

Winter care tips for your pet

Review these tips to keep pets safe and healthy during the fall and winter seasons.

- Keep cats indoors and shorten exercise walks for dogs when the temperature falls. Safe outdoor temperatures for pets vary by breed and size. Ask your veterinarian for a specific recommendation for your pet.
- If your pet must be outside at all, provide adequate shelter. A dog house should be no more than three times the dog's size. The door should face away from the wind—usually south. And void blankets and straw—they can harbor fleas. Use cedar shavings for bedding instead. Provide similar shelter or access to a building for outdoor cats.
- Never allow your dog to walk on a lake or pond that looks frozen. The appearance of ice can be deceiving and pets can fall through and drown.

Parasite prevention

- Continue using monthly flea, tick, and heartworm preventives. Pets should take these preventives year-round. Remember, it's often easier and cheaper to prevent parasites than treat them when a pet's infested or infected. Take your pet for fecal exams for internal parasites at least yearly, and keep your yard clean of feces.

Motor vehicles and antifreeze

- When the weather cools, cats like to sleep near a warm car engine, curling up on or under the hood. So be sure you know

where your cat is and honk the horn before starting your car.

- Antifreeze can be lethal. It tastes sweet to pets and contains ethylene glycol, a toxic agent. So always clean up any antifreeze if it spills. Contact your veterinarian immediately if you suspect your pet has consumed antifreeze.

Diet, food, and water

- Like people, outdoor pets can burn more calories in the winter. However, most indoor pets don't need their diet adjusted for different seasons. Your veterinarian can help determine whether your pet's diet is adequate and balanced.
- To prevent dehydration, be sure your pet's water supply doesn't freeze. And use a non-metal water dish to keep your pet's tongue from sticking.
- Candy, especially chocolate, can make pets sick. A stomachache is the milder side effect, but chocolate poisoning—caused by theobromine, a compound found naturally in chocolate and related to caffeine—can be fatal.

Feet

- Rock salt, used to melt snow and ice, can irritate paw pads. Clean pads thoroughly after a trip outside.
- Uneven, icy surfaces can slash dogs' paw pads, so keep your dog on a leash or dress him in canine booties.

- Without hard surfaces to act as a natural file, dogs' toenails grow longer in winter, so regularly clip your pet's nails.

Holidays

- If you have a tree-climbing cat or large dog, consider securing your holiday tree by anchoring the top of the tree to a wall using strong cord or rope. Make sure any presents accessible to pets are securely wrapped, and don't use ribbon or raffia.
- Frequently check the ground around holiday trees. Ingested pine needles can puncture pets' intestines.
- Keep all tree ornaments, yarn, ribbon, and garlands well out of pets' reach by hanging them high on the tree. Don't use tinsel.
- Keep lit candles out of pets' reach.
- Holly, mistletoe, and poinsettia plants are poisonous when consumed. Enjoy their beauty while keeping pets safe by placing them well out of pets' reach.
- Puppies and kittens like to chew, so keep electrical cords out of reach.
- When entertaining, be sure guests know these and other household rules that help keep your pet safe.

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