

Pet Care



Keeping Yards Safe for Pets

Having a healthy yard and having healthy pets aren't mutually exclusive.

With some planning and preparation, you can have a beautiful yard that's safe enough for your animal friends.

Fertilizers and insecticides are some of the most common, yet most toxic, chemicals in your yard. They help keep bugs away and keep your lawn thick and luscious, but they can also make your pets very sick. Experts at The Home Depot say to fertilize, then water the lawn or garden right after you're done. Don't let your pets out until the water dries completely.

Symptoms of fertilizer consumption may include mild gastrointestinal upset, food bloat, tremors and seizures, the ASPCA says. Fertilizers need to be stored in safe containers away from where pets can access it. Many fertilizers contain bone meal, fish meal, blood meal or corn and corn cobs, meaning they smell delicious to your pets, who may be tempted to tear into them.

The Merck Veterinary Manual says to carefully read and follow any directions on insecticide use, even if it's a familiar product. Regulations and labels change over time, as do ingredients. Even organic pesticides can harm your pets.

The manual says symptoms



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of exposure depend on the product, but look for:

- Excessive drooling
- Abdominal pain or cramping
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Sweating
- Difficulty breathing or a bluish tinge to the skin and mucous membranes

- Small pupils
- Muscle spasms or convulsions
- High fever or abnormal behaviors such as pressing their head against a wall or continual chewing movements
- Poor coordination
- Heightened reflexes and inflammation of nerves

- Blindness
 - Blistering
- Some chemical exposures are fatal, but some can be treated. It's important if you suspect poisoning from a fertilizer or insecticide or other garden chemical to get in touch with your pet's health care professional immediately and arrange for appropriate

treatment.

Consider using pet-safe, organic compounds in your lawn and garden or make a specific, pet-safe garden with places to dig and do their business. Make sure the pathways to their spots are clear and, if you have dogs, water the area frequently to help break down the damage from their urine.

Prevent Periodontal Disease

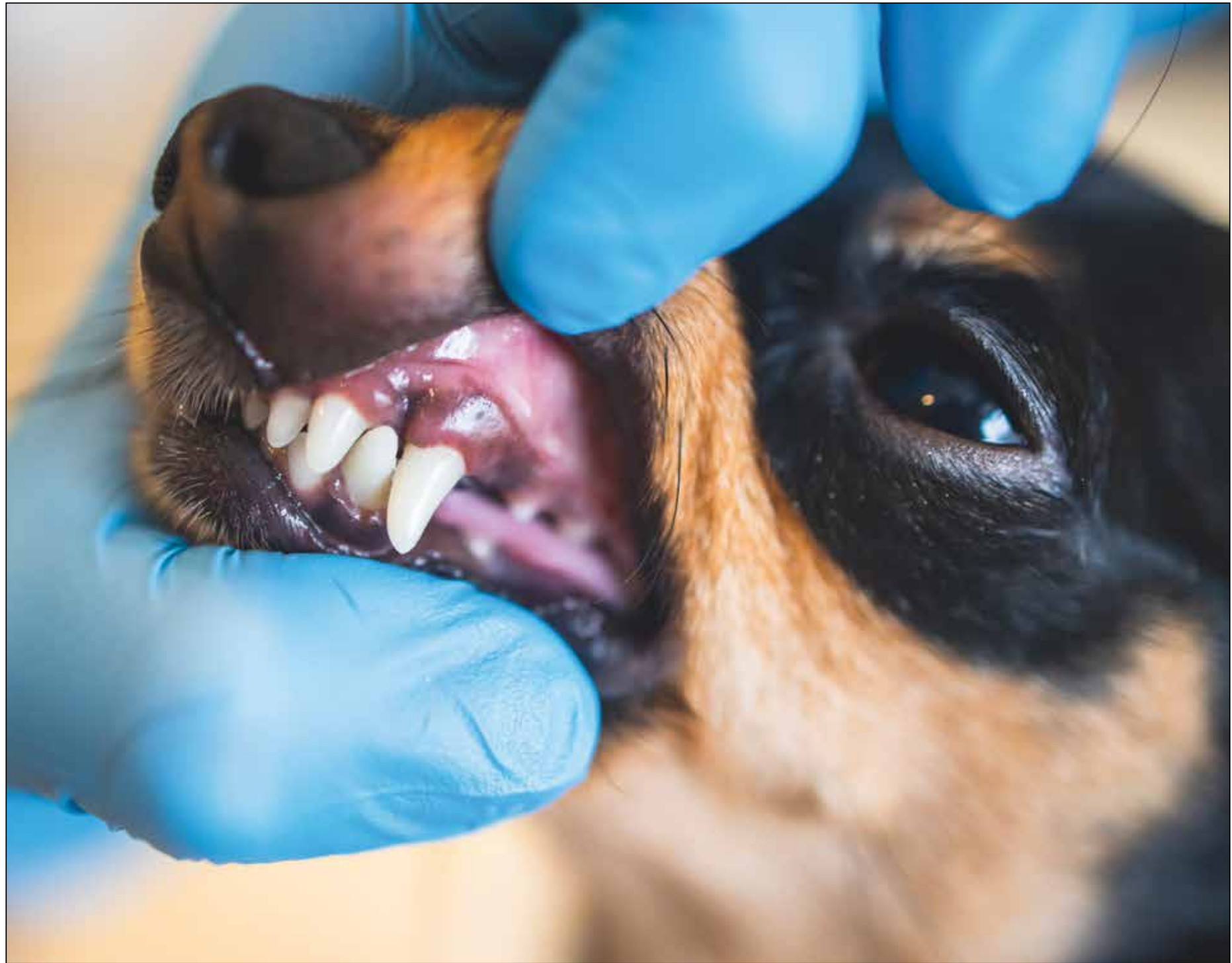
Just like you, your pets need regular care for their pearly whites.

