



# Honey's Canine Health Guide N°9

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## AUTOIMMUNE DISEASE

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## A quick overview

In autoimmune disease, the immune system is so severely imbalanced that it attacks itself and thereby causes serious illness. Simply put, it is the job of the immune system to protect us against threats such as harmful bacteria, viruses, and fungi that we constantly encounter, but thankfully often remain completely unaware of, because our immune systems deal with them effectively. If the immune system, for whatever reason, malfunctions and so to speak 'loses its balance', it may get confused about what is harmful and start reacting against harmless substances such as pollen, fungi, house-dust mites or certain foods. This is what happens when someone suffers from an allergy. In autoimmune disease, the immune system has gone one step further and rather than being confused about what external threats (real or perceived) to react against, it has turned on itself and started attacking the body it was supposed to protect. You could say that the immune system is like a soldier standing guard at the entrance to a castle, ensuring that nothing harmful is allowed to enter. The well-functioning immune system is able to discriminate between who can safely be allowed passage and who poses a risk and must be stopped. In an allergic individual, the soldier is confused, unable to differentiate between friend and foe and therefore overreacting, lashing out wildly in all directions, in the process hurting himself and the castle he was supposed to protect. Autoimmune diseases are serious and potentially life-threatening conditions. The symptoms will depend on which organs are being attacked. The most common forms of autoimmune disease in dogs result in skin lesions, joint pains or, if the components of the blood are attacked, lack of platelets or of red blood cells.

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## What causes autoimmune disease?

Autoimmune diseases are poorly understood. There are believed to be many possible causes. It is well-documented that autoimmune disease can be triggered by medications and vaccines, but it can also appear out of the blue with no apparent cause. Heredity is known to be a factor and for this reason a responsible breeder will want to be informed if your dog has been diagnosed with an autoimmune disease, as this will influence how the parents are bred in the future. This information is crucial for the improvement of the genetic health of your breed, so never neglect to inform your breeder.

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## Conventional treatment

Autoimmune disease is not expected to be cured. The conventional treatment includes supportive symptomatic treatment and suppression of the immune system, typically using steroids in high doses. Some dogs will die from the disease, others will suffer unacceptable side-effects from the treatment. In many cases, though, the symptoms can be controlled through long-term drug treatment. Remission is possible and some dogs can return to a normal life without ongoing treatments, though relapses are not uncommon.

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## Holistic treatment

If I were to choose one area above all others where holistic treatments excel, it would be in the treatment of diseases of the immune system. If your animal suffers from an autoimmune disease, do contact a veterinary surgeon who is also a homeopath or an acupuncturist. I cannot say it any more clearly. My personal experience is with classical homeopathic treatment, but an acupuncturist trained in traditional Chinese medicine will also, in many cases, be able to re-balance the immune system

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## A case history

Luna, a female German Shepherd Dog born in 2011, suffered from the autoimmune disease Lupus. Luna's symptoms started with lameness in the summer of 2015. She was referred to an orthopaedic specialist clinic where she was scanned and had her joint fluid analysed. She was treated with steroids for a few months. The steroids were eventually discontinued without a return to the previous level of pain, although her carer never felt that she recovered her old personality and energy level. Sadly, two years later, Luna's joint pains returned with a vengeance, and this time she also developed a large ulcer on the nose, another symptom of Lupus. Luna's carer was determined that she would not let her go back on steroids, and with euthanasia as the only alternative, it was decided to give homeopathy a try.

I saw Luna in November 2017 for the initial homeopathic consultation. While I would normally treat a case of Lupus with a carefully chosen constitutional remedy, i.e. a homeopathic medicine selected to suit all important aspects of the patient's temperament, habits and preferences, I decided, after studying Luna's medical history, to approach this case from a different angle. I was struck by the fact that her joint pains, Luna's first signs of autoimmune disease, had initially started very soon after she first received two vaccinations against leptospirosis in the Spring of 2015. This led me to suspect that vaccination could have been a trigger for her disease. On this basis, I decided to start treatment specifically against vaccinosis. My plan was, if needed, to follow this up with a constitutional remedy at a later time. I prescribed the homeopathic remedy Thuja.

Apart from being a constitutional type in itself, Thuja is one of the prime homeopathic remedies against vaccinosis (illness caused as a result of vaccination). While it is often impossible to establish a clear causal link in each case, the fact that autoimmune disease can occur as a direct consequence of vaccination is now well established. Vaccinosis can happen after any vaccine, but some experts believe that most cases occur from the use of killed vaccines such as those against rabies and leptospirosis.

