



Pet Care

Pets and Your Health

Pet ownership is good for us. The Mayo Clinic says that pets can enhance our fitness levels, lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels, relieve stress, improve mental health and boost overall happiness.

Learn why you should start working out with your pets.

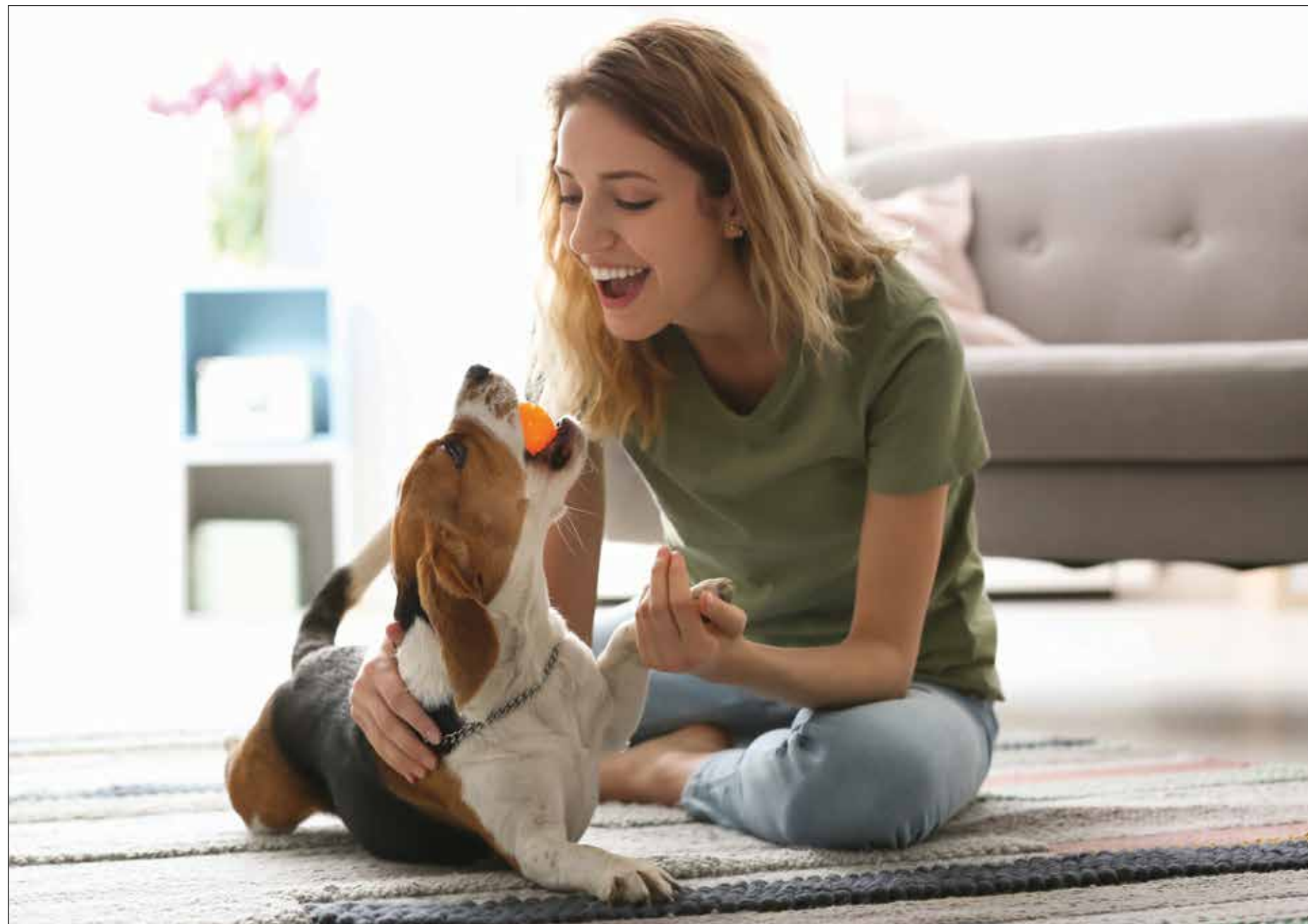
PHYSICAL HEALTH

Pets give us a reason to get outside and get some fresh air. The American Heart Association recommends 150 minutes of walking a week for good health, and with walking your dog, you can hit that goal regularly.

