

Pet Care



Why Pets Need Vaccinations

Make sure all of your pet's vaccinations are completed on schedule

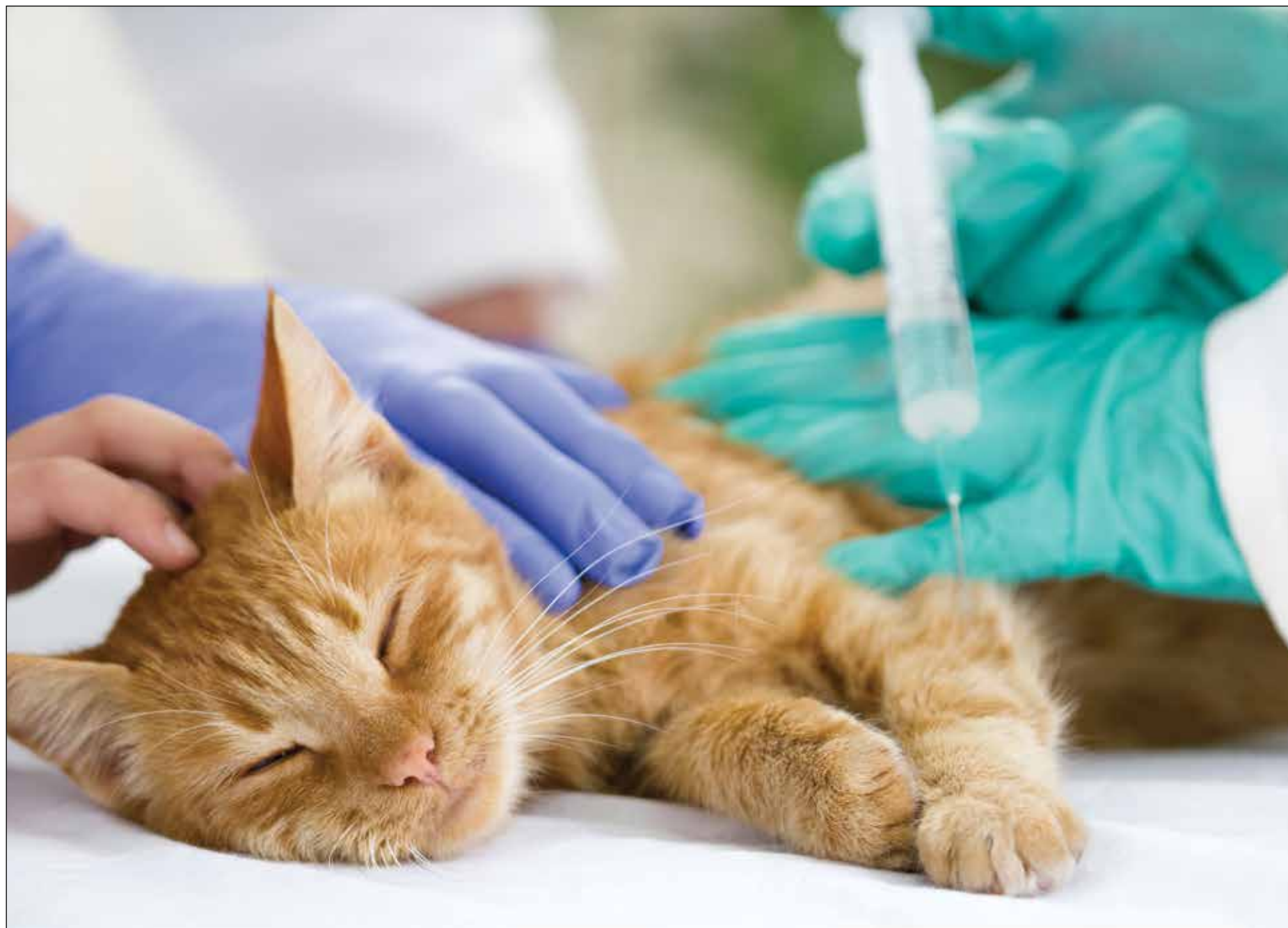
Unfortunately, dangers exist anywhere your furry friend may go, from the backyard to kennels to local parks. The best preventive treatment against these everyday dangers is to build a relationship of trust with a veterinarian who can keep your pet protected.

