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Pet Care News

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Taking Care of Older Pets*

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Because animals age more quickly than humans, taking a dog or cat for an annual check-up is the equivalent of a human getting a physical once every three years. This may be adequate for young animals, but as dogs and cats reach their middle age, health problems that could threaten their longevity may arise.

Different breeds of dogs and cats have problems specific to aging. For example, many breeds of dogs with short faces, such as Pugs or Shitsus, are prone to upper airway obstruction problems due to the shape of their heads, leading to respiratory difficulties as they age. German Shepherds have a higher incidence of hip dysplasia that frequently leads to osteoarthritis as they get older. With age, many pets become prone to organ dysfunction, immune deficiencies, metabolic disorders, osteoarthritis, dental disease and cancer.

Obesity is another common aging problem for animals. It can lead to increased heart disease, orthopedic stresses, respiratory distress, decreased gastrointestinal function and other abnormalities. An overweight dog or cat may need evaluation to rule out hypothyroidism (see accompanying article) or other serious diseases. If a pet's weight-gain is detected early, lifestyle adjustments will help eliminate these problems before complications arise.

Many veterinarians now recommend twice-a-year wellness exams for dogs and cats who are seven years or older. The visits also offer the opportunity for pet owners to learn about new diagnostics and treatments that can help their pets live longer, healthier lives. In addition to scheduling semi-annual examinations, pet owners should contact their veterinarians whenever a pet is injured or showing unusual behavior or symptoms. An owner's observations may help the veterinarian discover an otherwise hidden condition before it's too late.

Ticks Aren't Gone Yet

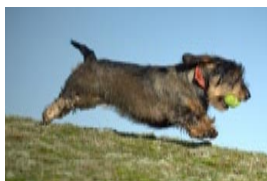


Just because the air is getting colder, the days are getting shorter, and the leaves are turning color don't become complacent about ticks. Pets make good hosts for pests that can transmit Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and Ehrlichiosis infection. Fever, lethargy, joint swelling and lameness are some of the most common signs that an animal might have contracted one of these diseases or infections and will need treatment.

Even in the Fall, take time to inspect your pets regularly and remove any ticks hidden in their coats. Remember to visit your veterinarian and pick up a flea and tick product for protection. Dogs can be vaccinated for Lyme disease by their veterinarians and can also be tested for Lyme infection.

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Pudgy Pets*

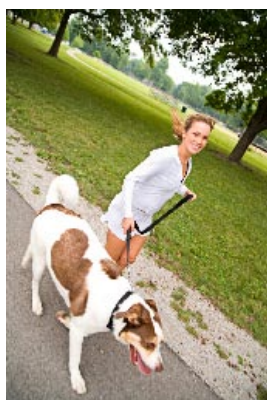


Is your pet simply overweight or could there be an underlying disease responsible? Any extremely overweight pet needs evaluation by a veterinarian to rule out hypothyroidism or other serious diseases. In dogs, hypothyroidism is seen most commonly in middle-aged females. Some dog breeds, such as cocker spaniels, golden and Labrador retrievers, dachshunds, and Doberman pinschers, are predisposed to hypothyroidism, but this condition is extremely uncommon in cats.

A dog that is simply obese due to overfeeding or lack of exercise will also have a decreased metabolic rate, displaying signs very similar to those of a hypothyroid dog. Blood tests are used to distinguish the obese pet from that pet with hypothyroidism. Fortunately, once diagnosed, canine hypothyroidism is simple and inexpensive to treat with orally administered hormones. This treatment is very effective, helping a dog regain its energy, and causes no long-term side effects.

To prevent misdiagnosis try to prevent obesity in the first place by feeding an appropriate food amount and increasing exercise to increase and maintain metabolism and vitality.

Exercising With Your Pet*



Many of us keep in shape by exercising with our pet. Here are some tips to make exercise enjoyable and beneficial for both of you.

- **Set up a good routine**

Long periods of repetitive, physically-demanding exercise are not natural for dogs. Gradually break your dog into an exercise regime by starting slowly, gradually increase the length of the activity and take breaks. Constant, steady activity at an elevated pace could be harmful for an unconditioned pet.

- **Consider the breed**

Some breeds, such as pugs and bulldogs, cannot withstand large amounts of physical activity because their respiratory systems are unable to handle too much activity, especially in warmer weather.

- **Consider the age of your pet**

Avoid long periods of repetitive motion exercise, such as running, with young dogs. Because they are still growing, this type of exercise may cause injury to their growing bones and joints. Older pets may not have the physical stamina that they once did.

- **Medical conditions**

Pets with respiratory, heart or joint disease may be harmed by too much physical exercise. Consult your veterinarian before starting a new exercise routine with your pet.

- **Weather & climate**

During the summer months be aware of overheating. Your pet doesn't have the ability to sweat efficiently to dissipate body heat as you do. Hot road and sidewalk surfaces can burn foot pads. Be careful during winter months as well. Your pet's feet don't have much protection; watch for frostbite and icy patches that might cut your dog's foot pads. Salt or other deicers on roads and sidewalks may also harm their feet.

- **Stay safe**

Avoid running along a road with your pet because of traffic concerns. Non-paved trails provide a surface that is gentler on the joints, for both dogs and humans. Trails also provide a safe place for a break, should one be necessary.

- **Be visible**

Both you and your pet should wear a vest or a collar equipped with reflectors.

- **Be a good neighbor**

Have a bag to pick up your pet's waste and make sure your dog is controlled so it's not intrusive to others.

The most important thing you should do is to be alert to what your dog is experiencing. Be prepared to take a break if it's lagging behind, limping or working too hard to breathe. These are all physical signs that your pet has had enough exercise and you should stop.

Call Ahead for Meds & Special Diet Foods



Reminder to our clients: If you need prescription medications refilled for your pet or need to pick up more prescription pet foods, it is helpful if you **call us ahead of time** before arriving at the hospital. This little bit of notice will give us time to prepare your request and have it ready for your arrival, resulting in less waiting time for you. Thank you for your cooperation.

* Some of the information in these articles was adapted from "Pet Talk", a service of the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences Department at University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. For more information go to: <http://www.aces.uiuc.edu/news/pettalk.html>

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