It’s better to vaccinate than to cure… isn’t it?

It’s better to vaccinate than to cure’ reads the title of a brochure of a manufacturer of cat vaccines in my vet’s waiting room. It sounds so logical, an association with the Dutch proverb ‘It’s better to prevent than to cure’. But does vaccination really prevent diseases, as this title suggests?

Advantages and Disadvantages of Vaccination

Why vaccinate?

Vaccination is a hot item. The idea behind vaccination is that it will increase the specific resistance against certain diseases, thus fighting or preventing such diseases. Vaccination means: exposing an animal or human to a micro-organism that has been changed in such a way that it has lost its feature to cause sickness, but does stimulate vaccinated humans or animals to develop immunity against this particular disease, i.e. the immune system will react to a vaccination as to a natural infection by making antibodies - immunity- against the pathogenic agent, protecting the animal or human against another contact with this pathogenic agent for a certain periode of time. However, the difference is that a natural infection usually involves symptoms varying from mild to severe, or even fatal. In particular very young, old of weakened individuals run the risk of dying of such an acute infection. Because the vaccine contains weakened microorganisms, thus not causing the symptoms of the particular disease, symptoms will normally not occur. So vaccination is in fact a very mild form of immunization.

Vaccination has led to a decrease of the number of deaths related to acute infection diseases, in particular among young animals and humans. Cat flu is a good example of this. In an historical perspective, vaccination has stopped epidemics by preventing contagious diseases to spread on a large scale. The fact that vaccinated animals, or humans, secrete less virus then when infected with the real virus, reduces the risk they will infect other animals of the same kind (or other people). Vaccinating an individual will also protect its environment. All in all vaccination has increased survival figures of both animals and humans.

Why not vaccinate?

Why NOT vaccinate? If vaccination eventually offers the same result as a natural infection, i.e. immunization against a pathogenic microorganism, without the occurrence of the unpleasant symptoms and sickness, than why ever would we consider NOT vaccinating our animals? Superficially seen it only seems to have advantages, with the same effect. But there are major differences between the natural way of infection with a microorganism and the artificial way through vaccination.

First of all it’s the way in which the contact with the microorganism is taking place. The normal natural contact with a virus, bacteria, fungus, parasite, etc. occurs through the mucous membrane of the mouth or nose when inhaled, or through the skin, for example in case of a wound, so with the external layers of the body. The infected body will first try to fight the intruder in these frontlines to prevent it from infecting other parts of the body, and to affect internal vital organs such as the heart, lungs kidneys, liver, etc.
However, vaccination is usually done through a subcutaneous injection into the tissue. This brings the virus via immediate blood contact directly to the place the organism’s immune system is with all means trying to keep it away from, thus fully allowing the intruder to get to any tissue, and directly attacking ‘the heart’ of the organism. In addition, in the frontline fight -a local outside spot- the organism will first and in particular deploy its rough a-specific defence to eliminate the microorganisms that have intruded. However, by injecting them directly into the body, it must immediately appeal to its specific defence mechanism that makes specific antibodies acting against the intruded antigene.
In this way a vaccino-organism can avoid the first local defence and basically force the body to depend on its internal immune system. As the specific defence is a much more complicated task than the a-specific physical defence, this is putting the body under an even higher pressure. In particular for younger animals that are still developing their complete defence system, such pressure can be too strong and cause their general defence to decrease. This pressure is again increased by the fact that a vaccine usually does not contain one, but multiple different viruses, bacteria, etc., the so-called cocktail vaccines.
This will challenge the immune system with numerous antigenes at a time, forcing it to both find out and develop various antibodies at the same time. Imagine the body is attacked by air bombs, by torpedoes and by ground troops, and it must in no time be able to find a counter weapon for each weapon of the enemy in order to survive. This overwhelming with antigenes means an extremely stressful situation for the immune

system, which may cause it to get over-stimulated, overstrained and into trouble. In nature an animal or human would normally be infected with only one kind of micro-organism at the time, so it can focus all its attention to find the antibody specifically acting against this type of antigene.

When it has only one task to perform the immune system will be able to perform it much more accurately and successfully. The more tasks in a short period of time and under stress, the more sloppy these will be performed, and the more mistakes there will be made. Apart from numerous, very different microorganisms, standard vaccines contain a lot more ingredients. This may be preservatives, adjuvants (auxiliary agents that have no active agent of themselves but support the effect of the vaccine), and antibiotics. Examples include carcinogens aluminium and mercury derivatives. Formaldehyde and formaline, also tumorigenics, are used to weaken a virus. Moreover, many microorganisms are bred on tissues of other animals (chicken and duck embryos), so that foreign proteins are injected together with the vaccine. Additionally there is a risk that during production non-intended organisms, molecules or enzymes accidentally come into the vaccine and are introduced into the body of the vaccinated individual as stowaways.