FOR YOUR PETS, TOO

The mental and physical stimulation isn't just good for you, it's also good for your pet. The American Kennel Club says that fitness programs that also require pets to be alert, rather than just running or performing another activity, can wear pets out even more quickly. Think of activities like kayaking, yoga, trail running or boot camp training.

The AKC says that exercising with your pet also promotes bonding between the two of you. It cited a yoga class that incorporates dogs into classic



© ADOBE STOCK

yoga poses.

“They really benefit from eye contact, the dogs,” says expert Annie Appleby. “In our classes, it’s one hour of complete and utter communication with your dog the whole time. And the dogs like that a lot.”

Before starting an exercise program, make sure that you are cleared for exercise — both of you — by your doctor and your veterinarian.

MENTAL HEALTH

All that physical activity with a social connection — the one you have with your pet — can do wonders for your mental health as well. The American Psychiatric Association says that a strong majority of pet owners, 86%, said their pets have a mostly positive impact on their mental health.

“People recognize that there is something special about

bonds between humans and their pets,” said APA President Rebecca Brendel, M.D., J.D. “The animals we bring into our lives and our families play many roles from non-judgmental companions that we love to key partners in reducing our stress and anxiety. Americans clearly recognize that our relationships with our pets can have noticeable benefits for our overall mental health.”

Two of three employees say work stresses them out, the Mayo Clinic says, but studies show that pets in the workplace can reduce stress and improve employee satisfaction. Pets provide companionship and support, especially for people working from home and others who may not get out as much as they once did. The bond with pets can help people who don't leave their house feel less alone.

Reading a Dog Food Label

We are what we eat, and that's true for our pets, too. The label is your best friend in understanding what you're feeding your dog.

The meat of understanding your dog's food is in the wording. The Association of American Feed Control Officials has four rules. The AAFCO does not regulate, test, approve or certify pet food, it says, it just establishes the model language that governing bodies can adopt into law. And many states have, meaning these are standards for the industry.

First, at least 95% of the product must be the named ingredient. If it's called Chicken Dog Food, it must include at least 95% of chicken. That main product must also be at least 70% of the total product when counting the added water. The remaining 5% of ingredients will be nutritional, such as vitamins and minerals.

The next rule is the 25% rule. If the named ingredients comprise at least 25% of the product, not counting water for processing, but less than 95%, the name must include a qualifying term such as dinner, entrée or platter. The named ingredients, including the water, must still comprise 10% of the product. If there's more than one ingredient, the combination of named ingredients — chicken and rice dinner, for example — must



© ADOBE STOCK

total 25% of the product and be listed in the same order as found on the ingredient list.

When you see a dog food label such as “dinner with beef,” the named ingredient needs only be at least 3% of the product. Lastly, the flavor rule: if the label says “chicken fla-

vor,” then the percentage is not required but must be enough to be detected.

States have rules concerning the minimum amount of nutrients in pet food. Dog food labels in particular must display the percentage of crude protein, crude fat, crude fiber

and water. Ingredients in the dog food must be listed in descending order by weight. Terms describing collective ingredients such as “animal protein products,” are not allowed, and the AAFCO says that ingredients must be listed by their common name.

It's important to note that there are no official regulations for organic pet foods. Natural is not the same as organic. The word natural also has no official regulations, but the AKC says it's generally taken to mean a lack of artificial flavors, colors or preservatives.

Keeping Your Cat Healthy

Dog may be man's best friend, but cuddly kitties run a very close second. With regular veterinary care and keeping to these tips, it's possible to keep your cat best friend around for many years to come.

