

## Human Emotions and Animal Psyches,

The well-being of our pets is affected by our feelings. Most dogs and cats form strong bonds with their owners, the people they depend on for food, shelter, safety and affection. That's why it's especially important for them to tune into our emotional cues. Except for perhaps a few brief verbal commands or names, pets rely completely on the emotional messages communicated by our posture, tone of voice, facial expressions and, well, just plain feelings in the air.

As a result of this connection, pets often seem to soak up angry, sad or fearful feelings from family members who are experiencing tension or conflict over issues that have nothing to do with the animal. Frequent arguments in the home are especially stressful for a pet, who may react with irritability or fear. Emotional tensions in particular may affect health problems that have either a behavioural component (such as increased aggressiveness, destructiveness or extreme restlessness) or a nervous component (such as irritated skin, ears, bladder and the like). Just as a pet might react to losses, an emotionally stressed animal with a predisposition to skin or bladder problems, for example, might scratch or urinate still more, further irritating the tissues and setting up the conditions for a vicious circle.

Other times, the owner's anxious emotions and expectations can aggravate a pet's existing health problem. Most commonly, an owner becomes upset on first noticing that a family pet is not feeling well. Deeply worried that the condition may worsen or even become fatal, the owners may be afraid of doing something wrong in treatment and losing their dear friend as a result. The animal senses this anxiety.

Something must be wrong! The uncertainty only increases the pet's anxiety, which may already be heightened by the discomfort of illness. The animal may even begin to hide. Fearful and stressed, your pet may have a diminished capacity to heal.

Conversely, your calm, positive response to a pet's first symptoms relaxes and reassures the animal, helping to strengthen its immune response. All else being equal, I have observed time and time again that the animals likeliest to recover from chronic and difficult illnesses are those whose owners manage to be calm and maintain a positive outlook. While it may be difficult to find calm in the face of suffering, it's the best thing you can do for your animal.

Besides sending a danger signal to your pet, your anxiety could also hinder treatment. Clients have often told me that in acting from fear or a sense of urgency they made decisions that they later regretted. When animals get tumors or cancers their owners often feel under tremendous pressure to have the growths immediately removed, as though every passing hour were critical. But there is no evidence to support such urgency. In fact, the stress of the surgery can make the animal even more difficult to treat when using less drastic methods.

Similarly, the intense scratching that accompanies skin allergies sometimes drives owners to get corticosteroids, which can undo several weeks of progress resulting from nutritional and

homeopathic treatment. True healing of chronic disease requires, above all, patience. The desire for immediate relief is very seductive. That's the appeal of using strong drugs to control symptoms. But since they don't actually cure the underlying ailment, the illness recurs, gradually worsening over time or taking a different and more difficult form.

Over-anxiety can also push owners to jump from one veterinarian or treatment to the next, whether conventional or holistic. This can overwhelm and confuse your pet's body, never allowing any one method a chance to work. On the flip side, worry and discouragement can lead owners to give up on medical treatment without really trying

For you, it's regular exercise, watching what you eat, annual medical and dental check-ups and good, clean living. What about for your pet?

**Exercise:** Most cats manage to get enough exercise by themselves playing games, but dogs usually want to play with their owners. It's important that you ensure your pet is getting regular exercise. Besides, walking and playing with your pet is an excellent way to reduce stress and get you outdoors, too.

**Nutrition:** Consult your veterinarian about the proper diet for your pet. The type of food can often vary given your pets' age, health and weight. It's also important to try to feed your pet the same food regularly. Any sudden switches can cause stomach upset.

**Annual Check-ups and Vaccinations:** It is crucial that your pet sees a veterinarian at least once a year and receives the appropriate vaccines. You should also have a fecal exam done at the same time. Regular dental examinations and cleaning is as important for your pet as it is for you. Speak to your veterinarian about the services offered and take advantage of them.

**Sleeping:** Sleeping arrangements should be provided well away from the hustle and bustle of the family in a warm, dry and draught-free position. Depending on where you live, you may decide to keep your cat indoors, in which case you will need to provide a litter tray which will need to be refreshed daily. There is nothing wrong in keeping cats indoors. However, you should try to provide a stimulating environment, with lots of things to play and lots of places to hide and sleep. A house cat will also seek more attention from you. Cats can get themselves into danger in the home and you should keep such hazards as trailing electrical cords and cleaning chemicals well out of reach. They will also seek out warm places to sleep and you should always check inside washing machines and tumble dryers before using them.

**Neutering:** Neutering makes sense, unless you particularly wish to have a litter or participate in cat shows. Male cats that have not been neutered tend to wander for long periods and often return home with wounds from fights. They also mark their territory including "spraying" objects in the home. When neutered, they make better house cats, fight less and tend to live longer. If they are not neutered, female cats will come into season regularly and if they are allowed out, will undoubtedly become pregnant. Your veterinarian will advise you when your cat is mature enough

to be neutered, but it can usually be done around the age of 5-6 months. It is a routine procedure and recovery is usually uneventful.

Hygiene: Hygiene need not be a problem with a healthy, well cared for cat, provided you observe a few simple precautions:

- Provide them with their own feeding and drinking bowls and wash them separately from the family utensils.
- Don't allow your cat to walk on kitchen surfaces.
- Allow them free access to outside or train them to use a litter tray and refresh it daily.
- Encourage your cat to soil in a particular part of the garden. They like dry sharp sand and will use this in preference to soil. It is very easy to refresh, by burying or disposing of the waste safely.
- Cover children's sand pits when they are not being used.
- Never feed your cat uncooked meat or fish and have a fecal exam conducted annually by your veterinarian.
- Keep a careful watch on your cat and if you notice any signs of illness, get him treated promptly by your veterinarian.