

HOME HEALTH CARE

There are several things you can do to help improve your dog's health at home:

Brush the dog at least once a week. These grooming sessions serve to stimulate the skin circulation, remove mats and burrs, and keep the coat looking its best. During the grooming, watch for any bald or raw spots and feel for any swellings. Also trim the nails if necessary. We would be happy to show you how to properly brush down to the skin and how to do a nail trim. Also, lift each ear flap, looking for wax or smelling for anything but a mild doggie odor – either of these can mean an ear infection. Each year, we see many patients with problems which could have been detected earlier or prevented entirely by routine grooming.

Ensure that your dog gets adequate exercise for his age and breed. Your veterinarian will be happy to help assess your pet's needs. Exercise stimulates bone health, keeps joints limber, builds muscle, trims fat, and keeps your dog happy. Don't assume that if he's in the backyard all day, he's out there jogging – he's probably napping in the sun! Aim for one or two pleasant walks a day unless exercise is being restricted on doctor's orders.

Feed a high quality food, minimizing table scraps and snacks. Not all pet foods are created equal – the expensive premium foods are more costly due to more thorough research and development and more rigorous product control. They are carefully balanced, and each mouthful of something else eaten by your dog throws that balance off a little bit. Non-dog food items should never comprise more than 10% of the volume of daily intake. Absolutely avoid real bones. We see patients with marrow bones lodged on the lower jaw, or bone fragments causing pain as they pass through the digestive tract. They can also cause broken teeth.

Feed puppies less than 4 months old four times a day; puppies between 4-6 months three meals and dogs over 6 months twice daily. Special feeding requirements apply to pregnant and nursing mothers, puppies of very small breeds (e.g.: Maltese, Yorkie) and large, deep-chested breeds (e.g.: Great Dane, Doberman). Ask your veterinarian for details. Be sure that fresh, clean water is available at all times.

Brush your dog's teeth at home. This is usually much easier than it sounds – ask one of our doctors or nurses to demonstrate. Most dogs actually like the taste of our special dog toothpaste. Do not use people toothpaste – it can cause digestive upsets if swallowed. Even if you cannot brush the teeth, they can be treated with an antibacterial dental gel. Daily home dental care is as important for the prevention of plaque and gingivitis in the dog as it is in us. Tartar accumulation can result in severe periodontal disease, bad breath and even tooth loss. The bacteria in plaque and tartar can also get into circulation, causing infections in other organs like the heart, liver and kidneys.

Be sure you have a first aid kit for your dog. Human first aid kits rarely contain appropriate bandage materials, etc. Having the kit handy will allow you to prevent further bleeding or injury on the way to the hospital, and perhaps even to treat a minor problem at home with your veterinarian's advice.

YOUR ROLE ON THE HEALTHCARE TEAM

Our patients cannot speak directly with the doctor – you are that vital link!

One of the most important ways in which you can contribute to your dog's health is to know what is normal for your pet. If you know what is usual, you are more apt to spot something unusual in your pet's daily routine. These subtle signs are often the first hint of illness, and can prompt you to bring your pet in early for diagnosis and treatment. Many daily details, like exactly how much food and water your dog typically eats and drinks, can be extremely helpful to the doctor.

Before the doctor performs a physical exam, he usually will ask you several questions about your dog to help him determine what might be going on and any areas which might require special attention during the exam. Be as precise as possible in answering these, and bring up anything else you find unusual, even if it doesn't seem related. Often a vital piece of information may be the one an owner thought too silly to mention.