CAT-PROOFING YOUR HOME

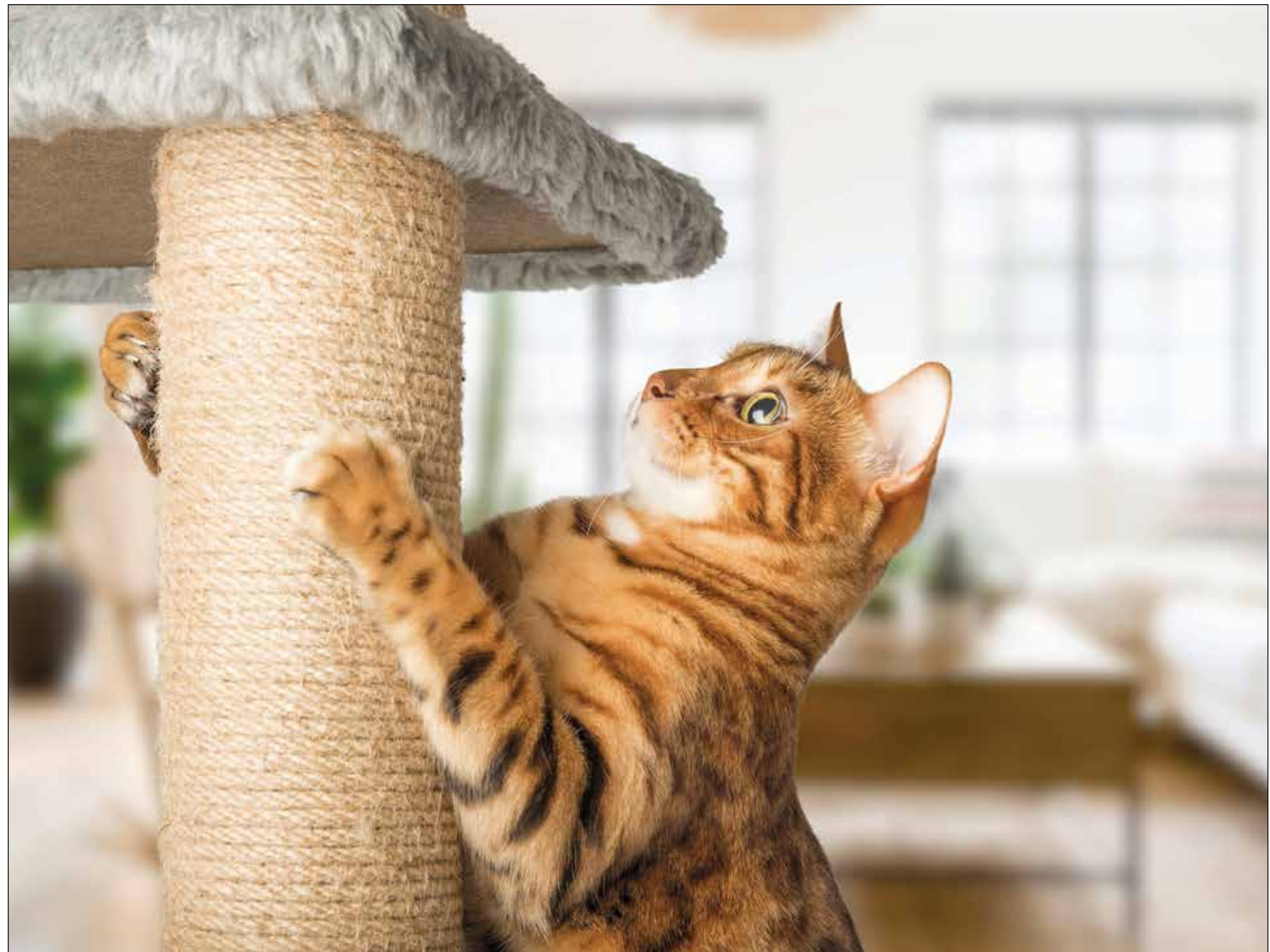
Cats are smart and can learn to open cabinets and doors, so making your home safe for cats is similar to making it safe for babies and toddlers. Store household chemicals and poisons in a cabinet with a child-proof latch. Strings, threads and dangling materials should be put away so your cat cannot hunt or eat them. This includes blind and curtain cords, electrical cords, wires, dental floss and rubber bands. Some plants can also be toxic to cats, including philodendron, lilies, poinsettia, azaleas and hydrangeas.

CHOOSING A FOOD

Pick a high-quality food that is appropriate to your cat's life stage. Your cat may also have special nutritional needs due to an allergy or illness. Your veterinarian can recommend an appropriate diet that keeps them in great shape.

LITTER TRAINING

Most cats were litter trained by their mothers and take to the



© ADOBE STOCK

litter box naturally. It's important that you scoop the box daily and replace the litter entirely as needed. Urinating or defecating outside of their litter box could be a sign of a serious health problem. You should also keep an eye out for the appearance of blood in either poop or urine. That can also be an indi-

cation of a problem.