Another danger may lay in the fact that the integral structure of the virus is often broken during the preparation of a vaccine, and thus internal structures such as DNA and RNA are offered to the immune system as viral lumps. DNA and RNA are nucleoproteins that are present in any form of life, and are highly similar. Antibodies that may be made by lymphocytes may -in their enormous activity- lack the capacity to distinguish their own nucleoproteins from those of the virus and start making mistakes, resulting in the antibodies also attacking the specific nucleoproteins of the individual.
This self-destruction by the body is called an autoimmune disease. Autoimmune diseases are occurring more and more often. In case of a natural exposure to a virus the virus is still intact, and the immune system will only be presented its outside, which is much more ‘foreign’ than the nucleoproteins inside the virus. In a natural virus infection mistakes of the immune system are therefore much less likely to occur. So ‘cocktails’ will even involve higher risks. Any auxiliary agent may -sometimes after many years- cause all kinds of ‘unexplainable’ diseases.

It will be hard to establish a link with the vaccine. The current veterinary practice to repeat vaccinations on an annual basis will only increase the risks of severe consequences. And it also substantially differs from the frequency with which an animal in nature is infected. Normally animals will only once, or be it incidentally, get into contact with a pathogenic organism, and maybe even never. But a regularly vaccinated cat dying at the age of fifteen will have had to resist an attack of the viruses causing cat flu, the feline parvovirus and probably also the feline chlamydia and rabies virus for at least sixteen times. Moreover each visit to the vet and each injection will cause stress for the animal - and we all know that stress weakens an organism’s resistance, thus causing a higher susceptibility. Even the moment of contact with the pathogenic agent is artificial in case of a vaccination, even unnatural. Because it is chosen by the pet owner depending on his/her opportunity to see the vet, and determined by the vet as it has to be during surgery hours, and made compulsory by the authorities such as government, cat associations and animal homes, in case cats are taken abroad, to cat shows, breeding, vacation, temporary homes, etc.

Everything in nature has its own rhythm, but the ‘vaccination rhythm’ we impose on our pets is in fact materially contrary to it. What’s more, the annually repeated vaccinations (boosters) completely ignore the defence system’s immunological memory. From an immunological point of view there is basically no need to repeat any vaccination every year. After the first contact, through natural contact of through vaccination, with a pathogenic virus, bacteria, fungus, etc. and finding the right antibody against the antigene, the relevant type of antigene will remain in the immune system’s memory for years, maybe even lifelong. If the animal is again infected with the same type of antigene later, it can immediately proceed to produce numerous copies of the specific antibody without the need of the initial search and identification process. So a confrontation will do to establish a long-term protection. Just like you don’t have to ride on your bike every day in order not to forget how to ride a bicycle, the immune system does not need to be ‘remembered’ every year how things must be done. These routine boosters are merely an over-stimulation, a sort of ‘drilling’ of the immune system making it over-stimulated, over-strained and stressed, lose its discernment, and eventually may start to over-react to innocent agents (for example food). Sometimes even substances of the organism itself are perceived as life-threatening intruders, and are attacked. In medicine these reactions are called allergies and autoimmune diseases. The repeated vaccinations make the body to produce an enormous number of antibodies time and again, so there’s always a sufficient stock readily available in case an antigene should succeed to intrude. But even if the reserves would be exhausted the immune system can still refill them immediately using its memory. Also a booster vaccination often fails to stimulate a second reaction, as it is interfering with the antibodies that are produced as a result of the first vaccination. So annual boosters do not increase immunity, while this is what they are meant to do, and in fact they are unnecessary. It is odd anyway to vaccinate adult cats each year against cat flu, as this disease is basically only (life) threatening for young kittens. Adult cats, provided they are in good health, may feel just a bit sick or have a light cold. One

could compare it with adult humans who are not repeatedly vaccinated against measles, mumps, chicken pox, and other so-called children's diseases. The same applies to the feline parvovirus and rabies vaccinations. The vaccine against the feline parvovirus may be even the most effective and long-working vaccine, in any case much longer than one year. One or two rabies vaccinations will do for a life-long protection. Even vets doubt the use of annually given booster vaccinations that started years ago, but lack any scientific validity or verification.

