



We are all familiar with the phrase "A healthy pet is a happy pet" - but there is probably also something to be said for keeping your pet happy in order to maintain its health. Most owners know their pet very well and can quickly spot if it is feeling under the weather.

What are the signs of good health?

A healthy animal will have bright eyes, clean ears, eyes and nose and be interested in what is going on around it. The amount of food an animal eats varies a lot between individuals - if your pet's weight remains constant then they are eating the right amount of food. You should be concerned if your pet's appetite or water consumption suddenly changes, or your pet suddenly starts to gain or lose weight.

When in good condition a pet's coat should be shiny, soft and free of parasites. Animal's skin ages (just like in people) and may become less elastic and more dry in an older pet.

How do I keep my pet in good health?

To keep your pet in good condition it must be fed a healthy diet and allowed regular exercise. Mental stimulation in the form of an interesting environment and opportunities to play are also important. A regular walk is good for dogs because it provides exercise as well as mental stimulation.

Coat condition can be affected by diet. Fish oils or evening primrose oil capsules may help improve a dry coat. Groom your pet every day with a soft brush.

How much exercise does my pet need?

Regular exercise is important to keep all animals healthy. Most cats are good at regulating their exercise and match their food intake to their energy needs; dogs are less good at this. Excitable dogs may continue to exercise until they collapse if they are not well, and older dogs put on weight as their appetite remains unchanged despite a reduced energy requirement.

If your pet is showing signs of stiffness when they get up from rest they may be getting arthritis. If so the exercise programme should be altered accordingly. Regular short walks will allow your pet to maintain mobility better if they are arthritic. If your pet is overweight then a diet may help improve its condition and allow it to exercise better.

What is a healthy diet?

A healthy diet is a balanced diet containing all the nutrients your pet requires. Dietary requirements change with age and may also be affected if your pet is suffering from some diseases. As pets get older they may lose muscle mass and gain weight more easily. Overweight animals have a higher risk of diseases such as arthritis, heart disease and diabetes. Check your pet's weight every 6 months to make sure it is not overweight and prevent excessive weight gain by cutting back on calories if your pet's weight increases.

What is routine health care?

There are a number of measures that can help prevent your pet developing diseases. You should discuss these options with your vet to work out the best plan for your pet.

Worming

All pets have worms at some stage in their life and many will be re-infected unless they are given regular, routine worming treatment. Except in rare cases, worms are unlikely to cause serious harm. Getting rid of worms is relatively simple and inexpensive so regular treatment with a wormer is strongly recommended, particularly as some types of worm can be passed onto humans. Make sure your pet is wormed every three months against roundworms and tapeworms. Some worms are transmitted by fleas so routine flea control all year round is important.

Flea control

Fleas are the most common parasite in dogs and cats - almost every pet is likely to be infected at some stage in its life. However, modern flea control products mean that it is possible to prevent fleas from becoming a problem in your household. Working closely with your vet, who will give you advice on



how to use these products effectively, you will be able to stop these nasty little insects making a meal of your pet and you!

Neutering

It is a sad truth that the number of puppies and kittens born every year is far greater than the number of good homes that can be found for them. As a result, thousands of healthy animals are destroyed and many unwanted animals are left to fend for themselves. Having your pet neutered will not only help to reduce these numbers, it is also one of the simplest, safest and most practical ways of safeguarding your pet's health and welfare.

Vaccinations

There are a number of highly infectious and potentially fatal diseases that can affect our pets. There is no treatment for many of these diseases and young animals who catch them often die. However, for many of these conditions there is a simple protection in the form of vaccination. Ensuring that your pet completes an initial course of vaccinations and then receives regular booster jabs is important if you want them to stay fit and healthy.

Dental care

Dental disease is very common in cats and some dogs and so dental care

is important. Surveys show that after the age of three years, about seven out of ten cats have some kind of tooth disorders. If left unattended these may cause irreversible damage to the animal's teeth, gums and jaw bones. Dental disease can be prevented by stopping the build up of plaque on the teeth.

How do I know if my pet is unwell?

A fever (increase in body temperature) is often one of the first signs of illness. If your pet has a fever they are likely to be quieter than normal and probably will be off their food. If you check your pet's temperature and find it is raised then contact your vet for advice.

Any changes in your pet's behaviour, altered appetite or water consumption, or the presence of signs such as coughing or diarrhoea should alert you to the fact that there may be a problem with your pet. Most animals recover from illness in 24-48 hours - if your pet does not seem to be improving in this time or is getting worse then you should contact your vet.

Most owners can tell if their pet is limping or crying with pain, but it can be harder to see if your pet is suffering from a long-term discomfort such as arthritis. Dogs and cats generally show a change in behaviour or temperament when they're uncomfortable. A normally happy and affectionate pet may become grumpy and avoid human contact, preferring to sit or lie quietly by itself. If the animal can reach the painful area, they may lick, scratch, or bite at it.

If you want any other information on health issues concerning your dog please contact Willow Veterinary Group on 01908 610982 (Newport Pagnell) or 01234 711473 (Olney) and we will be happy to advise you.