Luna's response to the homeopathic remedy was dramatic and immediate. Two days into the treatment, she stopped being lame. She progressed to make a full recovery over the course of only a few weeks and she has not needed further treatment of any kind. There was never a reason to prescribe any other remedy than Thuja. Her carer is pleased to report that Luna, now 9 years old, has never been better. Not only are there no physical symptoms of Lupus, a blood test has confirmed that abnormalities could no longer be detected, and the positive changes to her temperament and energy levels are frequently remarked upon. Luna is clearly a happy, healthy and beautiful dog.

It is important to underline the fact that while the homeopathic remedy Thuja saved Luna from being euthanised because of Lupus, this does in no way mean that another dog suffering from Lupus will benefit from this remedy. The principle of individualised treatment is at the heart of classical homeopathy. Homeopathy has a marked effect on the immune system and is absolutely ideal for treating immune imbalances such as autoimmune disease and allergies, still, it goes without saying that a sick animal should be examined and diagnosed by a veterinary surgeon. Likewise, never stop prescribed medications without first discussing this with your veterinary surgeon and do not attempt to treat serious illness at home. Homeopathic treatment of autoimmune disease will require an experienced homeopath. Even a fully qualified medical doctor or veterinary surgeon undertakes at least a further three to four years of study to become a competent homeopath. Homeopathic treatment is entirely dependent on the patient getting the correct remedy. The homeopath knows the remedies intimately and, when meeting a patient, always attempts to identify which remedy best fits the particular patient. The remedy has to fit the individual patient, taking all their symptoms into account. This means that the remedy will never be selected on the basis of a disease diagnosis alone, in fact, 10 patients with the exact same diagnosis can be expected to find a cure from 10 different remedies. As there are thousands of remedies for the homeopath to choose from, making the all-important match between each patient and their correct remedy is a challenge that requires experience and time. Always seek professional help if your animal is seriously ill.

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## Professional support

For osteopaths: [www.associationofanimalosteopaths.com](http://www.associationofanimalosteopaths.com)

For veterinary homeopaths: [www.bahvs.com](http://www.bahvs.com)

For veterinary acupuncturists: [www.ivas.com](http://www.ivas.com)

For veterinary physiotherapists: [www.acpat.org/](http://www.acpat.org/)

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## The role of diet

A natural, raw diet will aid and support optimum health. Species appropriate feeding is, therefore, to be recommended in all but very complicated cases, such as where the dog may have had recent bowel surgery or is on a high dose of steroids.

If you live in the UK, Honey's Health Team will be delighted to devise a special dietary plan for your dog. Feeding a natural diet couldn't be easier and we can do all the hard work for you – working out exactly what your dog should eat each day (and how much, of course), explaining what to buy and how to prepare it. If you would prefer, and you will be under no obligation, we will be happy to supply the food you need and deliver it straight to your door.

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## Free expert advice

At Honey's we will be delighted to provide you with unlimited, free advice – we don't mind if you never, ever plan to become a customer. Moreover, you can also consult our Health Team (which includes vets, veterinary nurses and other experts) free of charge. We will be pleased to show you how to make your own food, too. We maintain a list of holistic vets, who we are happy to recommend.



## Free book

If you want to know about canine health and nutrition, then please visit our website and download our free book *Honey's Natural Feeding Handbook for Dogs*, or contact us direct and, if you are based in the UK, we will pop a free copy in the post.

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## General information about raw feeding

There is growing evidence that dogs live longer, healthier and happier lives if they eat the same sort of diet they would enjoy in the wild. That is to say: raw, fresh meat, bones and vegetables. Such a diet is referred to as biologically appropriate *aka* natural feeding *aka* raw feeding *aka* (what a lot of things it is *also known as*) the BARF diet.

Dogs and their wolf cousins have been eating raw food for over a million years and they thrive on it. If your dog has any health issues, a raw food diet could make a huge difference. Benefits include a glossy coat, healthy skin, lean muscle tone, robust immune system, sweet-smelling breath, healthy teeth and gums, increased energy, better digestion and a strong heart.

Indeed, if your dog has any health issues now (even minor problems such as allergies, dry skin, bad breath and what the Americans refer to, euphemistically, as 'gas') it is quite likely that a switch to a raw food diet will clear them up.



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Parts of this text are revised extracts from *The Complete Book of Cat and Dog Health* (Hubble & Hattie 2019) by Dr Lise Hansen. [www.hubbleandhattie.com](http://www.hubbleandhattie.com)

The advice and information contained in this fact sheet is for guidance only. The Honey's Health Team (vets, veterinary nurses and other experts) is here to help you in any way we can. However, nothing can replace a physical examination by a vet or other qualified professional.