

Elburn Animal Hospital Newsletter

May, 2009

Welcome

If a pet is ill, it is automatically brought in to see the doctor. But what happens if your pet does not show any signs of illness? Do you still bring him in for regular exams? This issue will address what wellness is, why we need to see our patients regularly for wellness exams, and how correct nutrition at home plays an extremely important role in keeping your pet healthy and happy. Any questions can be addressed to a member of our staff at (630) 365-9599, or you can contact us via email at 3lburn@sbcglobal.net.

Safety First

Spring has finally arrived! In May, we expect warming temperatures and flowers all around. People and their pets become more active. But May brings risks to our pets, ranging from increasing contact with wildlife to an increased risk of poisoning from garden supplies. The following tips can help keep your pet safe during this exciting season.

- Supervise your pets when outside. During the spring and summer, there is a higher likelihood of running into a wild animal if your pet is unsupervised. Although cats and smaller dogs are at a greater disadvantage in these encounters, do not assume your pet can adequately defend itself just because it is large.
- Confine your pet in either in a fenced yard or on a leash. As with wild animals, people are more active this time of year, and out driving in cars.
- Keep pets out of the garden. Many fertilizers and pesticides are not only toxic if eaten, but can cause chemical burns on skin or the pads of the feet. Plant parts, especially bulbs, may be toxic if ingested. Some may even be fatal.
- Put away tools. Our pets enjoy the spring as much as we do, and will want to be out playing more often. But now is when many of us are beginning or completing home-repair projects. Tools of all kinds can pose a threat from puncture wounds and deep cuts.
- Clean up fishing equipment. Fishing lures are especially attractive, but fishing line can cause great injury as well.



May: Wellness and Nutrition Month

Understanding Wellness: What is involved?

In a general sense, wellness means to be free from preventable discomfort/pain; free from preventable disease; to have routine preventive care; to have access to appropriate water and food; and to get regular exercise in an enriching environment free from undue stress. In the veterinary world, we use wellness exams to help us ensure our patients' health. Read on to find out what a wellness exam entails and why it is a necessary part of your pet's overall health.

- Physical exam: At a wellness visit, we do a full physical exam. We check the heart and lungs, examine the eyes and ears, check oral health, feel the belly, look for lumps, check joints and mobility, and generally make sure each patient remains in good health.
- Vaccinations: We evaluate each patient's risk factors to determine their best vaccination schedule. Some of the diseases we vaccinate against are fatal; others are debilitating, and all are extremely contagious. We do not presume that every pet requires the same vaccinations, and will habitually check a pet's risk factors to make sure we give vaccines appropriate to each individual. When fitting, the doctor may suggest testing a titer. This is a blood test that shows if antibodies are present in high enough levels. If so, the pet does not need revaccination at that time.
- Labwork: This is one of the most important aspects of wellness, and one of the most overlooked. Standard labwork includes a stool examination and urinalysis as well as bloodwork. Checking the stool every 6 months allows us to make sure there are no intestinal parasites. A yearly urinalysis allows us to track the health of the kidneys, bladder and urinary tract, which can alert us to problems early on. Routine bloodwork includes annual heartworm testing, chemistries and complete blood cell counts. Heartworm testing is begun at or about one year of age for dogs. Chemistry and CBC testing typically is begun at 3 years' of age for both cats and dogs. Birds and other exotic pets should be tested every year, as they are capable of hiding illness for an



Elburn Animal Hospital Newsletter

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extended period of time. By evaluating a urinalysis and bloodwork once a year, we track changes in how organs are working, and



notice trends that may help us diagnose disease before clinical symptoms appear. This is especially important before surgical procedures. Knowing what is going on early helps us prevent and manage chronic disease easier, which keeps our pets' quality of life at a higher level for a longer time.

- Preventive medicine: It is less expensive to prevent disease than to control and cure it. To this end, we recommend using a heartworm preventative year-round and a flea and tick control product when appropriate. This is also why we recommend brushing your pet's teeth daily and checking yearly lab values annually.
- Frequency: The American Veterinary Medical Association recommends a check-up every 6 months. Pets go through their life cycle faster than humans, so changes can occur in as little as three months. It is very important to notice these changes as early as possible to maximize our pets' lives. Most pets are considered "teenagers" by the time they reach one year old, and "middle-aged" by 6 or 7 years! Clients can split their vaccines and routine labwork between two visits. We vaccinate for rabies and lyme disease at one visit, then distemper and any other necessary vaccines, along with a blood test, six months later. Other clients opt to have all vaccines done at one visit, then just have the exam 6 months later. Either



way is fine. Speak with one of our technicians to implement a schedule that best fits your pet's health,

your lifestyle, and monetary issues.

