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Topic: It's Not All Lost with Bad Breeding!

A: The unfortunate reality is that most diseases suffered by our 'new-age' pets today are largely attributed by genetic disorders, the environment or both. Over the centuries, the role of dogs used for herding and hunting has changed, and the majority are now kept primarily for their companionship, or more importantly for the way they look as indication to man's status quo or its fancy appeal. As such, man has cleverly developed and capitalized on breeds, differentiating today's dogs through their unique characteristics using selective breeding, creating today's profit-driven range of pedigrees or 'designer dogs'.

This has resulted in the rise of inherited diseases; diseases inscribed into the genetic makeup of the individual and passed on from generation to generation. This is commonly found among pedigrees through inbreeding or line-breeding. In-breeding is the mating of very close relatives, for example father to daughter or sibling mating, while line-breeding, a form of inbreeding is the mating of first cousins or distant relatives who share a common ancestor. Such breeding methods are popular in achieving consistent litters, 'fix' traits in a breed or to retain a superb specimen through their genetically identical off springs. However, the limited gene pool allows deleterious genes to become widespread through inheritance, commonly seen are the more obvious genetic conditions which includes hip and elbow dysplasia, chronic skin problem, abnormal temperament, collapsing trachea, heart and eye disease and cancer.

One of the prevailing and worrying health condition triggered from inheritance among pedigrees is Endocrine-Immune Dysfunction. It is the basis of many common ailments suffered by our pets today. Our canine's endocrine system include the pituitary gland, the sex organs, thyroid, adrenal, parathyroid and part of the pancreas that produce hormones, substances that travel through the blood stream and affect other organ functions. Endocrine-Immune Dysfunction arises from the inability of the dog to neutralize inflammation caused by environmental stress, processed foods and inconsistent lifestyles. The result of this will derail the immune system, giving rise to allergies, asthma, irritable bowel disease, dermatitis, epilepsy and eventually cancer.

Health abnormalities arising from inheritance are mostly not evident until the dog gets older. Besides genetic disorders, spontaneous genetic mutations can also be caused by malnutrition and environmental stresses during pregnancy. Despite inherited and environmental induced abnormalities, long term health can be achieved through all-rounded lifestyles which include high quality balanced diets. The happy medium for a stable confident dog is to expose him safely to regular physical activity and socialization with fellow pet friends and humans.

An adequate, healthy and balanced diet is not only the principle for a healthy immune system, but can also manage or help prevent a variety of inherited and metabolic diseases from surfacing. Introduce an optimal daily diet that provides the right levels of protein, fat, vitamin and mineral levels for growth and maintenance. To achieve this, you may choose to feed high quality commercial pet foods or home prepared meals. A common guideline to choosing commercial pet foods is to select a brand that complies with the Association of American Feed Control Official (AAFCO) standards. This will provide you with the basic assurance in feeding nutritionally sound diets in accordance to Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA). As for raw, BARF or home-cooked feeders, be constantly equipped with pet nutritional knowledge or seek detailed advice from your veterinarian to suit your pet's condition. Introduction of fresh foods such as eggs, meat, vegetables and fruits with appropriate antioxidants, added vitamins and minerals will do much to stabilize the pets' internal environment. Some nutritional factors that play an important role in maintaining a healthy immune system include zinc, selenium, vitamin E, vitamin B and linoleic acid. The requirement levels of these essential nutrients differ over life stages and deficiencies of these compounds may impair circulating as well as cell-mediated

immunity. However, supplements should never be used as a substitute for feeding premium quality fresh and/or commercial dog foods. Being said, it is always advisable to check with your veterinarian or nutritional experts to make more accurate dietary choices.

Be it a purebred or mixed-breed dog, when fed a high-quality balanced diet, given proper veterinary care and protection from diseases, allowed plenty of exercise and cared for as part of the family, it will be a healthier and happier pet.