

The

Dog Repair

BOOK

A Do-It-Yourself Guide
for the Dog Owner

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INTRODUCTION

My first book, **How To Be Your Own Veterinarian (sometimes)** was written to help horse owners save money on their veterinary bills. It was aimed at helping them tell the difference between problems they could treat themselves, and those which needed the services and expertise of a veterinarian.

Somewhere between the tenth and eleventh printings of that book, customer demand reached a point where it could no longer be ignored. Readers were asking that I write a similar book for the dog owners, telling them how to avoid problems and save money on medical care for their dogs. YOU asked for it! So, here it is.

As with the previous book, I have tried to tell the dog owner how to treat simple problems at home. I have discussed the ailments for which veterinary diagnosis and treatment are essential. And, I have tried to distinguish clearly between the two extremes. Not incidentally, I hope to save you, the dog owner, some money with this knowledge. If I can save each person who buys this book just one veterinary call, it will have paid for itself. If I can also prevent the heartache of losing the dog you love, and save that animal some pain and suffering, the time I have devoted to writing it will have been well spent.

When you get this book, please read it at least lightly from cover to cover. In doing this you will come to know my thinking on treatment of injuries and illnesses, and also which problems are considered minor or which need veterinary help immediately. This first reading will give you an idea of how to begin and where to look for specific information when your dog is ill or injured. It should also point out many ways to keep your dog healthy.

I have tried to emphasize preventive measures which may be taken to keep many problems from occurring so that you may never need to treat them. Many illnesses are in large part preventable, but may be nearly incurable or permanently damaging once they have occurred. Preventive medicine is the cheapest form of veterinary care—and the most effective in the long run!

Chapter 1

HELPING YOUR VETERINARIAN TO HELP YOU

What Can A Veterinarian Do For You?

Hospitalization
Finding A Veterinarian
Getting Acquainted
A Second Opinion
A Few Additional Hints

WHAT CAN A VETERINARIAN DO FOR YOU?

What can a veterinarian do for you? He can provide routine care for your dog, including checkups, immunizations and routine surgery such as spaying and neutering. As with your car, maintenance of your dog is much cheaper than repair. Your veterinarian can also serve emergencies such as accidents and illness. He can provide hospitalization for these problems. Because of its cost, hospitalization should be reserved for serious problems or when extensive diagnostic procedures are needed. Some problems can be handled on an outpatient basis much as they are in humans: you bring the dog in first thing in the morning and take him home at night, even if he is still slightly sedated. You provide part of his aftercare in return for a greatly reduced veterinary bill.

Why does veterinary treatment cost what it does? When you or a family member go to a doctor, the hospital provides X-ray machines, nurses and all the other things. All the doctor provides is an office, receptionist and a few routine instruments. On the other hand, the veterinarian provides his or her own hospital and all the equipment, including X-ray machine, anesthetic equipment, pharmacy, and nursing and technical assistants. He has available diagnostic tests, either in-house or from an outside laboratory. He may provide electrocardiograms to examine the heart (EKG's or ECG's), electroencephalograms (the same type of examination, done on the brain) and many other sophisticated tests, depending on your animal's needs. Maybe we should wonder not why veterinary care costs what it does, but how your veterinarian can provide so much value and care for so little cost!

By the same token, you should feel that you are receiving value for your money. Please feel free to discuss fees with your veterinarian. How much will tests or treatment cost? If your vet can't give an exact figure, ask for a high and low range. Some large clinics now ask whether you want minimum, average or no-holds-barred treatment. Give this some thought. What can you afford?

If you can't afford to pay for the treatment all at once, see what arrangements can be made. Does your veterinarian offer charge accounts? Does he take payments or credit cards?

Before you make the final decision, find out what outcome can be expected. Is the cost of treatment consistent with predictions for expectancy and quality of life? If there is only a 30% expectation of the animal living for only three or four

months and suffering in pain the whole time, and it's going to cost \$2,500, treatment may not be realistic. Even if you can afford it, do you really want to inflict that sort of pain and suffering on your animal to keep him alive for only a short time?

Pet health insurance is available in some areas, but it is too new to know how well it is going to perform. It is your individual decision as to whether projected costs of veterinary care will exceed insurance payments. Most pay only for catastrophic problems such as surgery or severe illness, not for routine care. Would you be better off putting a sum away each month in a savings account? If you never need it for your pet, you still have it for other use. If you watch out for your pet and he never runs loose to get hit by cars or get garbage poisoning, he has much less chance of needing emergency care than a dog who runs freely.