Sometimes a vaccination may even render an animal or a human even more receptive to the diseases against which the vaccination was intended. I know people who say never to have had the flu so often as since they started getting the annual flu vaccinations, so they stopped getting them.

Practice has proven that the organ(s) with which the real, virulent virus has most affinity, even after injecting its vaccine, will be the first to experience troubles. For example, bacteria that in reality affect the lungs have a strong tendency also to trigger a lung reaction if they are administered as a bacterine.

A good example in humans are the respiratory troubles triggered by the whooping-cough vaccination. Other examples include two nowadays frequently occurring diseases in cats: a chronic autoimmune intestines infection and cardiomyopathy, also an autoimmune disease. The frequency with which these diseases are diagnosed has significantly increased only since cats are vaccinated against the feline parvovirus. And knowing that the main symptoms of the feline parvovirus, infections and degeneration of the gastro-intestinal mucous membrane, lead to vomiting, diarrhoea, dehydration, loss of weight, a decreased resistance due to the catagenesis of leucocytes (panleucopenia), and weakening of the myocardium. Although these symptoms only occur in case of an acute feline parvovirus infection, they have become chronic after vaccination. Of course cats may also have chronic diarrhoea or a weak heart after having gone through a real feline parvovirus, but in the first place vaccination against the feline parvovirus does not guarantee that no gastro-intestinal or heart troubles will occur, maybe even the contrary; secondly in case of vaccination cats will surely get the parvovirus, while in nature this may even never happen.

Two other autoimmune diseases, FIV and FeLV, could be 'consequences' of the parvovirus' defence-suppressing effect - even when it is given as a vaccine, meaning that the vaccine allows them to jump into the immunological gap the parvovirus has left. A comparable phenomenon can be observed in relation to the rabies vaccination.

It seems our pets' immune system has completely lost track of what's happening. And corticosteroids prescriptions to suppress this confused, hyper and wrongly reacting immune system are rising to unprecedented levels. In order to prevent acute diseases through vaccination we have created chronic diseases. And those acute diseases may even not be eliminated at all, but have just dormant -underground- mutated to another form: into chronic clinical pictures. Although vaccination has reduced mortality figures due to acute diseases among animals, but has it really improved their quality of life? And do they live longer and in better health conditions? How many cats must stick to a special kidney, bladder-grit or allergy diet, get daily insulin or other medications to suppress and 'cover up' their chronic disorders? Nowadays many vaccinated animals skip the acute phase of a disease and in turn live a chronically sick life. Before pets were vaccinated they died of an acute contagious disease, or they overcame it and then lived a long and relatively healthy life. Because weaker animals will die this situation constitutes in fact a natural selection, thus improving general health conditions of the whole species. Only strong and healthy animals with a powerful defence system will reproduce and pass their vitality to their offspring, thus keeping the gene pool healthy.

Undoubtedly the status of the cat and the dog as a pet was one of the reasons why we have started vaccinating them. Pets get better care and more attention and love. In general we find it harder to see a pet suffering and being sick than a 'wild' animal. Vaccination was meant to prevent getting sick. But why should a pet never be sick? Being sick now and then is just part of life. Besides, being sick incorporates a learning process. Children's diseases belong to the physical, emotional and psychological development of both humans and animals. The body must learn how to cope with a disease, and find out itself how to overcome. This requires practising and training - by engaging in natural confrontations with various microorganisms. Just like you only get smarter by training your brains, make your body stronger by using your muscles, you will only have more resistance by making it work hard. The first entails headaches, the second muscular pains, and the third involves being sick. 'Practice makes perfect' does also apply to the defence system. Clinical experience has proven that going through an acute disease, and letting it follow its natural course (i.e. not suppressing it by antibiotics, corticosteroids, etc., but just letting itself work out), will make the entire defence system stronger as the whole system is deployed in combating the disease. However, vaccinations meant to increase immunity against a certain disease may reduce the body's capacity to attack and overcome other diseases. Practise has proven that this often is the case. Going through acute diseases, especially at a young age, is only beneficial to the immune system, while vaccination is hindering it. 'Who

learns young, forgets not when he's old' does only apply to natural infection diseases, not to vaccinations. The immune system of a young animal still is so receptive, so open, undeveloped and inexperienced that it can only be overwhelmed and confused of so many and repeated cocktail vaccinations.

