

# Pet Care



# Stay Well with Preventive Care

Preventive care is about keeping your pets well even when they're not sick.

It includes regular wellness exams; vaccinations; dental care; and preventive medication, such as those that keep fleas and heartworms at bay.

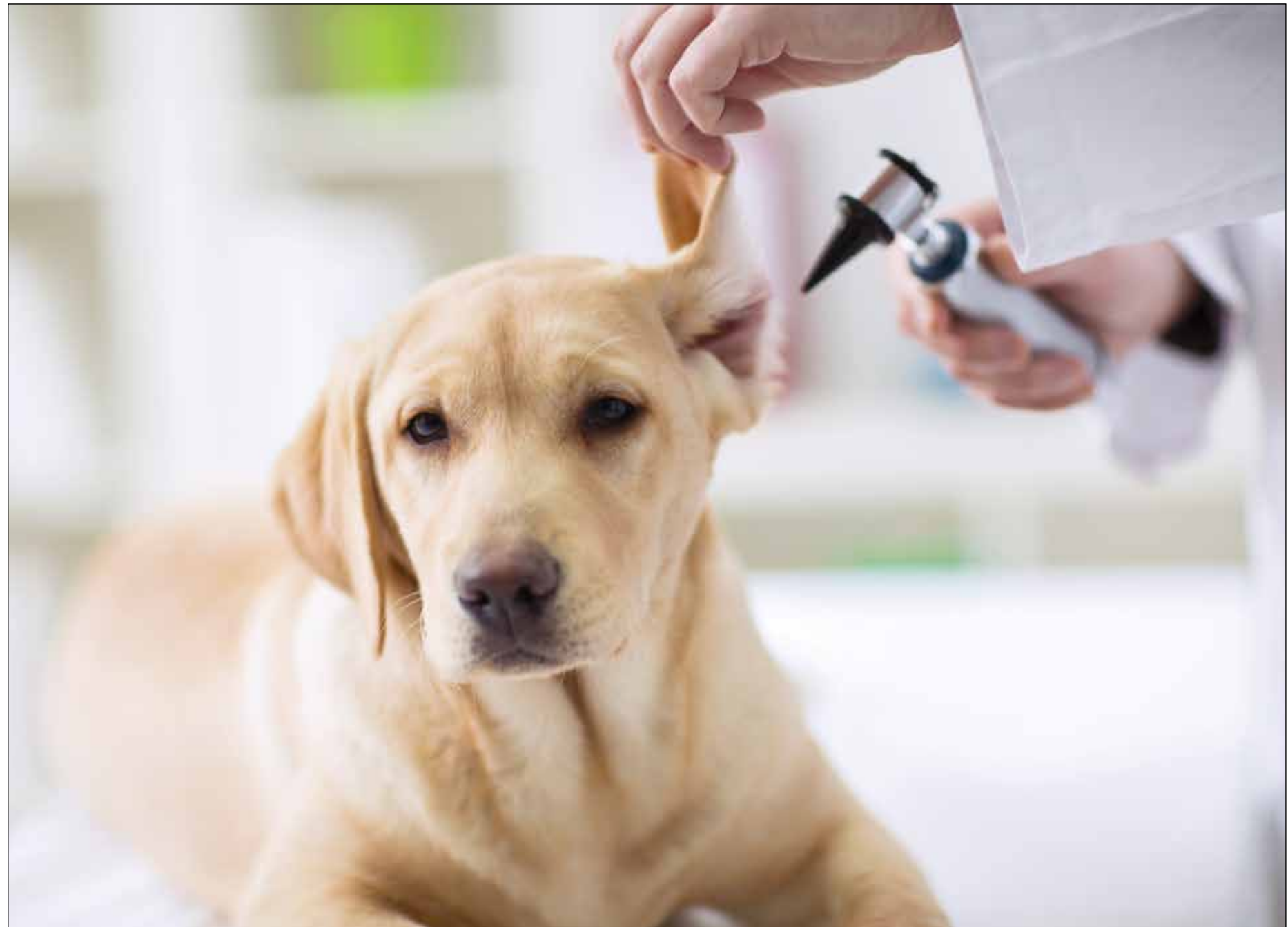
## WELLNESS EXAMS FOR DOGS AND CATS

For dogs and cats, preventive care starts with an annual or regularly scheduled wellness exam. Your veterinarian will take vital signs and look for any health concerns. They may take blood work and check on any conditions you're treating, as well as update any needed vaccinations. Seniors and babies may need more frequent visits.

