did not, however, always approach cases in such a manner. My veterinary school training in nutrition had included little more than the admonition: "Tell your clients to feed their animals a good commercial pet food and to avoid table scraps." Beyond that, nutrition just wasn't considered an important part of our education. I accepted this attitude at face value, and after graduation I set out to conquer disease, armed with the usual arsenal of drugs and surgical techniques gleaned from my years of schooling.

Faced with the day-to-day challenges of my first job in a busy mixed practice (small and large animals), I soon learned that many diseases simply did not respond to treatments as I had been told they would. In fact, it often seemed that what I did to help mattered very little. I was like a bystander at the battle for recovery—doing a lot of cheering and occasionally making a contribution of sorts, but often feeling ineffectual.

So I tried to make sense of what I saw, and gradually several basic questions arose: Why do some animals recover easily, while others never seem to do well, regardless of which

drugs are used? Why do some animals in a group seem to have all the fleas and catch all the diseases going around, while others are never affected? I knew there must be some basic understanding that I just didn't grasp about the ability of an animal's body to defend and heal itself.

When you ask a question long enough and deeply enough, life seems to provide the opportunity to find an answer. Soon a job offer as an instructor at a veterinary school was dropped in my lap. Always eager to be in a climate of learning, I immediately accepted.

Once I was back in academia, I decided to take a course or two myself. The next thing I knew, I was a full-time graduate student in veterinary immunology, virology, and biochemistry. Surely here, I thought, I can learn the real secrets of the body's defense systems. And so I set about studying and researching various problems, particularly the body's immune response to cancer.

Some five years and a PhD degree later, I found that the answers to my questions still eluded me. Though I had acquired an even greater wealth of factual information about the mechanisms of immunology and metabolism, I still did not feel a sense of real insight about the issues that concerned me.

## THE BIG PICTURE: THE HOLISTIC APPROACH

I had begun to realize what was causing me to feel baffled by conventional veterinary

medicine. Knowledge was fragmented, and specialists clung to narrow academic disciplines. For example, one group of immunologists would hold a particular viewpoint on disease mechanisms and a second group, a different view. It seemed that no effort was being made to reconcile the opposing positions. And then there were the microbiologists, the virologists, the biochemists, the pathologists, and a host of others, all of whom tended to see things through different sets of filters! Our research aims had become so narrowly defined and carried out that we were missing the whole picture. I didn't fully realize it at the time, but I felt, somehow, that what we really needed was a holistic approach to the problem of disease.

As a result, I started doing two things that were decisive and have continued to define my style of operation ever since. One was to read broadly in many fields and from many sources to get a larger scope of concepts and ideas. The other was to experiment with new ideas that made sense to me by trying them out on myself.

I made it a first priority to learn more about nutrition. After some self-directed study, I was convinced that nutrition was a very significant factor in maintaining health and treating disease. Therefore, it amazed me to find that the indifference to nutrition that prevailed when I was a student in veterinary school was still in place. There was a wealth of research, for example, showing that a number of specific vitamins are essential to the normal functioning of the im-

mune system—though they were never mentioned throughout my years of graduate study. Most surprising to me was the fact that proper nutrition could boost the body's natural resistance to disease. Here was an incredible truth—unique in that it meant the body need not rely on drugs for better health. With this information, people could take charge of their own health. At last I was beginning to find some answers to my questions.

## PERSONAL DIVIDENDS FROM A DIET CHANGE

I decided to change my own diet. I began to use whole grains, to cut out sugars and other junk foods, to eat less meat, and to take supplements like nutritional yeast, wheat germ, and various vitamins. Before long I was feeling better than I had in years.

I also started exercising regularly, using herbs, and exploring my inner life. All these measures eventually played a part in removing some things from my life that I didn't need—like a potbelly I was developing, plus colitis, ear infections, excess tension, susceptibility to colds and flu, and a number of negative psychological habits.

Though these personal experiments didn't constitute so-called statistically significant studies, they were tremendously valuable to me. There is nothing more convincing about the value of a treatment than feeling better after using it. You don't need the interpretation or opinion of any au-

thority to acknowledge positive changes in your own body and mind.

After helping myself, I began to apply my newfound knowledge to animals—first my own pets and then, as I returned to clinical practice, to some “hopeless” cases like Tiny. At one point, I adopted a stray kitten half-starved and ragged from life in the woods. We named her Sparrow because she looked like a small bird made up mostly of feathers and fluff. At first, I fed her a conventional kibble and she did all right. But when she became pregnant a year or two later, I decided to boost her strength. I faithfully added fresh, raw beef liver, raw eggs, bone-meal, fresh chicken, brewer’s yeast, and other nutritious foods to her daily fare.

Unlike many cats I’ve seen, she never lost any weight or hair during pregnancy, and her delivery was exceptionally fast, easy, and calm. She always had plenty of milk to nurse her three large, thriving kittens, and all of them grew up to be much larger than their mother. I kept one of these kittens and continued adding supplements to the diets of both mother and offspring, who became very chubby and happy. I was always amazed at how remarkably healthy they were. I never needed to use any flea control on them. And if one of these cats got scratched or bitten in a fight, the injury healed quickly and never developed into an infection or abscess. Sparrow lived to the ripe age of 18 years and never needed veterinary care for any of the common cat problems.

One thing led to another, and soon I be-

came deeply interested in using herbs as a treatment. A particular occasion convinced me that these natural remedies could bring about almost miraculous cures. It was late one Sunday night and my son, Clark (then about six), was besieged by a high fever, flushed face, swollen throat glands, and incipient bronchitis (to which he was prone). He was very restless and cried with extreme discomfort and pain. I had nothing in the house to give him except some aspirin, which neither reduced his fever nor enabled him to get to sleep.

I felt stuck, and I thrashed about in my mind, desperately searching for some way to help Clark. Then all at once I remembered I had some goldenseal (*Hydrastis canadensis*) capsules in the house. Goldenseal has been found very useful for reducing inflammation of the lining of the bronchial tubes, the nose, and the eustachian tubes (which drain the ears to the throat), especially when the inflammation is accompanied by a harsh, dry cough and fever. I gave him one capsule with a little water. Five to ten minutes later, Clark suddenly got up and, for the first time in hours, went to the bathroom and voided a large quantity of urine. Afterward, he lay down, relaxed, and fell asleep. Clark’s fever dropped rapidly, and by the next morning he was normal.

As you can imagine, this experience was very encouraging to me. Looking back, I realize how fortunate I was to have hit it so perfectly. Goldenseal was quite appropriate for the symptoms my son showed. This remark-

able experience inspired me to pursue many fruitful directions later on, such as herbology, naturopathy, and, especially, homeopathy. This last has completely changed my understanding of the nature of disease and its cure.

Though I eventually branched out in other directions, I have found over the years that proper nutrition is the essential foundation of a holistic approach to health and healing. Without it, there is little to work with in helping an animal to recover. And I feel certain that many of the chronic and degenerative diseases we see today are caused by or complicated by inadequate diet.

After all, the physical body requires cer-

tain substances it cannot make internally. As with any complicated and delicate machinery, one missing element in the fuel that powers the body can bring the whole mechanism to a standstill. For example, it appears that the immune system, with its production of specialized white blood cells and antibodies, is particularly susceptible to nutritional imbalance. Perhaps, because of the fast growth of these specialized cells and their complex function, deficiencies show up sooner here than in, say, the skeletal system.

That said, let's take a closer look at what your animal friend is actually eating. What is and isn't provided by the diet can make a big difference in your pet's health.

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