Inherent to the vaccination of pets is that also weaker animals are allowed to reproduce and to pass their weak genes, simply because they do no longer die of a contagious disease before having reached the fertile age. The fact that a species is getting less and less healthy leads to less healthy individuals, resulting in a spiralled weakening of the gene pool, and of the species as a whole. The more such a species is getting sicker, weaker and more prone to diseases, the more vets will call to vaccinate more frequently and against a larger number of diseases, not realizing that the increased general chronic sickness of the animals may well be the consequence of so many vaccinations. 'The more vaccines we have developed, the more diseases have occurred'.

Alternatives

Obviously the most apparent and best alternative for vaccination is NOT to vaccinate and to ensure your pet has the best possible resistance to overcome any infection disease it may catch by itself. This will be achieved by keeping the animal physically, emotionally and psychologically healthy, and it involves proper and natural nutrition, social contacts with animals of the same kind, love and attention. And possibilities to express their natural behaviour, fresh air and sunlight, as less stress as possible and keeping it away from possible infections until the animal's immune system has matured. Obviously there is no better defence and prevention against sickness than optimum health. A healthy body with a powerful immune system has an enormous capacity to resist practically any pathogenic organism. Stop vaccinating pets altogether will probably be too radical a step for most people. If this applies to you, you could at least consider the following.

First of all you could decide to stop the annually repeated vaccinations. Have young animals vaccinated once or twice when they are just a few months old, and then no more. This will do to build up their immunity; the animal will then be protected against catching an infection disease.

Secondly, have all vaccines be given as single vaccinations, so no more cocktails of cat flu, feline parvovirus and chlamydia. This does much more resemble the natural course of contamination with a single pathogenic agent at a time. Moreover the body will succeed far better to resist a single antigene at a time and building up immunity against it without the adverse side effects and/or consequences (such as allergies and autoimmune diseases caused by a confused immune system), than when it is faced with multiple and varying attackers.

Finally you may consider having your animal 'vaccinated' with nosodes, as an alternative for conventional vaccines. A nosode is a drug that is produced according to a homeopathic preparation by dilution and shaking (potentialization). Nosodes are based on a pathogenic product, i.e. secretion by an animal suffering from a specific infection disease, as a symptom of the disease; for example nose flow, eye secretion, mucus, blood, pus and ear wax. This way the FVR nosode (the cat flu nosode; FVR stands for feline viral rhinotracheitis) is produced. After potentialization all molecules of the base material have disappeared, and the nosode only carries the microorganism's energy and the essence of the disease.

Nosodes can be used in two ways: therapeutically, as a medication, or prophylactically, preventive. The last way is a useful alternative for regular vaccines. Just like vaccines, nosodes stimulate the immune system to produce antibodies; they are just as effective as vaccines, and in some cases have even proven to be more effective in preventing a disease than conventional vaccines. Advantages of nosodes include that they are perfectly safe and do not entail any health risks, provided however they are used carefully. Contrary to vaccines they do not contain any chemical additions that may harm an animal's health. For homeopathic medications lactose is used as a carrier of the potentialized base material (globuli or granules). Administration is done orally, via the mucous membrane. This corresponds with a natural infection. Moreover nosodes may be given at an age of three to four weeks and to the pregnant mother, allowing her kittens to be protected by the antibodies in the mother's milk from the moment they start drinking with her. Generally, the preventive action of nosodes works best when they are given around the time of infection with or exposure to the contagious microorganism, so a few days before and during the incubation time. As real vaccines they can be administrated in the C 30 potency in a frequency of once or twice a week until the age of eight months. At that age the immune system should have developed in full, and there is no need to repeat any 'nosode vaccination'. However, should you choose this alternative, it is best to find a homeopathic veterinarian, and discuss a 'vaccination schedule'. Additional advantages of this way of immunisation are that you can administer a nosode by yourself at home (so without the stress of going to the vet), and it's much cheaper than regular vaccinations.

Conclusion

The chapter ‘Why not vaccinate?’ is substantially larger than the chapter ‘Why vaccinate?’ But then, there’s a lot to say for not having your pets vaccinated (in the regular way). The decision whether to have pets vaccinated or not is first of all an individual choice, one you will have to make yourself. I hope this article will be helpful when making a considered choice. A choice we have to make for our animals. They depend on our care, and as their caretakers we must do for what is best for them. The cat fancy is always talking about the cat’s health, and in breeding ‘a healthy cat’ is a top priority, having raised vaccination to one of its spearheads. However, eventually the current vaccination policy, in the way I have described in this article, leads to more and more chronically sick cats - so it’s completely overshooting the mark of ‘a healthy cat’.

By Karen Friedrich