



FDA VETERINARIAN

NATIONAL PET WEEK - MAY 3-9, 1998



ANIMALS AND PEOPLE NEED EACH OTHER

This year's theme for National Pet Week is "People and Animals Need Each Other." Cosponsors are the

Auxiliary to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), the AVMA, the American Animal Health As-

sociation (AAHA), and the North American Veterinary Technician Association.

According to a study conducted by the AVMA, almost 60 percent of all U.S. households own at least one companion animal, with cats and dogs being the most popular, in 45.7 percent of homes, but close behind are birds (14.5 percent), rabbits and ferrets (2.3 percent), guinea pigs, hamsters, gerbils (2.3 percent), and reptiles (1.5 percent). In addition, 6.3 percent of households own 55.6 million fish.

The *FDA Veterinarian* is proud to support the National Pet Week campaign and its goals. Animals play an important role in our lives and provide us with hours of companionship and unconditional love, but they remain dependent on us for their well-being. Scientific studies have shown that pet
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DOG OWNERSHIP—A LONG-TERM COMMITMENT

by Karen A. Kandra

As a loyal friend and guardian to your dog, you have certain responsibilities to provide food, shelter, and veterinary care to ensure your pet's health and safety. As dogs are "man's best friend," so are we "dog's best friend," and we should be willing to attend to their needs before our own. Dog ownership is a long-term commitment resulting in mutually rewarding companionships for both people and dogs.

GETTING ACQUAINTED

Whether you purchase a registered AKC dog from a reputable breeder, or rescue one from the animal shelter, it will be totally dependent on you for its

care and well-being. It is important to build mutual trust and loyalty from the start, by spending as much time together, and training it to be responsive and obedient. The local humane society or dog club may offer obedience classes. A well-behaved dog will ensure a good relationship with your neighbors, and will be a joy to own.

Provide a warm, dry place for your pet to rest. Dogs adapt well to crates, as long as they are large enough to turn around. This will prevent unacceptable behavior, such as chewing furniture, and dogs seem to feel more secure in a small, close area where they can escape for peace and quiet.

Never leave two or more pets together unattended unless you have observed them frequently and are sure they are compatible. Be sure to take your dog outside often (at least three times a day) to urinate and defecate to avoid accidents, and always provide clean, fresh water. Dogs quickly adapt
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to a routine, and come to expect the same activities on a daily basis.

Unless you plan to raise puppies, it is important to spay (removal of ovaries and uterus) or neuter (removal of testicles) your dog. This will prevent objectionable behavior, such as roaming and fighting, and help your pet enjoy a longer, healthier life. In addition, spaying of females lowers the risk of mammary cancer.

Purchase a license if your city or town requires it, and attach it to the dog's collar, along with an identification tag containing your name and address in order to expedite finding a lost dog. Microchip I.D.'s are now available from your veterinarian.

It is a good idea to name a caretaker for your four-legged friend, in case of your death, or hospitalization, just as you would for a child.

FEEDING

There are endless choices in dog foods. It is important to choose specially formulated diets for growth, reproduction, or maintenance, depending on the dog's stage of life. Purchasing pet foods labeled as "complete and balanced" can help ensure that your dog's diet is nutritionally adequate. There are three types of commercial pet foods available today—dry, semi-moist, and canned. As long as they are complete and balanced products, all three are equally nutritious and each has its own advantages and disadvantages. One advantage of dry food is



Photo by Karen A. Kandra

its abrasive action which helps keep teeth clean. It is important to maintain a regular feeding schedule, and always provide fresh food and water with each feeding.

Obesity is a major problem with dogs in our society, since owners tend to feed table scraps in excess. Serious health problems may result from obesity. Extra weight puts a strain on the animal's heart, lungs, skeleton, and muscles, and lowers its resistance to disease. An occasional treat is fine, but many human foods can upset the dog's metabolism, and it is best to avoid bad feeding habits. Regular exercise and proper nutrition are both essential to maintain optimal weight and health.

HEALTH CARE

Veterinary examinations are critical to a dog's health. It is important to keep a detailed medical history and establish a veterinary-client-patient

relationship to ensure a long, healthy life for your dog. During the initial exam, your veterinarian will be able to establish a preventive health care program for your pet.

Vaccination for rabies is basic to preventive health care, and required in most areas. Rabies is a deadly disease, transmitted by saliva, and frequently found in wild animals, such as skunks, foxes, and raccoons. For the health of yourself, your family and neighbors, and your dog, it is essential to keep the rabies vaccination up-to-date. Your veterinarian may recommend other vaccines, such as a combination of distemper, parvovirus, leptospirosis, hepatitis, coronavirus, or parainfluenza, depending on your dog's activities and expected travel.

Parasite control is another area to discuss with your veterinarian. A stool sample can be tested for the presence of harmful parasites, such as ascarids (roundworms), whipworms, tapeworms and hookworms. Your veterinarian will prescribe treatment if necessary, and may recommend heartworm prevention medication following a negative blood test to determine the existence of heartworms. Many of the new heartworm preventatives also prevent some of the most common intestinal parasites.

Flea control may also be discussed, as there are new products which may be prescribed by veterinarians to control or prevent flea infestation.

