

Pet Care



In Case of Emergency

It's important to be prepared for that moment when the unthinkable happens.

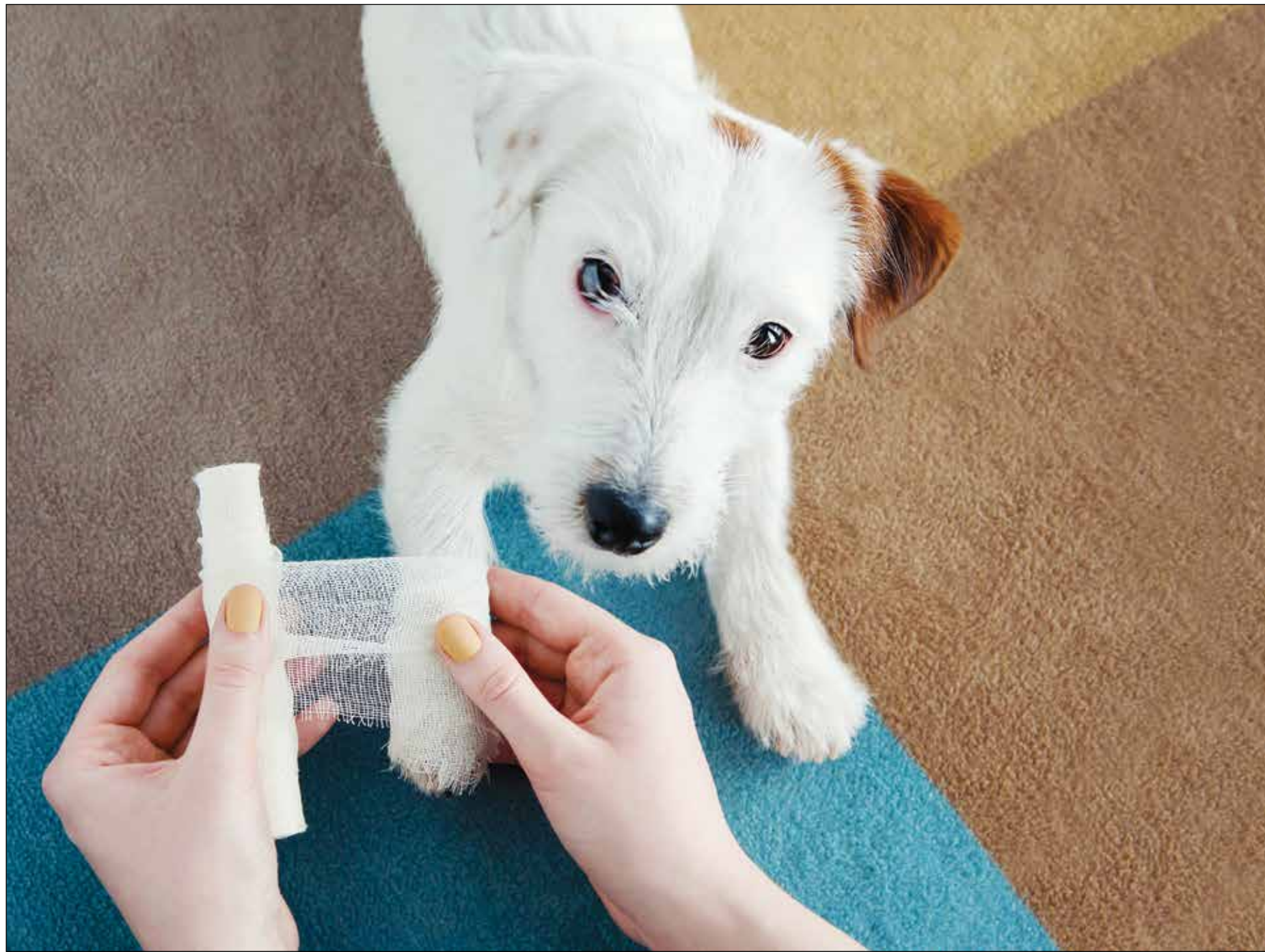
Pets are curious by nature, and that can sometimes lead them to trouble. They sometimes eat things they shouldn't. Traffic and mishaps with other animals are always a danger. Threatening weather can present problems, too. In any case, you'll need to plan ahead in order to know just what to do in case of emergency.

FIRST AID

Any time an animal is wounded, first we must determine the extent of the injury. Sometimes, you may be able to render all of the care your best friend needs right at home. Others times, it may be necessary to offer some first aid in order to stabilize your pet before transporting them to the veterinarian. You can slow external bleeding, for instance, by elevating the wound and then gently applying pressure. Animals who are choking may be helped by dislodging the obstruction with your fingers, or by employing the Heimlich maneuver. Keep needed items like bandages on hand.

PLANNING AHEAD

Discuss emergency protocols with your vet, including whether their office provides after-hours or 24-hour care. If not, find out which animal



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hospital they rely upon for referrals — then keep their contact information handy just in case. In certain situations, your pet should be brought to the emergency room right away — like trauma caused by a car accident or a suspicion that they've ingested something toxic.

