



Tips for Pet Health & Safety in 2019

We're a little over a month into the new year, and hopefully you've gotten a good start toward achieving your goals to improve your life in the year ahead. But for those of us who have pets, the new year can also offer opportunities for you and your pet to bond, develop healthier habits, and discover new ways to live a full life. Here are some easy tips to help improve your pet's health and safety throughout the year.

Get More Exercise

Do you tend to pack on pounds during the holiday season? Exercising is always more fun with a friend, so get your furry partner involved. Exercising together not only gets you both moving, it is a great time to bond and get some fresh air together.

Exercise is critical to maintaining a fit pet. Make a commitment to increase both the physical and mental health of your dog by going on regular daily walks. A lot of mental stimulation occurs for a dog on a daily walk; it also makes for a calmer pup.

In addition to keeping your pet's weight in check, a long walk can also offer behavior benefits. A lack of exercise can lead to separation anxiety or destructive behavior. Younger pets or certain breeds with endless energy can develop serious behavior problems if not allowed sufficient exercise. A vigorous game of fetch is good for both dogs and cats.

Good Eating Habits

Make your pets' health one of your biggest priorities going into the new year. Part of this involves paying close attention to how much and what type of food you give them. Like their humans, the majority of American cats and dogs are overweight or obese, and it's a hefty problem. Excess weight can cause health issues ranging from arthritis, diabetes, and respiratory disorders to cancer, certain skin and liver diseases, and kidney dysfunction.

This year, focus on measuring your pets' food every day so you always know they're eating a healthy and appropriate amount. Avoid table scraps—they can cause serious health problems for your pet, from diarrhea to pancreatitis. Don't overdo it on the treats, either. Instead, offer some healthier snack options, such as carrots, apples, or homemade pet treats. Feeding a good-quality kibble to your pet—the best you can afford—is also important. The better the food, the better their health, skin, and coat, and the less mess to pick up!

Veterinary Care and Wellness

To make sure your pet is healthy, take him or her to the veterinarian at least once a year. Pets age much faster than we do; an annual vet exam is comparable to a human going to the doctor once every five or six years. As much as we love our pets and pay close attention to them, there can sometimes be things



that we can't see going on under the surface. Regular exams can help catch potential health issues before they become a serious problem and increase the chances of successful treatment. Veterinary visits are also the perfect time to ask for advice, update your pet's food, or get an expert opinion on any behavioral issues that may be affecting your bonding with your pet.

Prevention is also very important to keeping your pet healthy. Protect your pet with a preventative for fleas, ticks, and especially heartworms. Heartworm disease is serious and potentially fatal. Not only is it painful for pets, but treatment is very expensive. Give yourself peace of mind and protect your pet, once a month, every month. Another element of prevention is to keep toxic substances out of your pet's reach. Thousands of pets fall victim to accidental poisoning from ingesting substances such as household products, medications, food, alcohol, and various plants.

Prepare for the Unexpected

Start an Emergency Pet Savings Fund. Just as parents save money for their children to go to college, pet owners should start a special account just for emergency pet-related medical expenses. You never know when your pet will have a severe injury or illness. Costs can add up quickly, and having some extra cash will ensure that you never have to compromise when it comes to getting your pet the best care possible, and it can prove to be a lifesaver should your pet need an emergency surgery or treatment.

Many pet owners are now opting for pet insurance, which covers a variety of different injuries and illnesses. Policies come in a variety of plans that meet their needs and fit every budget. A CareCredit account, which can be used to finance veterinary expenses, can also be a lifesaver in an emergency.

Identification Update

Statistics show that one in three pets will become lost at some point in their lives. No pet owners ever want to be in a situation where their pets have wandered away. But you can at least be sure that they will be returned to you as quickly as possible by keeping their pet IDs up to date. Over the course of a year, a lot can change—people move, get new phone numbers, and forget to update their pet's tags. Sometimes tags wear out or become illegible. If any of your contact information has changed in the last year, don't wait—update your dog's information right away, and make sure your dog wears it, along with the [license](#) identifying your dog and its owner!

A stronger line of protection is a [microchip](#). The rice-sized chip is quickly and inexpensively implanted under the pet's skin between the shoulder blades. When your pet is lost and is brought to an animal shelter or veterinarian, it will be scanned for a microchip. The microchip has a number that can be looked up in a database and can provide the owner's name, phone number, and address. This is especially helpful if your pet gets lost and loses his/her collar and identification tags. A microchip greatly increases your pet's chances of being returned to you. However, that information must be kept up to date in order to assure your pets get back home.



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So many stray animals entering shelters every day have no ID, license tag, or microchip, which makes it tougher for them to find their way back home. By staying vigilant with current information, you can help shelters reunite lost pets with their owners.

Taking advantage of these tips can go a long way toward ensuring that your pets have a safer and healthier 2019!