SCRATCHING

Scratching is a normal and healthy part of cat behavior. Redirect your cat to a scratching post or scratching toy rather than your curtains or your furniture. Discourage inappropriate scratching by applying

double-sided tape to the area. You can regularly trim your cats' nails to minimize damage from scratching.

GROOMING AND HAIR BALLS

Cats are generally pretty good about grooming themselves (if they stop taking care of their

hygiene, something is probably wrong). They may need the occasional brushing — or more for long-haired felines — to cut down on shedding and hair balls. Your cat's teeth should also be brushed regularly. Ask your veterinarian about appropriate products and foods to help with your cat's dental care.

Settling In an Adopted Pet

Congratulations on making the decision to add to your family by adopting a pet.

About 6.3 million animals enter U.S. animal shelters every year. Thanks to you, that number just dropped by one.

WHAT IS THE 3-3-3 RULE?

While every situation is different, animals generally follow the 3-3-3 rule when getting acclimated to their new home. That means three days of feeling overwhelmed and nervous. Three weeks of settling in. And three months of building trust and bonding with you.

THAT'S A LONG TIME

Yes, it is. So don't get discouraged when you're not best friends right away. Don't be alarmed in those first few days if your new pet whines, cries or doesn't eat as much. They're still getting adjusted. They may also have potty accidents and will probably sleep a lot. Give them time to rest and learn their new environment. Do not force interactions and stay patient and positive.

AFTER 3 WEEKS ...

After three weeks in your home, you should start to see some of their true personality. They should start to play more and eat and drink normally. You may even be working on training and learning some new tricks. Be consistent with your new pet. Use their new name.



© ADOBE STOCK

Set and stick to boundaries. Give them clear directions and clear rewards. Praise the behaviors you want to reinforce.

AT 3 MONTHS

Your new pet knows they're home. You've got routines set.

Your pet knows some new tricks and good behaviors. Now is a good time to consider outside training. If you enjoy going out, work consistently on leash training and behavior in public. Use affection as a reward, but keep treats in

moderation as a form of enrichment.

WORKING ON BEHAVIOR

Shelter animals sometimes don't get the attention and training they need on a consistent basis. Pet problems are a

leading reason owners rehome their pet, the ASPCA's National Rehoming Survey says. Work with your veterinarian to understand your new pet and be ready to call in professional help to work through your pet's problematic behavior.

Common Aquarium Problems

Our finned friends can give us just as much love and satisfaction as the pets that don't live in a bowl.

As with most things, however, there can be problems along the way. Here are some common aquarium problems and how to fix them.

STARTING TOO SMALL

Smaller, in aquariums, is not easier. Conditions tend to be more stable in larger aquariums, and you have more time to correct problematic conditions. Aqueon says that aquariums 20-55 gallons are a great size for first-time aquarium keepers.

BUYING FISH AND THE AQUARIUM ON THE SAME DAY

A new aquarium should be run for two or three days before fish are introduced, Aqueon says. It takes time to establish the conditions that are ideal to keeping fish. Start a new tank by running it for a few days, then adding just a few fish initially. Feed them sparingly and test ammonia and nitrite levels until they stabilize at zero before adding more fish. Repeat until the aquarium is fully stocked.

OVERSTOCKING

New aquarium keepers tend to want all the fish. But there's a limit on what your tank can



© ADOBE STOCK

hold. Err on the side of having too few fish rather than too many. Remember that your fish are going to grow after they are purchased and some fish are aggressive or territorial. Prevent fights and heartbreak by remembering fewer is better.

IMPULSE BUYING

This is related to overstock-

ing. You should always research new fish before purchasing to make sure they're compatible with what you already have. Some fish also need special water chemistry or feeders that you don't have.

OVERCLEANING

The biological balance in a new aquarium is fragile and unstable. Avoid scrubbing or

stirring the gravel or cleaning the filter or ornaments when they don't need it as you can be killing beneficial bacteria and upsetting the aquarium's balance.

If your aquarium seems to need cleaning the first two to three weeks after setup, the filter may be too small, you may have too many fish or you may be overfeeding your fish.

