

Herbs and nutrients in domestic pet care

[Jacqui Fahey](#) | Educator

19/10/21



in 5 minutes with...

Catherine discusses working with herbs and nutrients for domestic pets.

Catherine's details...

Herbalist, Director and senior herbalist at McDowell's Herbal in Bathurst, New South Wales

What is your background and how did you come into specialising in animal care? Growing up on a farm in country New South Wales and working on a family farm, I had contact with the previous generation who just worked with very old fashioned animal husbandry techniques. Having that interest in agriculture and studying that, I ended up doing a degree in agriculture at university, studying equine husbandry there. What I noticed from early on, there were issues with animals that were being overmedicated and fed incorrectly. You could see the results of all of these things and that piqued my interest as to what was going on.

I was a voracious reader as a young person and I found it fascinating the idea that for every ailment put on earth, there is a herb to provide a solution. I think that goes through now in my study, you can find these anecdotes and you can find all of this history in European herbal medicine, in these wonderful people that have come before us. I think that all of that is combined now with my love of animals. I was a vet nurse for about three or four years early in the piece. I actually wanted to be a vet, but my life took a different pathway. So following on all of those things, I've been able to, over the years, combine all of that knowledge and apply it into this practice of which I've been managing and owner of now for over 20 years. I think the more I work

daily with people and animals, I just become more convinced that nature, if treated well and we interact with nature correctly, there is a beautiful synergy and a beautiful health and a vibrancy that happens as a result of that interaction. That includes our emotions as well, so all of the breathwork I've done and following Vedic principles as well, I see all of this interacting well.

I'm not against intervention should intervention be needed. I've always said to anyone who calls me for a consultation, they do need to have a veterinary assessment or a doctor's assessment. I don't do any kind of diagnosing but if we know what the baseline is, from that point, we can design in conjunction with what they are currently doing, a really appropriate pathway to promote good health with that individual animal.

What are some of the common issues you see in cats and dogs? Cats are a bit trickier because they're harder to get herbs into, so I'll focus on dogs. Because dogs have evolved alongside humans, the results they have within their own metabolism is very similar to the way humans do.

So there's a very nice little crossover with human herbal medicine and animal herbal medicine, dog herbal medicine. So we can safely say that what we think works really well for a human, with a condition of a particular kind, we will get a very similar result with a dog. So I think one of the big things that we're seeing and what you'll see most people have issues with are skin conditions. Like people, they can be very difficult to treat. We can do a lot for some animals in resolving their skin conditions almost a hundred percent. Some particular breeds are very tricky, for example French bulldogs are absolutely notorious for really severe skin conditions. They're much harder to treat but of course we always start with this idea that we want to clean up the diet, and it's very naturopathic in our approach. We want to make sure the diet is as clean and pro health as possible. We always promote a raw health, a raw food diet. So you'll see that in Sydney, I know there are a lot of new companies starting up promoting raw food diets and this is great. So if you can tap into any of those things that are promoting this raw food. There's the BARF food diet which Dr Ian Billinghurst coined that name. He's a Bathurst vet who we actually knew. He's lecturing internationally on raw foods and on the benefits of raw food. So we always start there, but in terms of herbs, what we end up doing is we are using a particular protocol where we're toning up the liver and the kidneys, and we're enabling that body to eliminate well. So if you can start on the idea that we need to reduce the inflammatory cause and promoting the body to remove these inflammatory items. So herbalists know those as alterative herbs. We have a variety of different formulas in our clinic that assist with this such as our conditioning formula and infect-a-clear formula.

From there, we then would put another protocol in there that might be anti-anaphylaxis herbs working with allergy formulas. So they'd be utilising very traditional herbs like [Euphorbia](#) and [Chamomile](#) and [Vervain](#) to settle down the nervous system. Dorothy Hall's system with herbal medicine always involved working with five herbs and one of those herbs was always a nervine that was very specific to an individual assessment. Now, dogs, interestingly, can reflect their owners. They reflect the breed that they are. So in many ways it's quite easy to predict what kind of nervine an animal needs but in many cases you do need multiple nervines. Though I know Dorothy was very fixed on one specific nervine that's your dominant nervine which I agree with that.

So as you learn more about each of the breed types, you can certainly put together programs that work for them. We also use high levels of omega 3s, it's just like a normal naturopathic practice

that you would use. Yeah. And it's interesting, it's interesting.

