

How to keep your dog healthy & happy!

1. Proper nutrition. Feeding your pet the right amount and type of food helps him maintain a healthy weight, which is one of the best ways to prevent obesity-related illnesses and extend his lifespan. Pets can usually meet their nutritional needs from a balanced diet of quality food but check with your veterinarian to see if he needs any supplements. Also be sure your pet gets enough fresh water and keep an eye on the amount of treats you give him; most veterinarians suggest they should make up no more than 10% of your pet's daily calories. Find a vet to reach out to for consultation.

2. Exercise. Regular walks, hiking, playing fetch and swimming can keep your pet physically active and fit. But don't forget about mental stimulation! Providing toys to play with, hiding treats, building obstacle courses and practicing new tricks all keep your dog or cat interested and engaged. You can also change up your walking routine to expose your pet to new scenery and smells.

3. Regular checkups. An annual wellness exam provides the best opportunity for your veterinarian to perform a variety of health screens that can lead to early detection of diseases and to spot warning signs of serious illness. Yearly dental appointments may also be recommended to remove plaque and tartar buildup.

4. Preventative medications. Taking preventative measures go hand in hand with regular veterinarian checkups. Preventative medications can keep your pet free of unwanted health issues, like heartworm, flea-related diseases and tick-borne illnesses. In addition, regularly brushing your pet's teeth and giving him dental chews help prevent periodontal disease, which can lead to more serious health problems.

5. Grooming. This involves keeping your pet's nails trimmed, brushing him a couple times a week and giving him regular baths. Grooming is also a good way to keep an eye on changes in your pet's fur or skin, like dandruff, bald patches or dry skin. And it's an ideal time to check for lumps and bumps that may be cause for concern. Check with your veterinarian for the best grooming protocol for your particular pet.

6. Affection. Establishing a strong bond with your dog or cat is good for both of you. Cuddles, petting, belly rubs and even brushing his coat are great ways to show your pet some love. Not only does this strengthen the emotional connection with your pet, but it promotes your pet having positive interactions with other animals and humans.

7. Socialization. According to the American Animal Hospital Association, “Early socialization [in dogs] and appropriate exposure to various people and situations at a young age decreases the odds of antisocial or fearfully aggressive behaviors as an adult.” A puppy’s or kitten’s formative years — from a few weeks old to about 16-18 weeks — is the most critical period for socialization. So be sure they get enough people and animal interaction, not just in the early months but throughout their life. A few options include visiting family and friends, taking a trip to the dog park, going for a walk around the neighborhood or letting your pet spend an afternoon at daycare after they’ve received the all clear from your vet.

8. Spay/neuter. Getting your pet fixed has several benefits. It can prevent some cancers and diseases, extend your pet’s life expectancy and cut down on aggressive behavior in males. For females, it can prevent them from going into heat and reduce unwanted behaviors associated with their cycle, such as irritability, yowling and spraying urine.

9. Know what’s “normal.” Has your pet’s behavior changed recently? Is he scratching more than usual? Is he eating more or less than he normally does? Changes from the norm could be cause for concern and indicate an underlying issue. If you notice abnormal behavior in your dog or cat, give your vet a call to see if an exam is necessary.

10. Pet safety. There are several ways to keep your pet safe: collars with ID tags, microchips, making sure your home is free of safety hazards and putting toxic substances out of reach. Along with the other tips above, you’ll be able to keep your furry friend happy, healthy and with you for many years to come!