STAYING ON TIME

The importance of their vaccination schedule can't be overstated, since the effectiveness of any shot may wane over time. Some inoculations can also take an extended period of time before they are most effective. Follow your vet's instructions to the letter in order to make sure your pet gets the most protection possible. At the same time, rabies vaccinations may be required by law, and owners can get into big trouble by falling behind. There may be additional recommendations from your veterinarian based on your pet's general health, age and breed.

HOW THEY WORK

Much like vaccinations for humans, these shots are typically meant to protect your pet from infection or disease. Antigens which contain small amounts of common illnesses are introduced into your pets systems so that they're pre-



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pared to fight back if they were to have an actual infection. It all works in concert to help avoid costly future treatments for preventive illness, while also lowering the chances of transmission from animal to animal and, sometimes, from animals to people. Distemper and rabies are two of the most easily transmitted with unvaccinated pets.

COMMON VACCINATIONS

For dogs: The American Humane Society recommends dogs get the combined shot for distemper, parainfluenza, hepatitis and parvovirus. Ticks are also known to carry Lyme disease in some regions of the country, so your doctor may suggest vaccination since this illness can be

passed on to dogs. Your vet may also discuss the risks of kennel cough, an upper-respiratory infection that is very contagious. Shots to guard against it are typically recommended before your dog is boarded but may also be needed for visits to the groomer or a dog park.

For cats: The combination shot for calicivirus, rhinotra-

cheitis and panleukopenia protects against a trio of very common illnesses. Feline leukemia may also be passed along through close contact, so protection may be recommended for outside cats. Your combo distemper shot may also include protection against the bacterial infection chlamydia, which can lead to severe conjunctivitis in cats.

The Dangers of Table Scraps

There are lots of better, safer ways to spoil your favorite pet

Your pet doesn't know any better, but many of the most common things that people consume are actually health dangers for pets. In some cases, there is even the risk of death. So resist the urge to give in when confronted with a begging pooch — in particular with these key things:

AVOIDING THREE 'Cs'

Coffee, chocolate and caffeine have been targeted as particularly dangerous by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Ingredients in all of them include methylxanthines, a class of stimulants that includes the most widely consumed caffeine. When ingested by pets, methylxanthines are potentially deadly. Pets may suffer from vomiting and diarrhea, excessive thirst and urination, hyperactivity, panting and tremors, arrhythmia and seizures. Be particularly careful around baking chocolate, which has higher amounts of methylxanthines. Dark chocolates also carry more risk to your pets than milk chocolates.

ALSO OF CONCERN

Raw meat and eggs may contain the very harmful *E. coli* and salmonella. Avoid bones that may split, though any bone can be a choking



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hazard — and the potential for a potentially deadly digestive-tract puncture. Be careful with uncooked yeast-based dough, since it can continue expanding in the abdomen causing a dangerous build up. If the stomach were to rupture, it could prove deadly. Cooked meat should also be sharply limited, as no more than 5 to 10 percent of the

daily caloric intake according to the ASPCA.

Keep in mind that obesity is a huge problem with pets these days, and table scraps often arrive as additional calories on top of their regular meals. Your pet probably doesn't need the extra food. If you suspect your pet has accidentally ingested a dangerous food item, call your vet imme-

diately or contact the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' animal poison control center at (888) 426-4435.

APPROVED CHOICES

There are some table scraps which are fine for pets, but even then they should only be given in very small portions.

Lean strips of cooked beef, pork, turkey or fish are OK, as long as they have been de-boned and don't have the attached skin. Raw carrots, celery, lettuce and cabbage hearts may be given, but never onions or garlic. Peanut butter is OK, but again in small doses. Avoid raisins, macadamia nuts and anything with alcohol.

Spaying and Neutering

The fight against pet homelessness starts with this simple procedure

There are key medical and behavioral benefits associated with spaying and neutering pets. Those who aren't risk developing negative traits at a young age, according to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. More than that, however, this common medical procedure helps limit the number of healthy cats and dogs that are euthanized annually because no one adopts them.

BIG BENEFITS

Animals that haven't been spayed or neutered are more apt to contract common diseases like breast tumors, in both the cat and dog populations. The odds of avoiding this diagnosis go up even further if the procedure is done before the animal goes into heat for the first time. Un-neutered male pets are more apt to wander around while looking for a mate, risking more encounters with neighborhood traffic or aggressive animals. Males are also prone to marking their territory before surgery, leaving messes around the home.