This is a good time to discuss weight, nutrition and feeding as well as any general concerns or questions you may have about your pet, including behavioral questions. If your pet isn't spayed or neutered, you can discuss that at this time.

## WELLNESS EXAMS FOR OTHER PETS

Other pets also need wellness exams. Birds, for instance, will have their beaks and nails checked and possibly trimmed or shaped to make life easier for your feathered friend. For reptiles, the vet may ask about its enclosure and take a blood or stool sample to look for parasites



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and other conditions. For any pet, establish veterinary care as soon as you can with a health care professional you trust. Thereafter, follow along with the schedule you and your vet set to keep ahead of conditions.

## DENTAL CARE

Caring for your pet's teeth and gums is just as much a

part of keeping them healthy as feeding them properly and giving them plenty of exercise. The University of Wisconsin School of Veterinary Medicine says inflamed gums become an entryway for bacteria to enter your pet's bloodstream and infect other parts of the body.

The school says dogs and cats will tolerate tooth

brushing, especially if it ends with a reward. Start with short periods of massaging the gums with your finger and transition to a soft-bristled toothbrush. Focus on the cheek-side of the teeth and use a pet-specific toothpaste that does not have added fluoride.

Bones and dental chews can help, but the school says not to

give pets hard objects such as antlers or bully sticks because they can result in dental fractures. If it's too hard for you to chew, experts say, it's too hard for your pet. Vets can perform routine cleanings and may recommend doing them even if there aren't any signs of poor oral health. Talk to your health care professionals about their recommendations.



# Build the Perfect First-Aid Kit

Emergencies can happen at any time and pet owners need to build a first-aid kit to take care of their pets before bad things happen.

## WOUND CARE

Appropriate wound care can prevent infections and other dangerous conditions. Stock your first-aid kit with:

- Gauze pads and rolls for cleaning wounds or applying pressure on a wound.
- Self-adhering bandages to hold gauze in place without sticking to fur.
- Medical or adhesive tape.
- Antibiotic ointment that's pet safe to prevent infection in minor cuts and scrapes.
- Antiseptic wipes or spray for cleaning wounds. Choose a pet-safe product.
- Sterile saline solution for flushing wounds or eyes.
- Styptic powder or corn-starch to stop minor bleeding, especially from a torn or broken nail.
- Hydrogen peroxide to induce vomiting. Use only with veterinary guidance.

## TOOLS AND ACCESSORIES

Along with wound care basics, there are several tools that can make treating pets easier.

- Blunt-end scissors for cutting bandages and other items.
- Tweezers for removing

ticks, splinters or debris.

- A digital thermometer used only for your pets to check for a fever. Petroleum jelly can make this more comfortable for your pets.
- Disposable gloves to protect yourself while treating your pets.
- Syringes for administering liquid medication or flushing wounds.

- A flashlight or penlight to examine wounds, eyes or ears.
- An instant cold pack to reduce swelling.
- Towels and rags to use for warmth, clean up, as a barrier or to transport the animal.
- An extra leash and collar.
- A muzzle or soft cloth to restrain a frightened animal. Even the most well-behaved animals can bite when scared

or hurt.

- A first-aid book to help you treat injuries.

## DOCUMENTATION

Emergency situations call for information that may not always be top of mind. Add in:

- Your veterinarian's contact information, including name, address, phone number and emergency phone number.

- The contact information for an emergency animal hospital in your area. Add this to your phone as well.

- A copy of your pets' medical records, including a vaccination history.
- A current photo of your pets with their names and a description of any collars or harnesses they may be wearing.



# Managing Pet Allergies

Your pets can be allergic to things just like humans can, and in a lot of cases, it's even the same allergens causing problems.

The good news is that with proper veterinary care and management, allergies aren't the end of the world.

## ENVIRONMENTAL ALLERGENS

Dogs, cats and other pets can get hay fever, too. Some common environmental allergens, Tyrone Veterinary Hospital says, include pollen, grass, dust mites, mold and fibers from plants or even other animals. Treatments include regular baths with a veterinarian-approved hypoallergenic shampoo, limited exposure to allergens and if they do have to get near them, wipe their paws and fur with a damp cloth to remove irritants. Clean the home and pet habitat regularly and use air filters to help filter out allergens in the air.