If you can't afford the cost of treatment, what are the alternatives? Can you really not afford it, or do you choose not to? Don't expect free treatment as you drive off in your new car. In some areas, animal welfare groups offer free or low-cost clinical care to those who truly cannot afford surgery or other treatment for their pets. Some of these clinics are not non-profit, nor are they inexpensive. Check and see what their financial policies are. In some areas, one or more veterinarians may do some charitable work. Your own veterinarian may not, but another one in the area might. Some local veterinary societies have programs through which members donate a certain amount of charity work each year. The last choice, if all else fails, is euthanasia to end the animal's suffering (see Euthanasia).

HOSPITALIZATION

In some cases, hospitalization may be needed. If this is the case, you should expect realistic information from the veterinarian, including what treatment will be needed and what it will cost. There should be an evaluation of the dog's prospects for recovery, and a realistic evaluation of what you are or will be putting your dog through. Communication should be open in both directions.

Most dogs with a serious illness or injury will rest well in a veterinary clinic. It is better not to visit your dog at the clinic unless asked to do so by your veterinarian. It is impossible to explain to your dog why you came to see him and then left without taking him with you. Some dogs become extremely upset, and will even paw at the cage until their feet are bloody when the owner leaves without them.

FINDING A VETERINARIAN

Your dog is perfectly healthy. Why do you need a veterinarian now? Because it's easier to find one before you need

accommodate dogs from Chihuahuas to Saint Bernards. Your veterinarian may also prescribe human drugs, as this allows him to give some of the modern antibiotics which may not yet be available in veterinary form, as well as drugs which are so rarely used for animals that they are not produced for the veterinary market.

You give pills to a dog by placing one hand over the top of the muzzle. Press the cheek into the space behind the canine teeth, and gently but firmly open the dog's mouth, pressing inward and upward. Pull the upper jaw upward and backward, toward the dog's back. Do not pull it too far back, or the dog will fight you. However, pulling it a little way back will make it easier to hold. Do not count on keeping his mouth open by wrapping his cheek over his teeth with your fingers. The dog may bite through both the cheek and your hand. It is also very helpful if you are clearly dominant over your dog, so that when you speak sharply to him if he struggles he will stop immediately.

Next, using your other hand, pull the lower jaw down, and place the pill as far back on the tongue as possible, in the middle of it. Close the dog's mouth, and hold it gently shut. Hold it shut until he has swallowed. It will help some dogs to swallow to stroke the throat as if it were a liquid medication. Pinching his nostrils shut as you close the mouth will cause many dogs to swallow.

You can also use a "pill gun" which holds the pill, allowing you to place it far back into the dog's throat. You can then squeeze the plunger (much like a syringe), which pushes the pill out onto



Drop the pill onto the back of the dog's tongue, pushing it down with your finger.

the dog's tongue. Be careful! You can injure the throat area if you go too far back into the throat with the instrument.

Sometimes you can feed the dog his pills, using any food which is "legal" for his diet to disguise the pills. Putting the pill in a piece of cheese, hot dog or meat works well with some dogs. But don't use a hot dog or other salty meat for a dog on a salt-restricted diet. Some dogs will learn to take the pill if you give them a (legal!) treat afterward. You may try a couple of the treats, such as hot dog slices, without pills, followed by the one with the pill. If you are going to be giving the dog pills for a long period of time, it is well worth your while to train him to take them readily, and make it easy on BOTH of you. Some dogs will also take the pill if you coat it with butter and then offer it. Margarine works with some dogs and doesn't work with others. You can use sugar pills, harmless vitamins, or small round dog treats as trial pills to see which, if any, of these methods will work for your dog.

Capsules are occasionally used for dogs. They may also be used for special medications which are measured and placed into capsules in order to give something too bitter or distasteful for the dog to take as a powder or a liquid. If you are giving a capsule, you may have trouble with it sticking to the dog's tongue, with him spitting it out later. This can be avoided by lubricating it with a bit of salad oil before you pop it onto the dog's tongue. This will make it slide down without sticking.

Whatever method you use, watch the dog carefully for several minutes after you have given him the pill or capsule, to be sure that he has indeed swallowed it. If he spits it out, try again until you get it down him. If you have tried everything and still can't get him to take the pill or capsule, ask your veterinarian for help. He may be able to think of something you haven't tried. Or he may be able to convert to a liquid or injectible form of the drug. He may have you bring the dog into the clinic for daily treatment. It's cheaper to train your dog.

