

Prescription Drugs vs. Nutritional Supplementation

At the Veterinary Wellness Center, we frequently will use nutrition, nutritional supplementation, and other natural methods in order to maintain or restore health in our patients. However, there are situations in which prescription medications are necessary and can greatly benefit your pet. Therefore, we often will utilize a combination of natural remedies and pharmaceuticals in order to take best advantage of both methods. But, you may be wondering: What's the difference between these nutritional supplements and 'natural' methods versus the latest wonder drugs or multivitamin? Without getting too technical, we will highlight some of the differences between synthetic and natural.

If you watch television at all these days, you can't help noticing that there is a new pill to 'cure' just about any problem. Unfortunately, these 'cures' are associated with many potential side effects. This is true for many of the prescription medications available. Even synthetically produced vitamins have little-known potential side-effects. Prescription medications and most commercially available 'vitamins' are synthetic creations produced in the laboratory. Though many of these are modeled after naturally-occurring substances, they are not the same and do not act the same in the complex biochemical systems within the body. Prescription medications are often based on identification of beneficial naturally occurring substances. These substances are then isolated, purified, and possibly modified, to enhance their action. The isolation and purification process amplifies the specific effect of these individual compounds, but all the synergistic components present in the parent plant are lost.

This difference highlights the major contrast between synthetics and whole-food based supplements. When using whole-food extracts, the various phytochemicals found in the plants are preserved and incorporated into the supplement. All these naturally-occurring substances act in a natural way within the body systems in which they were designed to function. They do not drive the particular systems or overwhelm the body, but rather feed the cells to enable them to function optimally. This is obviously a slower process than the immediate effects of drugs and synthetic vitamins. This is one reason that drugs are so valuable at times... they act very quickly. When we have time to allow the body to work naturally, nutritional support is a gentler and overall more effective approach. However, even when using pharmaceuticals, nutritional support can help the body respond better to the drugs and minimize some of the potential side-effects.

Another important difference between pharmaceuticals and food-based supplements is the dosing and duration of use. Drugs are used in specific amounts for a specified brief period of time. They are potent and fast-acting. Food-based supplementation is a long-term process and can be likened to putting gas in your car. It's something that you continue to do on a regular basis so that you can keep driving.