Dental health can affect overall health in pets just as in people. A veterinarian should check your pet's teeth and gums at least once a year, the American Veterinary Medical Association says, or more frequently if you notice any of the following symptoms:

- Bad breath
- Broken or loose teeth
- Extra teeth or retained baby teeth
- Teeth that are discolored or covered in tartar
- Abnormal chewing, drooling or dropping food from the mouth
- A reduced appetite or refusal to eat
- Pain in or around the mouth
- Bleeding from the mouth
- Swelling in areas surrounding the mouth
- Changes in behavior.

The AVMA says the most common dental condition in dogs and cats is periodontal disease. By the time a pet is three years old, it likely has some signs of the disease, the association says. Just like in humans, periodontal disease can be found alongside other health issues, such as kidney, liver and heart conditions.

Periodontal disease starts with plaque on the teeth that hardens into tartar, both above and below the gumline. Under the gums, tartar can cause damage to the jawbone



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and infections. Treatment for periodontal disease involves thorough cleaning and possibly X-rays to determine the severity of the disease — usually graded 0 (normal) to 4 (severe).

Unlike at your dentist, your pet will be placed un-

der anesthesia for their teeth cleaning. This makes it possible for your vet to get a good look at their teeth and treat them with minimal stress and pain. The American Veterinary Dental College does not recommend dental cleanings without anesthesia.

While thorough teeth cleaning should be done by a professional, there are things you can do at home to improve your pet's oral health. Regular teeth brushing can help, the AVMA says. Daily is best but it's not always possible. Several times a week also

works.

Talk to your veterinarian about the most effective pet dental products. Don't use human products that you aren't absolutely sure are safe. Many human toothpastes contain flavorings and other things that aren't safe for pets.

When to Use the Emergency Vet

It's hard when our four-legged or feathered best friends are in pain or sick, but not all occasions are appropriate for emergency care.

Before you are in need of an emergency vet, talk to your regular veterinary health professionals about the clinics or providers they recommend. They may even have an in-house service.

Some of the most common veterinary emergencies, according to Blue Pearl Pet Hospital, are:

SEVERE VOMITING OR DIARRHEA

Vomiting rises to an emergency level when there have been several episodes of vomiting in a 24-hour period, the vomiting is accompanied by other symptoms such as pain or lethargy, the vomiting occurs after the pet ingested something toxic or swallowed an object, or repeated dry heaving without anything coming up.

Diarrhea becomes an emergency when it's bloody, uncontrollable, occurs several times in 24 hours, is combined with other symptoms such as pain, or happens after the pet may have ingested a toxic substance.

UNCONTROLLED BLEEDING

To some people, any bleed-



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ing is an emergency. But Blue Pearl says true veterinary emergency bleeding is uncontrolled, is caused by trauma, is caused by a deep wound, is accompanied by signs of injury such as limping, is oral or rectal, or appears to be internal.

