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Bugs such as bacteria and viruses, as well as parasites such as fleas and worms, are common in the lives of our animals. In fact, many of these unwanted residents live normally on or in the bodies of our animals.

With any infection, there are two main factors allowing for progression. Firstly, the susceptibility of the host (animal) and, secondly, the virulence (ability to cause disease) of the bug. While there are some infections where the bug is extremely virulent, more commonly these days we see infections arise from bugs which are common residents. This has a huge amount to do with the immune systems of our animals not coping as well as they should.

From a holistic viewpoint, the presence of an infection is the tip of the iceberg. Underlying this is the big question of why is the body out of balance and not managing to maintain health so that it naturally repels bugs and parasites.

To support the immune system:

Minimise stress: Stress of any kind will impair the body's ability to heal and limit an animal's general vitality. Limiting stress by avoiding stressful situations such as overcrowding or adverse weather conditions and making use of remedies such as Emergency Essence or Rescue Remedy will go a long way to supporting the immune system indirectly.

Regular exercise: Exercise and fun as well as mental stimulation are important to help preserve health and ensure optimal function of the immune system.

Feed a wholesome and well-balanced diet: To allow for the body's inherent healing wisdom to function optimally and do what it does best (heal), there are three main tiers from which to draw resources. Firstly, nutrition, providing the good fuel; secondly, the healing mechanism must be running smoothly; and, thirdly, the presence of toxins will act as "spokes in the wheel" of healing.

Feed food that is free from chemicals, preservatives and carcinogens: So much of our animal food has foreign chemicals; some, like BPA, are known carcinogens. Contaminants such as glyphosate also end up in our food chain and have been shown to damage genetic material. With foreign ingredients, those that the body is not naturally evolved to metabolise, an analogy would be the running of a car: you may put in all the best fuel but if the engine is faulty or it is clogged up with waste then it won't run smoothly or go at all.

Provide optimal amounts of important nutrients: Nutrients such as omega 3 fatty acids and antioxidants can make a huge difference to the body's ability to naturally combat infection.

Use immune building nutraceuticals: Extra nutrients such as vitamin C and grapeseed extract are superb at helping to boost the body's defences as well as mop up damage caused by free radicals (which cause cell damage) and thereby allow the body's resources to be freed up to support healing and maintain health. Intravenous vitamin C, used by your vet, can work wonders to assist in severe infection.

Herbal medicine can be incredibly beneficial: Herbs such as golden seal and garlic (which can be toxic in high doses, one medium clove per 25kg dog per day is fine) have superb antimicrobial properties and echinacea (not for cats as the bitter taste makes them froth and hypersalivate) used as a preventative aid for a week or two at a time can work wonders to help ward off infections.

Homeopathy has its place: Homeopathy is also a wonderful tool and is best used under the guidance of a qualified homeopath for an individual's specific requirements. However, complex formulations can be easily applied in high risk situations such as in catteries or kennels to assist in preventing infection.

Additional therapies: Therapies such as hyperbaric oxygen therapy, NIS, Bowen therapy, acupuncture, massage and many more can also be very supportive tools to assist the body's natural defences.

Vaccination: For certain diseases, vaccinations can be a helpful preventative tool. Research has shown that over-vaccination may be detrimental to health so it's always important to weigh up the cost:benefit-ratio of their use and consider the individual animal and their risk factors as well as the owner's/guardian's needs and the environment that the animal lives in.

All in all, and as usual, by respecting natural principles, infections may be easily prevented and resolved adding quality of life and increasing longevity.

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