## FOOD ALLERGENS

Common food allergies among pets include beef, chicken, dairy, eggs, wheat and soy, which just happen to be common in people, too. Pets experiencing these allergies can experience digestive issues, chronic skin conditions and ear infections. Avoid giving your pet whatever they're



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allergic to and talk to your veterinary provider about what kind of diet is best for them. They may recommend a prescription diet that can help them get the nutrients they need while avoiding what they're allergic to. These diets are often made in strict sanitary conditions to avoid cross-contamination and may be more successful than just reading labels.

## CONTACT ALLERGENS

Sometimes pets have allergies to things they come into contact with, such as certain cleaning products, shampoos, fabrics or carpets, or even flea saliva. In fact, flea allergy dermatitis is a common condition where flea saliva causes itching, hair loss, red spots and skin infections in affected pets. Once the allergen is identified,

avoid that when you can. Frequent baths can help alleviate inflammation from allergies as can preventive medications such as flea and tick medications.

## VETERINARY TREATMENTS

Your veterinary professional may recommend prescription treatments for allergies and the resulting inflammation.

These may include antihistamines similar to those given to humans or steroids to reduce inflammation. Topical treatments, such as medicated shampoos or sprays, can be used for both the allergy and any secondary infections. For severe or persistent allergies, veterinarians may recommend immunotherapy shots to desensitize the immune system.



# Crate Training Your Dog

Crate training a puppy or dog creates a space just for them that keeps both them and your home safe.

It also makes it easier to travel with your dog and house train your dog.

## CHOOSING A DOG CRATE

Hill's, the maker of Science Diet pet food, says the right crate depends on your lifestyle and your dog's personality. Soft-sided duffle-type carriers work great for small puppies and small grown dogs. They also work well for travel, but can be less than ideal for keeping in the home. Hard-sided plastic crates come in a variety of sizes that are good for in-home use. Wire crates are a good choice for medium-to-large dogs because they're durable, easy to clean and offer good ventilation.

Dogs that are more shy may appreciate the closed feeling of duffle crates or plastic-sided crates. Dogs that have to see you at all times may be more comfortable in a wire crate, where they can see.

Crates should be at least four inches taller and longer than your dog, remembering that some accessories, like food and water dishes and beds, will take up some space.

## CRATE TRAINING 101

Start by making the crate an inviting, warm space for your dog. Then, play a game. Toss

the treats or pieces of dog food into the crate at meal time and say the command you want to use to tell your dog to go to their crate as the dog goes inside to get their treat. Leave the door open so they can leave once the food is gone.

Repeat 15-20 times per

session, gradually getting farther away as you toss treats. After the dog routinely goes inside, shut the door for one minute. Gradually increase the time inside with the door shut. Eventually, the dog should learn the crate command and tolerate times inside with the door shut,

even without treats.

You can try feeding the dog meals inside the crate, helping them associate the space with delicious food. If they cry, let them out, but do not give food. It's normal for dogs or puppies to cry when crate training, but the process shouldn't take long, so bear with it. When it's

not mealtime, leave toys, chews and smelly treats for the dog to explore and discover on their own. Keep the crate in a place where the dog can smell, hear and see the family and know they're part of it. Use a low-traffic part of a common room, such as the living room or family room.



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# Managing Separation Anxiety

Some dogs get more anxious when their family leaves them alone.

This can lead to destructive behavior such as destroying property, urinating or defecating improperly, barking or howling, or trying to escape. The family may notice the dog drooling or showing other signs of anxiety as they prepare to leave or destruction around points of entry, such as doors or windows. The good news is separation anxiety can be treated to make your life and your pets' more comfortable.

## SYMPTOMS

Dogs with separation anxiety may experience a range of symptoms, including:

- Urinating and defecating when left alone or separated from their family. If they do so with the family present, the behavior is probably not associated with separation anxiety, the ASPCA says.
- Barking and howling when left alone or separated from the family. This is a persistent behavior not triggered by anything else other than being left alone.

- Chewing, digging or destroying things. Dogs may chew on door frames or window sills, dig at doors or destroy other household projects. Not only do these behaviors destroy property, they can injure the dog, resulting in broken teeth, cut



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paws and damaged nails.

## WHAT CAUSES IT?

The ASPCA says it's not known exactly why dogs develop separation anxiety, but does say it's more common in shelter dogs than in those who have remained in the same family since puppyhood.