URINARY ISSUES

Blue Pearl says to seek emergency care for urinary problems such as the pet not being able to pass urine, strain-

ing to urinate, having blood in the urine, or being in pain when they attempt to urinate. The hospital says urinary emergencies are particularly common in male cats, who are prone to urinary blockage and obstruction.

SEIZURES

Seizures may rise to a veterinary emergency, especially if your pet has never had one before. Some signs of emergent

seizures include brief loss of consciousness, involuntary rigidity followed by a paddling of the paws, collapse, drooling or foaming at the mouth, altered perceptions of their surroundings, or uncontrollable shaking.

INABILITY TO WALK

If your previously perfectly mobile pet is suddenly unable to walk, it's important to seek immediate veterinary care, Blue Pearl says. Look for an in-

ability to stand up, dragging the hind legs, lack of coordination or stumbling, limb paralysis, limping with other signs of injury, or an inability to extend the limbs.

Also consider seeking emergency care for any major injury, such as broken bones, dislocated joints, any injury to the eyes or teeth, deep wounds or lacerations, head injuries, bite wounds, or sprains or strains.

All About Physical Therapy

Pets can need physical therapy to recover from illness and injuries.

Physical therapy can be critical to helping your pet enjoy a higher quality of life, one that's pain-free and active. Animal Emergency & Specialty Center says pet rehabilitation helps with arthritis, chronic pain conditions, recovery from injury or surgery, age-related conditions and more.

HYDROTHERAPY

This therapy uses the buoyancy and resistance of water to help pets move without as much stress on the joints. AESC says water-based therapy is effective for recovery from orthopedic surgery, a controlled return to activity after a soft tissue injury, maintaining mobility for senior pets, recovery from a spinal cord injury, or even managing chronic conditions, such as arthritis.

THERAPEUTIC EXERCISE

In this therapy, specialists (look for a certification as a Certified Canine Rehabilitation Therapist, or CCRT) come up with an in-house and at-home exercise program for each pet's needs. The plans are designed to improve balance and coordination, increase flexibility and range of motion, reduce compensatory movement patterns and rebuild muscle strength.

LASER THERAPY

Also called photobiomodulation, laser therapy uses specific wavelengths of light to stimulate cellular activity and promote healing. AESC says the treatments are useful for arthritis, soft tissue injuries and wounds as they reduce inflammation, relieve pain and accelerate tissue repair.

MASSAGE AND MANUAL THERAPY

Yes, for pets, too! AESC says it uses massage and manual therapy to support healing and provide pain relief. These exercises help enhance flexibility and range of motion, relieve muscle tension, improve circulation and promote lymphatic drainage in pets.