WHAT HAPPENS

There is a trio of common approaches: Spayed pets have their ovaries, fallopian tubes and uterus removed. The tes-



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tes are removed when pets are neutered. Doctors use surgical sterilization to remove reproductive organs in a targeted procedure. All three procedures work to eliminate the behaviors related to breeding. Another option is a hysterectomy, where the ovaries remain. Connecting tubes from the testes are taken out in a vasectomy. Ovariectomy

involves removing only the ovaries. Others may choose non-surgical procedures, but some of unwanted instinctual behaviors can and oftentimes do remain.

MYTH FROM REALITY

Surgeries to spay and neuter pets are straightforward, quite common and not very risky. Still, a number of mis-

conceptions have arisen over the years. Some believe these procedures can lead to weather problems for pets, but that's typically a function of overfeeding and/or not enough exercise. There is a slight chance of related problems because anesthesia is required, but those instances are rare. Spaying and neutering can be expensive, but look

into no-cost or very low-cost options. There are shelters and clinics which specialize in helping pet owners who can't afford the procedure. In some cases, spaying and neutering is bundled into the process of adoptions. Visit the ASPCA website for more information on spaying and neutering, and to find care options in your area.

Before Bringing A Fish Home

Take care of a few critical things, then sit back and enjoy your new aquarium

There isn't an extensive to-do list involved with setting up a habitat for your new fish, but all of them are important – both in terms of maintaining the proper environment and keeping your new pet happy and healthy.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Smaller aquariums may seem like they'd be easier to maintain, but the opposite may be true, according to leading aquarium makers. A 20-gallon tank presents much less of a problem with balancing, and the extra space makes it easier to clean.

Once you've decided on a tank, it's time to begin your search for a filtration system to keep the water clean, an air pump that will create additional oxygen, a heater for any tropical varieties, and a thermometer to track tank temperatures. Add lighting, gravel and other decor, but don't forget the water conditioner. Tap water has to be specially adapted for most fish.

PICKING A FISH

Discuss your plans to get a fish with experts at the pet stores to find out more about what would work with your particular environment and set up. Experts typically recommend easier-to-care for fish like bettas, goldfish, swordtails



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or cichlids, among others. They'll also give you specific recommendations on the habitat you'll need to create. Real plants can help clean the tank and keep it balanced, but they also require more maintenance. Most fish like caves and tunnels, so they can create a cozy home or place to hide.

There may be special dietary restrictions, as well.

FINAL PREPARATIONS

Pre-wash any rocks, gravel and decorations, but don't use detergent or soaps which might be dangerous for fish. Instead, simply rinse them in warm water. Add all of it to

your tank, and then fill the space with water until it's about a third full. The water should be room temperature. Follow package instructions when adding a water conditioner.

Connect the air-pump. Those with check valves can be placed outside the tank, other-

wise place it above the water line. Arrange plants to hide it all, making sure that any live plants are planted safely below the gravel with the root crown exposed. Now fill the tank to the top. Add and turn on the heater and thermometer, set your filter and then begin adding fish.

Why You Should Microchip

Pets don't have to be lost forever if they slip away or lose a collar

Tiny chips that are about the same size as a single grain of rice can now hold key information about your pet, helping to bring them back home to you. The chips are enclosed in glass, then implanted into your cat or dog by a doctor. Activate the chip with a scanner, and it will then transmit the provided information.

IF THEY'RE LOST

Pets are now routinely scanned by veterinarians, animal-control officials and shelters when they are lost. If owner information has been kept up to date, these microchips can provide easy access to contact information needed to reconnect you with your pet. It happens at an incredible rate these days. In fact, strays were returned more than 50% of the time in one American Veterinary Medical Association survey covering some 8,000 strays.

Those without these chips only found their way home about 22% of the time. The microchipped pets who did not return were typically the ones whose contact information had not been updated. That's why it's so critically important the chips are registered and consistently updated.