INSUFFICIENT COVER

We know you want to see your fish, but aquarium decorations and plants provide habitat for your fish, making them feel secure and reducing stress. Fish in a tank without cover often hide behind a heater, filter tube or other object, meaning you won't see them anyway.

What Are Heartworms?

It is estimated that, at any given time, there are more than 1 million heartworm-positive dogs in the U.S.

Heartworm disease is a serious parasitic infection that causes lung disease, heart failure, organ damage and even death in pets, mainly dogs, cats and ferrets.

CAUSES

Heartworms are caused by a parasitic worm, *Dirofilaria immitis*. They are spread through mosquito bites and infect the heart, lungs and associated blood vessels of an infected animal. In an infected dog, adult female heartworms release their offspring (microfilariae) into the dog's bloodstream. A mosquito bites the infected dog, becoming infected with the microfilariae itself. They become infective larvae inside the mosquito and, when it bites another dog, they mature into adult heartworms, mate, and the cycle begins anew. Heartworms are spread only through the bite of a mosquito.

LIFE CYCLE

Heartworms can live inside a dog from 5-7 years. Adult heartworms look like strands of cooked spaghetti. Males can reach up to six inches and females up to a foot. The worm burden is the number of worms living inside an infect-



© ADOBE STOCK

ed dog. On average, a dog's worm burden is 15 worms, but it can be up to 250.

TESTING

Blood tests check for heartworms in dogs. One test detects heartworm antigens. The earliest that heartworm antigens can be detected is about five months after being bitten by an infected mosquito. Another test checks for microfilariae and can detect heartworms about six months after the dog is bitten by an infected mosquito.

In the U.S., heartworm disease is most common along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts and along the Mississippi River and its tributaries. It has been reported in all 50 states.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of heartworm disease depend on the dog's worm burden, how long the dog has been infected and how the dog's body is responding. There are four stages of heartworm disease.

Stage 1: No symptoms or a mild, occasional cough.

Stage 2: An occasional cough and tiredness after moderate activity.

Stage 3: More severe symptoms such as a sickly appearance, persistent cough and tiredness after mild activity. Trouble breathing and signs of heart failure are common. Heart and lung changes are usually seen on X-ray.

Stage 4: Also called caval syndrome. The worm burden is so heavy that blood flowing back to the heart is blocked by a mass of worms. This is a life-threatening condition and

the only treatment option is quick surgical removal of the worms. Even with surgery, most dogs with caval syndrome die.

TREATMENT

The FDA has approved melarsomine dihydrochloride to kill adult heartworms in dogs. Another drug, Advantage Multi, can get rid of microfilariae in the dog's bloodstream. Treatment can be expensive and there can be serious complications. The best treatment, the FDA says, is prevention.

How to Hire a Pet Sitter

Our pets are definitely members of our family, but there are times when we can't take them with us.

Our options when going on vacation or on a long work trip are to board them at a kennel or a veterinary office or to keep them at home and hire a pet sitter.

USING A PROFESSIONAL PET SITTER

Professional pet sitters have extensive experience caring for pets and may have training in pet health and behavior. They help maintain your pet's daily routine in your home, reducing stress on your furry or feathered or finned friends. OK, the reptiles, too.

USE A SERVICE AND DO YOUR RESEARCH

You can find a professional pet sitter by asking your veterinarian or getting a recommendation from a friend or family member. You can also use a service such as Care.com, Rover or the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters.

Do your research on potential pet sitters' backgrounds and check reviews on their past services. Ask them questions such as:

- What type of training and certifications do you have?
- What will a routine visit to my house look like?



© ADOBE STOCK

- What is your communication style like?
- Are you insured?
- How do you deal with pet emergencies?
- What are your payment expectations?
- Can you provide me with references?

SET UP A MEETING

Have the pet sitter meet your pet in your home. Share information about your pet and their routine and watch how both your pet and the sitter react. If the sitter seems dismissive or disinterested, consider it a red flag. Once you're

satisfied that your pet will be in good hands, book them and set out a schedule that includes care instructions, any pet quirks, contact information, veterinary information and an emergency contact in case you can't be reached.

This is not a last-minute

chore. You should book your pet sitter well in advance of your trip, possibly even before booking your travel. Pet sitters often become more busy during the summer and during the holidays, so if your travel is during those days, definitely check before you book.