A very common question for some pet owners about teeth hygiene and care, any tips on this area of health for animals for domestic purposes? It is a common thing with dogs and I think diet is absolutely way and above the main cause of poor teeth. By the time you've got a dog that's got plaque that needs to be removed by your veterinary technician, there is a history before that of processed diets, usually dried food, high carbohydrate rich diets and lack of bones. Chewing healthy bones that are big enough so that they don't gulp them. For puppies, you want to start them on bones that they're not just going to be swallowing whole, you want to have them so that they're chewing those bones.

Now the big misconception is bones are bad. Well cooked bones are bad, but raw bones are absolutely essential. Diets that are rich in bones, whether those bones have been mixed along with mince, making a homemade diet and adding new vegetables is great.

The primary thing is of course prevention. Diet is also absolutely critical in terms of just generally what's happening within the digestive system and the microbiome there.

Hand brushing the teeth, those dental chews is a marketing thing really. Unless your dog doesn't have teeth left, they can, then the type of both you choose, excluding animals that are medicated or needing specialist medical care.

Are there any case studies that you might like to highlight where you've used herbal and nutritional medicines? Many, but one was Happy pants Dandy who had bladder stones and bladder cancer. Male Maltese terrier.

It was a fascinating case because initially the vets told Dandy's owner he had 6 months to live. The bladder cancer was diagnosed from 2 ultrasounds, and bladder stones diagnosed from a further two ultrasounds. Bladder stones can have many causes including genetic, bacterial infection, poor diet and/or an out of balance pH in the urine. In dogs, the general rule is: no infection, no bladder stones. Bladder stones come in several mineral compositions. The most common stone types are oxalate and struvite and since the approach is completely different for each type, it is crucial to determine the stone type.

For Happy pants Dandy, to dissolve the stones, I prescribed the concentrated extracts of [Uva Ursi](#), [Rosehips](#), [Dandelion](#), [Echinacea](#), [Garlic](#), Pellitory of the Wall and [Horsetail](#) with Bach flowers [Agrimony](#), [Willow](#), [Mimulus](#) and [Rescue Remedy](#). For the cancer mix I gave concentrated extracts of [Bladderwrack](#), [Buchu](#), [Comfrey](#), [Dandelion](#), [Golden Seal](#), [Parsley](#) and [Rosehips](#) along with the Bach Flower remedies [Oak](#), [Pine](#), [Water Violet](#), [Olive](#) and Walnut. I gave this in conjunction with [Maritime Pine Bark Extract](#) which is a great antioxidant. Together the two support mixes have the potential to slow the growth of the cancer and boost overall health. In addition, they can assist in healing the irritation and inflammation which has resulted from the cancer.

Three months after treatment started, Dandy has had 4 ultrasounds, with the 1st and 2nd showing cancer masses, 3rd one - bladder stones, 4th one – nothing; no stones or masses. He is doing very well, as of today.



Any general tips for the domestic pet, your favourite go to herbs and nutrients for general health? If you're just at home and you don't have access to your own herbal pharmacy, [Rosehips](#), [Chamomile](#), [Dandelion](#), [St Mary's thistle](#), [Spirulina](#), [Kelp](#), ground millet and ground linseed, these all things that you can add to your dog's diet, which will certainly add for excellent health.

I don't recommend using the British Pharmacopoeia dosage for animals, particularly for dogs. The reason our practice is so successful is because we use trigger dosing. Trigger dosing means that you're getting the smallest amount of herb into the system to trigger the response and you're not overdosing and you're not going to have an abundance of ethanol. It would be too strong on their liver, for a cat, it could make them very sick. There are some herbs you can't give cats at all because they are too sensitive but with dogs they're pretty all round, they can have whatever humans have just at the trigger dose. Trigger dose is 10 drops of your basic dosage for a formulation for your average size dog, twice per day.

Now we have some dogs on three or four different formulations, and they might be a medium or large dog. They might be getting 30 drops of some of those formulations, perfectly fine. So long as there is regular feedback from the owner. For general guidance, that's why we developed the Roar range in our practice because there's absolutely no ethanol in that Roar range at all, so you're getting the nutritional benefits as well as the medicinal benefits. It's all about balance and making sure that you're treating holistically and that's the whole point of holistic medicine.

Thanks Catherine.

[vital.ly pet care category](#)

[McDowell's herbal](#)

[McDowell's herbal Facebook page](#)