

Ask the Vet:

Resolve to make 2016 a healthy year for your pets

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With the commencement of a new year, the making of resolutions to improve our own life is common. But I challenge you to additionally make resolutions for your pet for a more healthy and happy lifestyle.

Working together, along with your veterinarian, we can try to make 2016 the healthiest year so far.

The best place to start in assessing your pet's general health to identify any areas of concern is the comprehensive physical examination. This includes detailed information gathering about your pet, which is best achieved when the person most responsible for care presents the pet for the exam.

Accurate descriptions of diet, behavior and exercise allow you to gain the most value from your veterinary team. The discussion of these topics allows you to gain insight that comes from professional experience and resources that are not widely available. This is not the time to defend your choice but rather to consider reliable information that may be new.

The physical portion of the exam includes evaluation of body and muscle condition, pain assessment and dental health. Diagnostics like blood and urine lab tests are recommended as they give veterinarians a powerful means to understand the internal health of your pet.

Based on the findings, areas of concern are identified and open the door to discussion about improvements -and resolutions -that can be made. Commonly, the results of lab tests reveal concerns for kidney or liver health that were unknown beforehand. Catching these abnormalities early always helps to improve the likelihood of treatment success.

Assessment of infectious and zoonotic diseases, along with a parasite prevention plan, also is very important. At least annual internal parasite testing is recommended. Veterinarians often find parasitic infections that were unknown to the family.

Understanding the treatment plan and following the prevention plan improves health. Control and prevention of parasites and infectious diseases plays a large role in every pet's general health. Use of year-round broad-spectrum parasite control is highly recommended; specific product use or strategies should be discussed.

Assessment and understanding of many pets' dental health often is ignored, but dental health has a huge impact on overall health. Some pets experience chronic oral discomfort and pain without their owners realizing it.

Bacteria from unseen periodontitis potentially can spread to affect airways, kidneys and heart tissue. Oral-care treatments and preventive techniques provide a pathway to significant overall health improvement.

Preventing oral disease is one of the most important resolutions for your pet you can make.

Good nutrition is another vital area that we all can resolve to improve. With the myriad food products available, a lot of confusion exists about what is best to feed your pet. From celebrity-endorsed products to completely unregulated and undefined "natural" and "holistic" diets, your veterinarian can provide reliable information and resources.

A proper diet recommendation for your pet is based on all of the described evaluation findings and, therefore, will vary among individuals. Assessment of body condition and activity, along with your pet's whole health status needs to be considered.

Nutritional needs change with aging or with the development of any health abnormalities. Periodic reassessment by your veterinary team is highly recommended.

May we all resolve to improve our own lifestyle and health, as well as that of our pets. They depend so much on us for maintaining a proper level of healthiness and well-being that we need to be resolute in our resolutions in resolving any areas of concern.

Healthy 2016!