

# 5 Ways to Keep Pets Healthy

## Preventive Care Can Make a Difference

Our pets tend to give us the silent treatment when it comes to their health. Because they are unable to tell us when they have an ache or a pain, it's up to us to look for tell-tale signs that may indicate an issue.

Simple routine care measures can help maintain your companion's well-being and help to promote a long and healthy life.

### 1. Bi-Annual Exams

Dr. Cori Gross, a veterinarian in Seattle, Wash., says one of the most important things you can do for your pet is to make sure he gets routine veterinary examinations. "It's all about taking preventative measures," she explains. "You want to make sure you catch any potential problems early; that way it's less expensive to care for your pets in the long run."

During a bi-annual exam, your veterinarian will conduct a complete physical exam to check your pet's condition from nose to tail. They will evaluate everything from your pet's heart and breathing to their ears, mouth and skin during this process. In addition to the examination, your veterinarian may recommend the following:

- **A blood panel:** This is a group of tests that help monitor liver and kidney function, red and white cell blood counts, and can help identify abnormalities that your pet may not be telling you about! Your veterinarian may suggest that seniors, pets over the age of 7, be tested bi-annually.
- **A fecal test:** This simple test checks pet's stool for parasite eggs and/or other organisms that can be shed during irregular intervals; puppies usually are tested more frequently than adult dogs.
- **Additional tests:** May be recommended including x-rays, an EKG, blood pressure measurement or others. Your veterinarian will identify the most important tests for your pet based on their individual history and needs.



### 2. Dental Health

Dental care plays a big role in maintaining a pet's overall health. According to the American Veterinary Dental Society, it's estimated that more than 80% of cats and dogs over the age of three show signs of oral disease. This includes everything from gum disease to oral melanoma (cancer).

Research indicates that proper dental health can extend the life of your pet by two to five years.

While the need for professional dental cleanings will vary from pet to pet based on your pet's age and oral condition; there are a few simple ways to promote a healthy mouth in the meantime:

- **Brush at home:** Get your pet into a daily or weekly habit of having his teeth brushed at home. Use a finger brush or a pet toothbrush and pet toothpaste (never use human toothpaste; the sweetener can be toxic to pets). Once your pet gets into the routine, this task will become easier and can potentially extend the time between professional dental cleanings.
- **Greenies®:** According to the company, this edible dental chew (shaped like a toothbrush) can reduce tartar up to 69% and tartar buildup by 10.5% if eaten once a day. Ask your veterinarian about the appropriate size Greenie for your pet and remember that this treat adds to the total calorie intake your pet consumes during the day.
- **Annual oral exam:** Having your pet's mouth examined once (or twice) a year during a routine checkup can help identify potential oral problems before they become serious.
- **Bad breath:** You may think that a stinky mouth is normal when it comes to your pet, but be careful: foul-smelling breath can indicate a serious problem either in your pet's mouth or a digestive issue. Schedule an examination if your pet develops noticeably smelly breath.

### 3. Healthy Diet

Your pet's dietary needs change over the course of his life, from birth to adolescence to adulthood and then to old age. A life stage diet is one that is tailored to meet the different nutritional needs as your pet ages.

Dogs' and cats' nutritional requirements are quite different from one another. It's always wise to discuss the best diet for your pet with your veterinarian at each stage of your pet's life. Check the food packaging for an AAFCO statement which will let you know if the product has been specifically tested and labeled to be safe, effective and designated for a particular life stage.

Portion control is important to maintain. When reading the label on your pet's food, follow the recommendation for your pet's ideal weight, not his current weight as some pets may require more or less than the labeled amount to maintain a healthy weight.

While some dogs may require special diets due to medical issues, the average small or medium breed dog should eat food containing:

- High-quality, animal-based protein for muscle maintenance.
- Fiber for a healthy digestive tract.
- Essential vitamins and minerals for the immune system.
- Vitamin-rich fish oils for a healthy coat and skin and for overall health.
- Healthy grains for energy.

Cats are strict meat eaters, or carnivores, so the food should contain a high level of easily digestible protein. Fat is also important for needed calories. If you want, you can blend dry cat food with canned food.

Adult cat food should also contain:

- Vitamin A, from liver, kidney and other organ meats, and niacin for healthy growth.
- Essential fatty acids for healthy skin and fur.
- Taurine for healthy eyes and heart muscle.

Your senior pet may develop age-related health issues in the last year or so of his life. There are different food and supplements to address different problems. Your veterinarian can help guide you to make sure your pet has a quality of life as long as possible.



#### 4. Daily Exercise

According to a Purina study, 60 percent of pets are overweight.

Diabetes, heart and lung diseases, bone and joint diseases, skin conditions and different types of cancer are more common in overweight animals, as is a shorter life expectancy. Many of these health problems can be alleviated with regular exercise and proper dietary management.

If your veterinarian approves of daily exercise for your pet, try some of these easy approaches:

- **Daily walks:** Take your dog for brisk walks of at least 20 minutes twice a day. Some cats can be trained to walk on a leash as well, so find a good harness and don't give up after a few attempts.
- **15-minute training routine:** Not only can dog training curb bad behavior and strengthen your relationship with your pet, the mental stimulation is exhausting for your companion. Consider taking dogs outdoors for an invigorating session up and down your driveway, in the backyard or on your neighborhood sidewalk.
- **Indoor activities:** Your pet can get as much exercise in an indoor setting as those who have outdoor space to run. Interactive toys such as motion-activated mice, balls and others not only mentally stimulate cats and dogs but also encourage exercise. Scratching posts, towers and dens, and carpeted cat trees are perfect for climbing, playing and hiding.
- **Dog-walking services:** Available by popular demand, this may be a reliable solution for those with puppies and those working long hours or traveling. Be sure your pet walker is bonded, insured and licensed, and some businesses offer dog training classes and pet boarding as well.



#### 5. Parasite Prevention and Management

Keeping up with parasite control is instrumental in maintaining the health of our furry friends. Fleas, ticks, heartworms and intestinal parasites can cause everything from discomfort to life-threatening illnesses in pets. For example, fleas can live for a couple of months and females can lay up to 2,000 eggs in their lifetime.

Pets are commonly allergic to fleas and can develop significant skin irritation from scratching. Ticks can pass dangerous infectious diseases when they bite. For both, prevention is the best medicine. There are a number of safe, effective monthly products that you can use to keep these pests from hurting your pet.

Heartworm disease is passed by mosquito bites and is fatal if not treated. Both cats and dogs are susceptible and there is no treatment for affected cats. However, there are several medication options that are safe and are completely effective in preventing this disease.

Finally, intestinal parasites can be a problem at any stage of a pet's life. Routine fecal examinations and deworming treatments can keep serious medical problems to a minimum.

Consult with your veterinarian to determine the best method and products for your pet.



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