That means the loss of an

important person or group of people can lead to the condition. Other things, though, can trigger separation anxiety, including a change in schedule or residence. Medical conditions can trigger separation anxiety. Take your pet to the veterinarian to rule out incontinence caused by other medical or behavioral problems.

## TREATING SEPARATION ANXIETY

Mild cases of separation anxiety can be treated by counter-conditioning, changing the dog's fearful behavior by associating the bad experience — leaving the dog alone — with something good, such as a puzzle toy filled with treats. Highly anxious dogs may not eat when left alone, so this may not work

in all cases.

Moderate to severe cases may require a more structured behavioral program, starting with short separations that get gradually longer. Work with a behavioral therapist and veterinarian to determine the best course of action. There are a variety of solutions out there, from crate training to medication, that can help.



# Dealing with Pet Hair and Smells

Our four-legged friends come with lots of love and joy, but also a few unpleasant side effects, such as pet hair and smells.

There are quite a few solutions on the market to help keep your space clean and pleasant for both you and your pets.

## PET HAIR

Pets of all kinds shed. Cats and dogs leave hair, birds leave feathers even reptiles can leave detritus and debris. Here are some tips to help decrease the dander:

- Vacuum regularly, using a vacuum with good suction and spending extra time in areas where the pets hang out. Use a three-pass method, vacuuming forward, backwards and diagonally.
- Keep lint rollers on hand to clean clothing and upholstery for quick cleanups. If you don't have a lint roller, try using a pair of damp rubber gloves to help lift pet hair off of fabrics.
- Use washable furniture covers to keep upholstery clean. The covers will catch the hair and regularly washing them will keep them clean and your home smelling fresh.
- Brush your pets regularly to remove loose hair before it sheds.

## PET SMELLS

Pets leave behind smells, sometimes associated with hair and sometimes from accidents. Silence the smells with these tips:

- Wash pet bedding and toys regularly in hot water to eliminate odors.
- Clean up pet accidents immediately. Blot up spills with an enzymatic cleaner to break down odor-causing bacteria.



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- Sprinkle baking soda on carpets and furniture to absorb odors. Let it sit for 10 minutes or longer before vacuuming it up.
- Use air purifiers with HEPA filters to trap airborne particles and odors. Open windows to ventilate the house

frequently.

- Clean pet accessories, such as pet bowls and litter boxes, regularly.
- Soak clothes with strong pet smells in one part white vinegar and three parts water to break down odors and loosen pet hair. Soak the items for

about 30 minutes before washing according to label directions.

- Use odor-neutralizing diffusers or air fresheners to help clear the air. Be aware that some of these products can cause allergies in humans and pets alike.

# Fostering Pets in Need

Pets are a commitment for life, which can last decades for some species. If you're not ready for that kind of commitment but still want to experience the joy a pet brings, consider fostering pets that are up for adoption.

Foster families give pets a chance to relax in a home environment while offering training and socialization that can make them more adoptable.

## BENEFITS OF FOSTERING

The Pedigree Foundation says foster families free up shelter space for other animals that need a home and can help traumatized animals recover from health problems or past experiences. For the fostering family, pets bring love and joy with the flexibility and support from the adopting organization. This can come in the form of paid veterinary expenses, food and training. Fostering can help you decide whether pet ownership is right for you.

The pet, meanwhile, learns how to live as part of a family with other people and animals. You can help the organization learn more about the pet, giving them a higher chance at a successful adoption. If you have children, it can teach



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them responsibility and compassion, and if you have other pets, your pets may help the foster pet learn to be a good citizen.

A foster fail is when the foster pet fits in a little too well and the family decides to adopt. It's not really a failure but is used in an affectionate

way. Adoption organizations consider it a positive outcome because the pet has a happy home and the foster family now has a new best friend.

## FOSPICE CARE

Fospice is a portmanteau of foster and hospice and is a term used to describe

end-of-life care for very old or terminally ill pets that have found themselves in the adoption pipeline. The goal of fospice care is not to get the pet adopted, but to provide a loving, permanent home for the short time the pet has left. These animals with their medical conditions or advanced

age are unlikely to be adopted, but are no less deserving of a good home to spend their final days with dignity and comfort. Many organizations provide special support for families willing to provide fospice care, including veterinary care and emotional support as well as supplies.