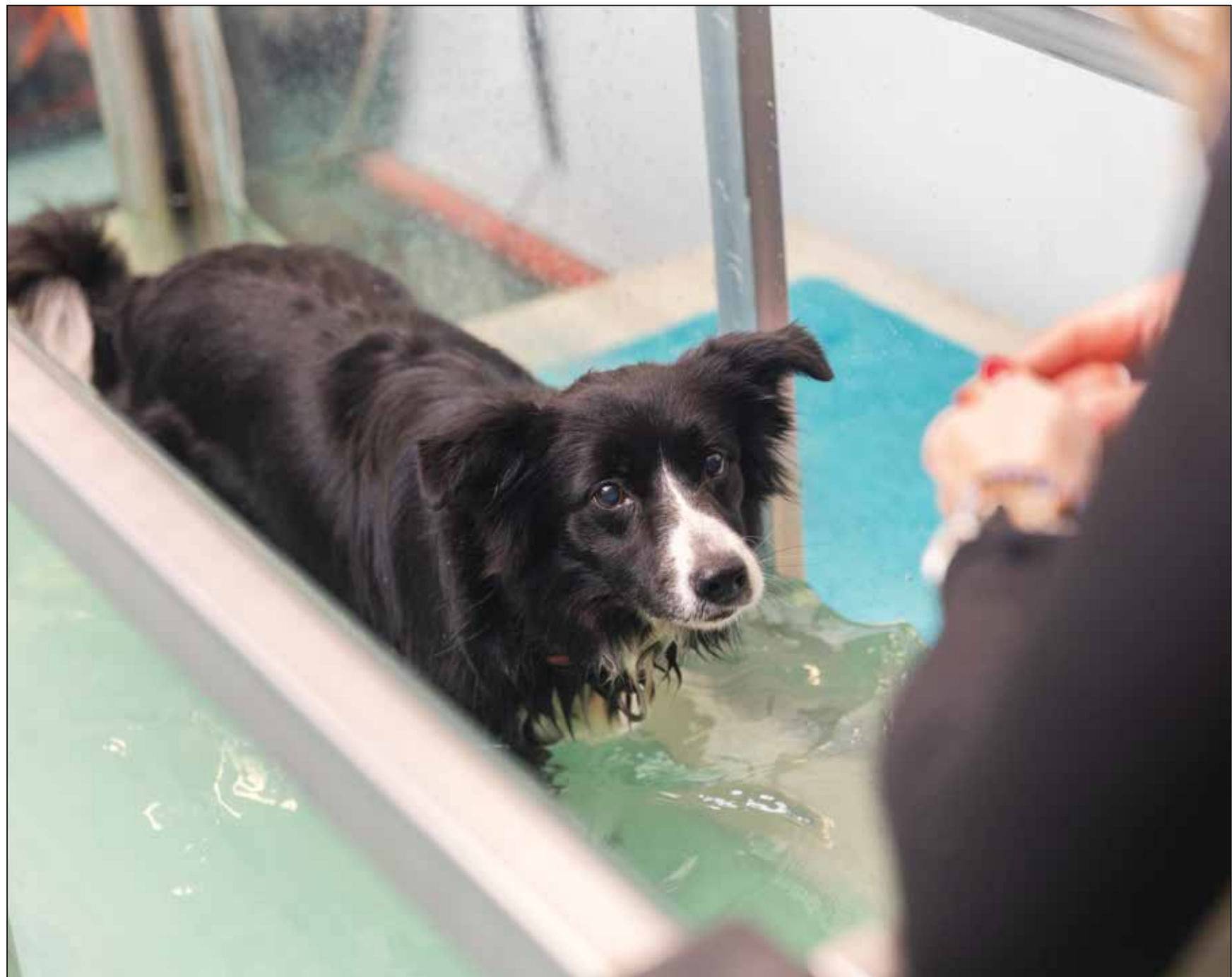
ELECTRICAL STIMULATION

These therapies, which include electrical stimulation and transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS), use low electrical currents to stimulate muscles or nerves. These treatments can reduce pain and swelling, build strength in atrophied muscles, and promote healing by enhancing blood flow to targeted areas. AESC says it uses these therapies

after orthopedic surgery and for pets experiencing neurologic conditions.

ACUPUNCTURE

Pet acupuncturists use very fine needles inserted into specific points on the body to stimulate nerve function to relieve pain and improve circulation. It's effective for pets with arthritis, chronic pain or neurologic issues, AESC says.



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Signs of Food Allergies in Pets

Food allergies can occur when your pet's immune system mistakes food proteins for invaders.

This triggers an immune response, causing symptoms such as itching, infections, vomiting or diarrhea, the North Carolina State Veterinary Hospital says. A veterinary health professional can help you diagnose food allergies to make sure it's not something else.

DIETARY ELIMINATION TRIALS

N.C. State says the best way to diagnose food allergies is through a dietary elimination trial. To start, the vet will collect your pet's diet history and perform a physical exam and diagnostics to rule out other conditions. Some signs it may be a food allergy are:

- Year-round itching with little variation from season to season
- A specific pattern of itchiness that includes ears, feet, groin, armpits or skin around the eyes and muzzle
- Some breeds may be predisposed to food allergies such as Labrador retrievers, West Highland terriers and cocker spaniels.

Food allergies typically begin early in a pet's life, but can show up later depending on dietary history. Your pet will be given a recommended diet that they eat exclusive-



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ly for 6-8 weeks but positive signs may show up in the first month. The food and treats your veterinarian recommends will probably consist of a prescription diet. N.C. State says over-the-counter foods, even if they have similar ingredient lists, can be cross-contaminated during manufacturing — even those

labeled as hypoallergenic.

N.C. State says continually rotating ingredients and food choices won't prevent or manage food allergies. It can even limit a veterinarian's ability to diagnose food allergies.

COMMON FOOD ALLERGIES

Food allergies often involve

animal proteins, N.C. State says, such as beef, eggs, chicken and dairy.