Nutrition: Directly affecting your pet and your wallet

Nutrition is directly related to all aspects of health in our pets. All pets are affected, whether they are dogs, cats, birds, snakes, etc. Many pet foods contain high levels of sodium

and sugar, additives that contribute to disease later in life. Food dyes in pet foods serve no purpose other than to look good—not to our pets, but to us! Lots of commercial pet foods are primarily made up of ingredients that our pets do not digest well, and while our pets may survive on these foods, they often do not thrive the way we'd like them to. Poor nutrition has been associated with up to 90% of medical disease. Read further to discover some of the benefits of good nutrition, some ways to make sure your pet is getting it, and how to recognize if your pet needs something more. High-quality foods may seem pricey up front, but you save money in vet bills in the long run, and your pet will enjoy a healthier, happier life.

- Benefits of good nutrition include healthy skin and coat, less dental disease, fewer ear infections, better muscling, stronger skeletal structure, and a more resilient immune system. Pets that receive



good-quality food make fewer visits to the vet for disease-related issues and tend to live longer on average. Good nutrition helps reduce the cost of your veterinary visits as well. Not only that, but superior nutrition

reduces the chance a pet will suffer long-term from chronic disease such as heart or kidney failure. Although we love seeing our patients, we would much rather see them for wellness visits than for illness visits! If a pet already has a condition, improving its nutritional intake helps the pet to recover quicker or make a chronic disease more manageable.

- Talk with us about your pet's specific requirements including caloric intake, water intake, and what ingredients should be avoided to help maintain your pet in optimal condition. We have lists of recommended foods located on our website. These foods are available at local pet stores or online. When ordering online consider where the food is being shipped from—if need be, call the company to find out. Food that is stored for long periods of time loses some of its nutritional value, so the fresher, the better. Along those same lines, consider making your pet's food

Elburn Animal Hospital Newsletter

May, 2009

at home. It may be less costly to make, and it gives you the opportunity to find out what types of food work best for individual pets. If you are interested, speak with one of our staff to get ideas on where and how to start.

- Patients with chronic disease require more help to jump-start the body on its way to a healthier state. Nutritional supplements give this boost. Many are available at local drugstores or grocery stores, and we have specialized nutritional supplements available here. If your pet scratches or chews on himself, rubs himself



on the floor or other surfaces, shakes his head often, scratches his ears, or scoots around on his behind, he may have allergies. This is a particularly common chronic ailment that is manageable partially through nutritional support. Other disease states that require extra dietary support include heart disease, liver disease, kidney disease, cancer, recurring pancreatitis, recurring urinary tract infections or crystals in the urine, constipation, irritable bowel syndrome (chronic diarrhea), and any auto-immune disease. But even pets with no chronic complaints will benefit from healthier food and better nutrition.

The medicine we practice is designed to keep each of our patients at their healthiest from start to finish. We are in this business to help, and would like nothing better than to see our patients for routine exams only. Following a schedule of wellness visits, lab work, and high-quality nutrition can help realize this goal. When our patients are the healthiest they can be, then we are happy.

May/June Special: Join us in reducing obesity! Seventy-five percent of pets are overweight. During these months, we are signing up patients to complete a weight-loss drive. Bring your pet in for a wellness exam and sign up for the weight-loss drive. Dr. Cechner will discuss how much weight your pet should lose within a 3-month period, and guide you in how to reach that goal. We will reweigh each pet

once every month to ensure he/she is on the right track to reaching the goal. At the 3rd monthly weigh-in, if your pet has reached or surpassed the weight-loss goal, you will receive a \$42 credit on your account. Those pets that don't quite make their goal, but have lost at least 50% of the target weight loss, will receive a \$21 credit, and those who have actively participated with monthly weigh-ins, but haven't seen any appreciable results, will receive a \$10 credit. Plus, you'll have a healthier, happier pet!

Upcoming Events: We still have six more spots open for our **charity dog wash** to benefit Elburn Woods, our local wildlife rehabilitation center. We will be offering discounted bathing, nail trims, routine ear cleaning, and anal gland expression. The date is set for Saturday, June 13th, so reserve your space now. You can even schedule a spot via email!

Also, start thinking about what costume your pet will wear to our **October Open House!** Yes, we are hosting another open house at our office, on Saturday, October 24th. Last year we had prizes for best costume, best family theme costumes, and a look-alike contest.

Thanks for your patronage. Our June newsletter will include information about exercising your pet, and helping to prevent (and reduce) obesity, and we'll be continuing our weight-loss campaign. If you have any questions or would like more information, go to our website at www.elburnanimalhospital.com, or give us a call at (630) 365-9599. If you would like to opt out of receiving the Elburn Animal Hospital newsletter, please send an email to us at 3lburn@sbcglobal.net.