



# Woman's Best Friend:

*Tips for keeping the dogs in your life happy and healthy*

**N**ext to my husband and my kids, my three Welsh Corgis are top priority in my home. Dudley, Flash and Tinkerbelle frolic around with few cares in the world aside from when they'll next get fed or someone will throw them a ball in the yard. I've been around animals all my life, but there's something about the companionship of dogs that sets them apart from other pets. Cats are thoroughly independent, dictating if and when they'll allow you to show them affection. Horses, which I grew up with, are super intelligent and gentle, but obviously can't fall asleep snuggled next to you while you

watch television or stay up late writing. And fish and reptiles? While interesting to look at, I leave those pet preferences to my kids.

So, I'm partial to faithful, four-legged canine creatures, particularly ones like mine that are eager to please and delight in attention. That I have three only adds pleasure to their lives and our home.

Keeping the pooches happy and healthy takes a lot of time, effort, dedication and research to find the best services and resources. Here in Fairfield County, we're lucky to have an array of wonderful expert practitioners and thoughtful (and fun!) retailers to help make life as a dog owner easier and life as a dog the best it can be.

Finding a good veterinarian is a lot like finding the right family doctor or pediatrician. You must feel comfortable



Darcy Poirier-Boyle, of Newtown, CT

with the approach to care, the philosophy, the office and the staff. I prefer a holistic approach that takes into account nutritional remedies, alternative therapies and conventional Western methods to treat conditions. There are a number of quality holistic practitioners in the area. One great practice is

Schulhof Animal Hospital in Westport. They approach each animal with the belief that the fewer vaccines they can safely give and the less medicine they can prescribe, the healthier that animal will be. In addition to traditional medicine and surgery, Schulhof offers the complementary sciences of acupuncture, homeopathy, nutritional counseling and therapy, and herbal medicine.

Asked for tips for optimal dog health, the experts at Schulhof said, "We suggest an annual checkup for small and medium dogs, ages seven and under, and a semiannual checkup for older dogs. Large dogs have a shorter life, and should start having a semiannual checkup by age five. Annual and semiannual checkups pick up small problems that can be corrected before they become large, chronic problems."

**Schulhof also shared these key points on animal health:**

■ **Vaccines should be kept** to a minimum—rabies every three years instead of every year, distemper every three years instead of every year, and leptospirosis only if there is a real danger of exposure. The Lyme Disease vaccine should only be given when a dog tests negative for the disease, as it can cause serious



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## From the *Pink Book*

complications if the dog has the active disease and is then vaccinated. *We do recommend vaccinating for Lyme*, as the disease can be lethal.

■ **Regular dental examinations** for tartar or gum disease are essential, as periodontal disease can cause heart, kidney and liver failure, as well as tooth and bone loss.

■ **Nutrition is extremely important.** Obesity in dogs is an epidemic in this country, and causes a variety of joint problems, as well as diabetes. A carefully selected, individualized diet for weight reduction is recommended for heavier dogs, and we sell many high-quality options. In general, we prefer



Compo Dog Fence collar

natural, wholesome foods made with real meat, such as California Natural, Neura and Innova diets. These contain less grain and few to no artificial preservatives, texturizers, sweeteners, artificial coloring and other unnecessary ingredients. Raw diets are also okay, but only if fed by an attentive owner who makes certain they are properly

stored and used. Uncooked foods have real merit, but can contain bad bacteria if improperly held or defrosted. If an owner relies on another person to do the feeding, we suggest staying away from raw food for this reason.

■ **Pets can be negatively impacted** by harmful chemicals and toxic fumes found in many household cleaners just as people can. Healthier options for cleaning products used around the house include Green Works natural all-purpose cleaner by Clorox, Tough and Tender all-purpose surface cleaner by EcoSense, and Mela Power laundry detergent, also by EcoSense. (These last two products use Melaleuca angustifolia oil, more commonly known as tea tree oil, which is a powerful natural cleaner and disinfectant.) Dog shampoos that use tea tree oil are also great. The Shulhof Animal Hospital grooming department uses a line of all-natural herbal shampoos by Kelco.

■ For pest problems, we recommend Frontline for ticks, as this is not something to mess around with. Frontline protection will last a month per application. (See sidebar at right for some homemade remedies).

For exercise, I'm lucky enough to have a large yard and Invisible Fence that allow my dogs to run around outside to their hearts' content, but on cold winter days or days when I have to be out for long stretches and don't want them outside the whole time, I often opt for a few hours of doggie day care. This is one of the best new services to pop up, especially for those dog owners who work all day and have high-energy dogs. It's important for a dog's mental health to burn up physical energy. And it can save your furniture if you have a pooch that chews on your couch or table legs out of boredom and pent-up energy! Two great resources

### Homemade Recipes that Repel Creatures!



- **Bug Repellent:** 3 drops eucalyptus or peppermint oil to 1 cup water. Wipe on coat.
- **De-Skunking Remedy:** 1 quart water, 1/4 cup Baking Soda, 1 teaspoon liquid soap. Do not store this in a closed container, and keep away from eyes.
- **Tick Spray:** 2 cups Skin-So-Soft, 2 cups water, 2 cups vinegar, 1 tablespoon peppermint or eucalyptus oil.

that allow your dog a day full of play with other dogs, as well as regular rest periods (don't want to overtire them), are Bandilane in Stamford and Dog Gone Smart in Norwalk. Both facilities are clean and well-staffed by dog lovers who make sure all day care participants play nicely together. Both of these great centers also offer excellent boarding facilities, train-

ing programs and grooming services.

And never one to deny the healing power of fashion, I was thrilled to discover a gorgeous line of new pet beds from Compo Bed, a wonderful Westport-based company dedicated to making fashionable, unique and fun products for dogs. I became familiar with Compo Dog with their first product line, the Compo Dog Fence Collar, which added flair and



Compo Schluffy dog bed, elegance in carnation and gold, comes in 50-plus patterns.

beauty to Invisible Fence and Pet Stop receiver collars. It was high time someone offered cute, colorful options for those mechanisms! Now, Compo Dog has come out with the Schluffy dog beds made of high-quality, machine-washable fabric that repels water, mold and odor in a range of over 50 patterns that are sure to complement any décor. I've actually purchased six, all in the animal

prints (I love the leopard and cheetah prints, especially), so that each of my dogs has one in their downstairs daytime rest area and one in their nighttime sleep spot. All made in the U.S., with a portion of proceeds donated to animal rescue and health organizations, another added benefit is that the inner cushions are removable and perfect for travel in the car or in crates! You can purchase the Schluffy beds and collars at [www.compodog.com](http://www.compodog.com) or at local resources listed on the Compo Dog site, including one of my local faves: Village Critter Outfitter in New Canaan.

Here's wishing a happy and healthy spring to you, your family and your four-legged friends! ■

*Devon Fleming's third edition The Pink Book: The Hottest Guide to Living in Fairfield County is being released in May 2008. Devon is considered lower Connecticut's Home and Lifestyle expert, and her multimedia business provides "Solutions for the Modern Household Manager." Visit [DevonFleming.com](http://DevonFleming.com) for more info.*

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