Uncommon or rare allergies include grains and gluten. Food allergies are uncommon; only about 10% as common as atopic dermatitis in cats and dogs.

Conditions that can mimic food allergies include para-

sites, viruses and bacteria; diet imbalance such as too much fat or the wrong fiber content; and environmental factors such as flea saliva, dust mites, pollen and grasses. Flea and other environmental allergies, in particular, are much more common than food allergies and they have very similar symptoms.

Enrichment for Indoor Cats

It seems perfectly natural for cats to want to be outside and for their people to let them outside.

But more experts, such as People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, the American Bird Conservancy and even some veterinarians, are advising people to keep their felines inside.

In fact, a study conducted by University of California-Davis in 2022 showed indoor cats lived longer than outdoor-only cats. Indoor cats typically reach their mid- to late teens, the study says, as they are protected from trauma and injury, infectious diseases, parasites and toxins.

With a little work, your cat can thrive indoors without becoming bored. Here are some ideas to keep kitty moving.

MEALTIME FUN

Take a box, such as an old shoe box or even a soft drink package, and a handful of toilet paper rolls. Trace the toilet paper roll ends on the box and cut out holes for the rolls. Slide the rolls into the hole, then place kibble or treats into each roll. Let your cat dig them out to satisfy their natural curiosity.

In another toilet paper roll-based activity, take a toilet paper roll or paper towel roll and add a handful of treats or kibbles. Seal the ends and cut small holes — just big enough for the food to pass through —



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and roll it to your cat. Watch them bat it around to try to get the delicious treats out.

You can use puzzle feeders and other store-bought interactive toys in multiple rooms and places to keep your cat entertained.

ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT

Create a comfy perch by the window and place a bird feeder outside to let your cat

enjoy watching the great outdoors. Don't have room or a place for a feeder? Turn to the internet. Search for bird TV for cats, the ASPCA says, and find cat-friendly videos to show on a screen.

If you've ever seen a cat with a box, you know it's always a package full of fun. Make it even better by joining boxes together to create tunnels and mazes. Add scratchers, hang toys and cut holes for your

cat to peer through.

SCHEDULE PLAY TIME

Make play sessions part of your regular routine. Use a variety of toys and mimic prey-like movements to get their attention. Encourage jumping, pouncing and chasing so your feline friend can let off steam in a safe, secure environment.

BUILD A CATIO

If you have the space and

the resources, consider installing a cat enclosure — a catio, if you will — that allows your cat to experience the outdoors safely.

It can be as small as a window box or even a small room in the back yard. Make sure the catio provides the cat with fresh air, sunshine and views of nature.

It should feature climbing structures, perches and toys to keep your cat entertained.

Comfort for a Senior Pet

Just like making adjustments for a new puppy, an older pet may need some accommodations to help them live their best life.

Banfield Pet Hospital suggests adding things that help pets stay stable and cozy, such as stairs or ramps for furniture access, minimizing contact with slippery floors, giving them toe grips for added traction, providing an orthopedic bed for joint pain, and elevating food and water bowls.

CHOOSING STAIRS OR RAMPS

Stairs and ramps can help pets make it safely onto beds, couches and cat trees so they can hang out in the same places they've always been. Using stairs and ramps can prevent accidents that occur when jumping up or down from furniture. Select stairs that are the right size for your pets and support their weight. It needs the proper incline for your pet's ability and lots of traction, Banfield says.

MAKING FLOORS LESS SLIPPERY

Older pets can have difficulty walking on hard-surface floors that make them slip and slide. You can put down non-slip surfaces such as rugs or yoga mats to provide some



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traction. You can use toe grips for dogs that slip on over their nails to increase stability and mobility.

If you have stairs, consider moving their beds and other belongings to the first floor or carrying them up and down the stairs.

CHOOSING A PET BED

Think about transitioning an older pet to an orthopedic bed that's specifically designed to help cushion pressure points and promote better sleep. Look for a bed that sits low and has a machine-washable cover with a

non-slip bottom. Put the bed in an easy-to-reach spot that's free of obstacles such as slick floors.

ADJUSTING MEAL TIMES

Banfield recommends switching pets to an elevated or tilted food and water bowl

to avoid unnecessary strain on your pet's neck and back. For a cat, check their litter box. Older cats may have a tough time climbing into taller boxes and navigating smaller spaces. Make sure they have enough room to maneuver and consider a box with a lower entry.