A SIMPLE PROCESS

Your pet will be micro-



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chipped at the doctor's office. They'll inject the device under the skin with a hypodermic, with a pain inducement that's roughly the same as your cat or dog's regular vaccinations. No surgery or anesthesia is needed, though some veterinarians choose to complete this process while animals are

already under during procedures like spaying and neutering or large dental procedures. In that case, it's really more for the comfort of the animal. The chip holds contact information and cannot track a lost pet since there is no battery. Instead, a professional scans the chip to learn

who to call and then gets in touch.

NO PRIVACY ISSUES

These are not tracking devices and share no information on where you or your pet are at any given moment. They also do not house any other personal information. The registered

information is only accessed by a person with the proper scanner after your pet has been recovered. You have to manually update your contact information if you move or change phone numbers, since the chip manufacturer does not have access to your specific location.

Dog Park Basics

It's a great way to meet new puppy friends, burn energy and have some fun

Dog parks have proliferated as a safe space for pets and their owners to unwind. In fact, they're one of the fastest growing amenities in public spaces across the country, according to the Trust for Public Land. Here's how to prepare for a visit, and what to watch for when you arrive.

FOLLOW THE RULES

Puppies younger than four months old should not be around unfamiliar dogs, and that includes visiting a dog park. The same goes for dogs who have not had all of their shots. Needed vaccinations include canine influenza, leptospirosis and bordetella, according to the American Kennel Club. Female dogs who have not been spayed may also need to be kept away.

Doggie visitors should already be familiar with basic obedience and everyday commands like stay, come and down. If your dog hasn't been socialized with other pups, is aggressive or overly protective or reactive, it may be best that they also stay home. Leave their favorite toys, treats and balls at your house, so you can avoid unnecessary doggy disagreements.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Evaluate the dog park on



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your own first, making sure that the space offers a safe and fun experience. Inspect the fencing to make sure it's secure along the entire perimeter so dogs cannot crawl under or over, through holes or around unfinished corners. Gates should be secure, ideally with double gates for maxi-

mum safety. With two gates, owners and their dogs must close the first one before opening a second, discouraging accidental runaways. Be on the lookout for excess trash, broken equipment and unattended dog pop, since those are signs of a poorly maintained facility. You might

have to keep looking for the best fit.

WHEN YOU'RE THERE

Keep a close eye on your pet the whole time they are enjoying a trip to the dog park. If you arrive when a large group of others is trying to enter, wait until they disperse before

making your way inside. If overeager dogs chase yours or play too rough, intervene to keep them safe. Don't overstay, since a half hour or so is plenty of time to burn off excess energy. If your dog remains by your side or sits by the exit, that means he's ready to return home.

Finding the Best Veterinarian

This choice involves medical expertise, but also trust and caring touch

Handing pets over to a stranger can be nerve wracking for everyone who's involved. They rely on you as an owner to find the right doctor to keep them safe, healthy and happy. That's why finding the best veterinarian can be so hard. You may have to make multiple visits before all of the pieces fall into place.

A PERSONAL TOUCH

Start with recommendations from family, friends, neighbors and various online reviews. Once you begin your visits, ask specific questions about care plans, while providing details about your specific pet and their health issues. But be on the lookout for signs that they'll provide the kind of individualized service every worried owner and pet deserve.

You're going to arrive with an ill, injured or agitated friend, and that requires a comforting touch — in particular early on, when the surroundings are still so unfamiliar. Look for a staff boasting workers with a friendly, caring disposition toward your pet. Make sure they're willing to discuss everything with you in a calm and complete manner. Try to meet as many members of the care team as possible.

AFTER-HOURS OPTIONS

Unfortunately, not every



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interaction with the vet is going to happen around regularly scheduled checkups. Ask about after-hours options, how emergency visits would work, and whether they handle these problems in their office. There may also be additional charges. Find out if you should call the regular office number during an

emergency, or a specially designated alternate. Some veterinarians will travel to your home on an emergency call, while others require that the pet be transported to their offices. Depending on the age and health of your pet, their answers may go a long way in determining who you choose.

PRICE RANGES

Costs for care can quickly add up, even if you have a youthful or relatively healthy pet. Ask about their pricing structures, including how much is charged for regularly scheduled services like wellness checks, flea treatments and basic procedures. If these

price ranges don't fit your budget, it's best to know before your pet develops an emotional bond with new caregivers. Check into targeted discounts that may be available to seniors or military personnel. Sometimes vets also offer discounts if you begin services for more than one pet.