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Animal Crackers

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Acupuncture is becoming recognized in the Western Hemisphere as a method of treating some conditions in animals. It has been accepted in the Orient for centuries. There is an International Veterinary Acupuncture Society which meets regularly for the exchange of information. The first English-language text, "Veterinary Acupuncture," was co-authored by Alan M. Klade, V.M.D. associate professor of anesthesia at our School of Veterinary Medicine and Shiu H. Kung, Ph. D. Since this, several other books have been published around the world.

In our Large Animal Clinic, acupuncture has been used in treating horses with chronic back pain and other painful conditions. The treatments are given once a week for eight weeks. It usually takes three to five treatments before signs of improvement are seen. After eight treatments, the duration of effect is a variable, unpredictable length of time—from weeks to years. Individual animals may require additional treatments at varying intervals, but usually the interval is constant for a particular patient.

The treatments are reported to decrease muscle spasms and block the transmission of pain sensation between the source of pain and the brain. In most cases, needles are placed at the acupuncture points and left in place for 15 to 30 minutes.

Dogs and cats are being treated in this manner for various painful conditions by veterinarians in different parts of the country.

Revaccination of dogs and cats can be considered a form of insurance. While it may not be necessary, it may prevent illness and is recommended by most veterinarians. Often it is included with the annual physical examination.

Vaccination against rabies is extremely important in dogs and cats. There are vaccines available that give protection for three years while others require annual revaccination. Using the newer vaccines, dogs and cats need only be vaccinated every three years. Rabies is a public health problem and the incidence of this disease in wildlife is increasing. The vaccinated dog provides a protective barrier between wildlife and humans.

Dog and cat owners should keep rabies vaccinations up-to-date.

There are many different methods of vaccinating puppies and kittens. The problem here is the protection received through the mother's milk which neutralizes the modified-live vaccines. It is possible to determine the amount of maternal antibody present by testing the blood of the mother and preparing a monograph to show how long there will be protection in the offspring. This may last as long as sixteen weeks.

Yearly vaccination is recommended against most diseases. This should be continued for the lifetime of the animal. It may not be necessary, but the insurance it provides can be life-saving. There is some evidence that dogs over seven years old have decreased ability to produce antibodies and revaccination of these older dogs is important for maintaining immunity. It is assumed this is also true for cats.

In addition to rabies, dogs usually are vaccinated against canine distemper, infectious canine hepatitis, canine parainfluenza and canine parvovirus. Usually, these vaccines contain modified live virus. A killed product is used against leptospirosis and intranasal vaccine is available for use against Bordetella ("Kennel Cough"). Rabies vaccine is given intramuscularly, while the others (which may be combined) are given subcutaneously, except for the intranasal product.

In addition to getting vaccinated against rabies, cats are usually vaccinated against panleukopenia, viral rhinotracheitis, calicivirus and pneumonitis vaccines. Rabies vaccine is always given intramuscularly. The others may be given intramuscularly, subcutaneously or intranasally. It is anticipated that a vaccine against feline leukemia will be available in the near future.

Modified live virus vaccines should never be given to pregnant animals. Also, vaccination may not be successful if the animal has been exposed recently to the disease or if it is not in good physical condition. Unfortunately, there are a few animals which are not able to develop immunity. During the past several months, a number of new canary parvovirus vaccines, both killed and modified live virus, have come on the market. We have too little experience with these products to make any recommendations concerning their use at this time.

Choosing a Dog, particularly if it will be the first canine member of the family, should be done carefully. Most puppies are cute and pictures can be deceiving, so don't base your decisions on "that darling puppy in the pet-shop window" or on photographs in a book. Think about how the puppy will look when it is mature, how much grooming will be required, and whether or not your home is suitable for the breed selected.

The American Kennel Club recognizes 127 breeds of dogs. Eleven of these breeds have several varieties—championship shows have classes for 138 breeds and varieties (a dog can win best of breed or best of variety). The varieties differ in color or coat-type. In addition, there are eight Miscellaneous breeds (not eligible for championship points). We have "Rare Breeds" not eligible for entry in A.K.C. Shows, plus many breeds recognized in Canada and foreign countries but not by the American Kennel Club. Then there are the "random-bred" or mixed breeds.

If you feel you want a pure-bred dog, it is best to visit several all-breed dog shows. Here you can see the dog in action and learn about the breed. You can also get an idea about how big a puppy will be when mature and how much care may be required. There are a number of excellent books about different breeds, usually available at dog shows, along with all kinds of equipment. The next step is to visit kennels and see the puppies and their parents. An excellent book to help with your decision is "The Roger Caras Dog Book—A Guide to Purebred Dogs" by Roger Caras (Holt, Rinehart and Winston).

Some families are not sure if they really want a dog or if a dog will fit into their lifestyle. In this case, a visit to a local animal shelter will help a child find just the right dog. Once adopted, this dog will require the same care as a pure-bred. There will be the same problems with house-breaking, training, etc. Don't adopt a dog unless you are willing to accept responsibility.

Some questions have no definite answer. "How old should the puppy be?" Usually at least eight weeks. "Should we get a male or female?" I feel this is a matter of opinion, as both sexes can make excellent pets.

Responsible dog ownership includes practicing birth control. If you do not have a planned breeding program, males should be neutered and females should be spayed. Before any animals are mated, they should be carefully evaluated. Improvement of the breed should be the purpose. Financial gain is secondary.