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ownership can lower blood pressure and even reduce the threat of heart disease. As animals increase our quality of life it is important to remember that responsible pet ownership can be a long-term commitment which requires the time and money to provide necessary care. Ensure your pet's good health and longer life by scheduling regular veterinary visits, and by watching for common problems that could have a serious impact on your pet if not properly treated. For infor-

mation concerning pet care, you may access the AVMA's Internet Web site at www.avma.org. The AAHA Web site is www.healthypet.com.

The following article provides information on dogs and provides suggestions for their care. Veterinarians may wish to duplicate this article and provide copies to their interested clients. As always, material which appears in the *FDA Veterinarian* is free of copyright and may be reproduced without permission. □

FDA Veterinarian

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Veterinarians may prescribe specific diets determined by your dog's needs, and a dental exam is always recommended, to detect periodontal disease, loose or abscessed teeth, receding gums, or other indications which require attention.

YOUR VETERINARIAN IS THE BEST SOURCE OF INFORMATION ABOUT ALL ANIMAL HEALTH MATTERS.

In a medical crisis situation, call your veterinarian immediately if you detect any of the following symptoms:

- abnormal breathing
- active bleeding
- bone exposure
- puncture to abdomen, chest, or neck
- watery or bloody discharge
- partial or complete paralysis
- difficulty urinating
- profuse vomiting or diarrhea
- poison ingestion
- bloated or tender abdomen
- rectal temperature over 103 degrees F or under 99 degrees F
- dehydration
- abnormal color
- disorientation
- collapse

NEVER GIVE ASPIRIN OR ANY MEDICATION WITHOUT CONSULTING YOUR VETERINARIAN.

GROOMING

It is important to establish a grooming regimen with your dog. Whether a short- or long-haired variety, your dog will benefit from frequent brushing, which stimulates the coat and skin, and your house will be cleaner, since less shedding will occur. If you elect to clip your dog in the summer, keep in mind that there is a risk of sunburn, if he spends much time in the sun.

Bathing is only suggested on rare occasions, since frequent baths remove natural protective oils from the skin. If he is dirty, or shows evidence of fleas, a dog may be bathed in lukewarm water using mild shampoo. Rinse the soap thoroughly and towel dry.

During grooming sessions, look for parasites which cause your pet dis-

comfort. Fleas are common, but can be controlled by commercial powders, sprays, collars, or dips. Contact your veterinarian for recommended treatment or prevention with long-lasting topicals or oral products. Ticks may be removed by saturating with alcohol, and carefully pulling off with tweezers. Mites are too small to detect, but symptoms include frantic scratching, biting, and chewing. Your veterinarian can help diagnose mites.

Eyes should be cleaned of any discharge with a soft cloth moistened with water or saline solution. Ear discomfort is indicated by scratching or head shaking. Infections can settle deep in the ear canal and should be treated by your veterinarian immediately.

Since dogs depend on their teeth for survival, the mouth should be examined periodically for signs of gum disease, and tartar accumulation. This should be a major part of the annual veterinary examination, and any problems should be addressed immediately.

Few dogs exercise on hard surfaces to keep their nails filed down, so it is your job to clip their nails, to keep them comfortable. Neglected nails may cripple a dog.

PREVENTION

Accidents can be prevented by thinking ahead and avoiding dangerous situations. Automobiles are the number one killer of dogs, so keep him leashed, or fenced in at all times. Invisible fencing is a popular alternative to traditional fencing styles.

Keep poisons out of reach. Many household plants are toxic to dogs, including poinsettias, ferns, philodendrons, dieffenbachia, and other varieties. Cleaning solutions such as detergents, bleaches, oven cleaners, etc. may pose hazards as well. Make sure bottle caps are tight and the rags used to apply these chemicals are stored safely out of reach. Treat animals like children and keep medicines locked up, and never leave candy, especially chocolate, where dogs may have access to it.

Outdoor hazards include windshield cleaners, antifreeze, weed killers, used motor oil and insecticides. Antifreeze has a sweet taste, and just a few drops

can be fatal to your dog. Other hazards include rodenticides used to kill rats and mice. If any poisoning occurs, call your veterinarian immediately, and provide a sample of the poison with the labeling to aid in proper treatment. In an emergency, call the ASPCA National Animal Poison Control Center at 800-548-2423.

Keep sharp objects, i.e., knives and forks, carpet tacks, paper clips, etc., out of reach, in addition to children's toys or small objects which may become lodged in a dog's throat. Never leave a dog unattended on a balcony. A precocious pet may squeeze through the bars and fall, which could fatally injure him.

Avoid extremes in temperature. Of course, never leave a dog in a parked car in hot weather, even with the windows open, and never leave him outside without water and shade. Similarly, in frigid temperatures, bring him indoors, and be sure he always has shelter from wind, rain, and sun, even in mild temperatures.

OLD AGE

Dogs are considered "old" around eight or nine years, but many live into their mid-teens, with proper care and nutrition. Senior citizens have more needs, and require more attention. Their sight and hearing may diminish, and they will sleep more and move more slowly. Steps may become a hardship, so sleeping arrangements may need adjusting. They need to go out more often, as bladder control is usually weakened. They still need moderate exercise, frequent grooming, and appropriate nutrition. Since they may have fewer teeth, a soft diet may be necessary. It is especially important to avoid obesity, since it will affect your pet's quality of life. More frequent veterinary visits may be required to deal with tumors, arthritis, or heart disease. Some dogs require daily medications to treat the infirmities of old age. Together you and your veterinarian can have a positive influence on your dog's happiness and comfort for many years to come. The rewards of dog ownership will last a lifetime.