OTHER ORAL MEDICATIONS

Paste medications are sometimes used. These commonly include vitamins, laxatives and high-calorie supplements. They come in tubes much like toothpaste, and the dosage is usually measured in inches of material squeezed out of the tube. The paste can be easily squeezed onto the dog's tongue, and he will usually swallow. Many of these products are made with liver extracts and other good flavoring agents, and most dogs accept them eagerly. Nutri-cal® (Evsco Pharmaceuticals) is an example of a nutritional supplement which comes either in a tube or in a pump-type dispenser.

Powdered supplements or medications are occasionally used. Sometimes they can be mixed with gravy, jelly or peanut butter ("sticks to the roof of your mouth..."). Or, they can be put into empty gelatin capsules and given that way.

EYE MEDICATIONS

To put any medication on the eyeball, it is often easiest to have the dog in a sitting position, with his head extended upward. A small dog should be placed on a table or counter,

as this gives you better control of him and a better working angle for putting medication in the eye.

After you have put the drops or ointment in the dog's eye, distract his attention for a minute or two to keep him from rubbing his eye and injuring it or removing some of the medication. This can be done by playing with him, taking him for a walk or feeding him.

Eye medications occasionally cause sudden allergic reactions or irritation, resulting in an itching, weeping, reddened eye. These are individual reactions to the particular medication being used, and are more annoying than serious. However, if a reaction occurs, discontinue treatment immediately and consult your veterinarian as soon as possible. He may wish to change your dog to a different medication, or the same medication in a different base. These medications, as is true of all drugs, should be kept out of the reach of children. Wash your hands after treating your dog's eye. This can keep you from getting an infection if he has one, as well as keep you from getting any of the medication into your eyes or mouth by accident.

EYE DROPS

Eye drops are a common form of medication. They are used to carry antibiotics, corticosteroids, atropine and other drugs onto the surface or into the interior of the eye (as with glaucoma).

Putting drops into your dog's eyes is easy. Hold his head slightly above level. Rest your hand which is holding the dropper or dropper bottle on the bridge of his nose. Then drip the drop onto the surface of his eyeball. Or you can drop it onto the sclera (white area) just inside the skin at the inner corner of his eye. To avoid contamination of the dropper vial, do not touch the tip to the eye. Just get it close and allow the drop to fall.

Most eye drop medications must be put in rather frequently, as the dog's blinking washes them off the surface of the eye and flushes them away with his tears. Many eye drop medications need to be put in the eye four or five times a day, or even more often. Let your veterinarian know if you cannot follow this sort of schedule. The product may be available in an ointment. Ointments remain on the eye much longer than eyedrops.

With some eye medications, more often is better. However, with drugs such as atropine, an excess may cause irregularities in the heartbeat. Make sure that you know whether the dosage is critical, or if "more really is better." Artificial tears and some other drugs can be used almost as frequently as you feel like using them.

EYE OINTMENTS

In some cases, eye ointments are used because they have a longer duration of action than eye drops. The greasy film helps to hold the medication in place and keep it from being washed away by the dog's blinking. They are used in other cases because the oiliness provides good lubrication for the corneal surface. Eye ointments are used to carry the same drugs as drops: corticosteroids, antibiotics, etc.

Eye ointments are even easier to use than drops. Again, you will hold the head with one hand and steady the other (holding the tube of ointment) against the dog's forehead or muzzle. The dog will normally close his eye when you get near it with the end of the tube. Pull the lower lid down, and squeeze a small amount of ointment into the pouch that is formed, using a steady, gentle pressure. Try not to touch the tip to the eye, in order to avoid contaminating it. In most cases, you will want to squeeze out about 1/2 inch (1.3 cm). When you are through, pull the tube gently away from the eye and stop squeezing. Some of the time you will leave a small tag of ointment on the eyelashes. Use a tissue to wipe it gently out of the way as your dog closes his eye again.

Some eye ointments are very stiff when cold. Warm the tube in your hand or in warm water before using it.

If you are using chloramphenicol ointment, be careful. Chloramphenicol is a good antibiotic, and seems to be safe for your dog. It can in rare cases, however, cause some blood problems in humans. Wash your hands well, with soap, to remove any traces, after using it.

If your dog's eye is injured and you use an ointment with a corticosteroid in it, you may cause the loss of the eye. If in doubt, use an ointment containing only an antibiotic (the names of corticosteroids often end in "-sone"). Either your pharmacist or your veterinarian can quickly tell you if the ointment contains a corticosteroid. If the dog's cornea has been cut or torn (such as having run into a branch on a bush or tree limb), DO NOT put ANY ointment in it if you can get the dog



Squeeze ointment into inner corner of the dog's eye.