Otherwise, operators can

often work with you, as an experienced pet owner, to determine if there is something serious to be worried about. They can also help determine which potentially lifesaving techniques to employ, as needed.

NATURAL DISASTERS

Don't forget to include your

pet when preparing for natural disasters. Make sure collars and tags are up to date, and consider microchipping your pet. This is one of the best ways to make sure you are reunited if the worst happens. Keep their carrier or leash near the door. If you're unsure what should go in a pet disaster kit, consult your

veterinarian. Any exit plan should also include a place to stay, since non-service animals are not typically allowed in local shelters or Red Cross evacuation centers. You should also locate animal hospitals near where you'll be evacuating in case some sort of medical attention is required in the meantime.

Careful with Those Scraps

Who doesn't love spoiling pets? Sharing table scraps isn't the best way.

Many kinds of "people" food present serious dangers to pets, sometimes even putting them at risk of death. Here's a look at what you should avoid.

THE THREE CS

The American Society of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has pinpointed the Three Cs as presenting the most serious risk to your best friend: Chocolate, caffeine and coffee. All of them contain methylxanthines, a substance that when ingested can cause diarrhea and vomiting, excessive urination and thirst, panting, hyperactivity, tremors, abnormal heart rhythm, seizures and sometimes death, the ASPCA reports. Baking chocolate is particularly risky, as it contains the highest amounts of methylxanthines. Darker chocolates are more dangerous than milk chocolate.

OTHER DANGERS

Uncooked yeast-based doughs are harmful because they can rise inside your pet's abdomen, causing gas to build up in their digestive system. The impacts can range from quite painful to deadly, if the stomach were to rupture. Even cooked yeast should be severely limited, according to the ASPCA, which recommends doughy treat constitute not



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more than 5-10% of your pet's caloric intake each day. Raw eggs and meats can contain Salmonella and E. coli, both of which can be very harmful to your pet. Bones are a choking hazard, in particular those that splinter. That can lead to a life-threatening puncture in the digestive tract.

WHAT'S OK

Some table scraps are usually fine to give your pets, but only in very small doses. Small, lean strips of cooked turkey, pork, beef or fish — but without bones, and without the skin.

Raw vegetables like carrots, lettuce, celery and cabbage

hearts are fine — but not garlic or onions. Raw pumpkin makes for a fun fall treat. Peanut butter is fine too, in small portions. They shouldn't be given anything with raisins, alcohol or macadamia nuts, either.

Obesity has become primary nutritional issue with our

pets. When you give them a treat, you are adding to his daily caloric intake — and he probably doesn't need them.

If you think your pet has eaten something dangerous, immediate call your veterinarian — or contact the ASPCA's Animal Poison Control Center at (888) 426-4435.

Spaying and Neutering

Raising pets for a year actually costs more than spaying or neutering them once.

This effective, permanent birth-control method for cats and dogs offers a range of positive impacts, beginning with reducing the number of homeless pets. They'll live longer, too.

HEALTH IMPACTS

This every-day medical procedure offers our friends a chance for a healthier life. A USA Today study found that pets lived longer in states that boasted higher rates of spaying and neutering. In fact, neutered male dogs lived nearly 20% longer than their unaltered counterparts. Spayed dogs lived almost 25% longer than female dogs who weren't spayed. Decreased aggressive behavior saves lives, and these procedures eliminate the risk of testicular and uterine cancers. They're less likely to roam, which means fewer encounters with other animals or a passing vehicle. Unwanted pregnancies can risk the life of the mother, especially over time.

PET HOMELESSNESS

Millions and millions of homeless animals enter animal shelters annually, many never to emerge again. One ASPCA study placed the number of euthanized homeless animals in some states at hundreds of thousands annually.



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In all, U.S. shelters euthanize nearly 3 million healthy dogs and cats, the ASPCA reports. Spaying and neutering has a direct impact on these numbers, literally saving lives.

DEBUNKING MYTHS

Spaying and neutering does not lead to weight problems for pets. That's typically the

fault of overfeeding and poor exercise. Neutering a pet will decrease some undesirable behaviors, because of the lowered level of testosterone. But that doesn't make it a quick fix for other problems. Your pet may still have to take part in other behavioral training, depending on personality, history and physiology.

WHEN TO DO IT

The traditional age for neutering dogs is 6-9 months. Younger puppies may be neutered as long as they're healthy.

Older dogs may also be neutered, though there is a risk of complications, in particular among the overweight. Check the incision daily to monitor

for proper healing. Contact your veterinarian if you notice redness, discharge or swelling, or if the incision comes open. Kittens as young as eight weeks old can be spayed or neutered.

The procedure should ideally be done before a cat reaches five months old. They can be spayed while in heat.

Boarding Your Best Friend

You're all set for a fun getaway, but what about your pet?

In most cases, the Humane Society of the United States recommends boarding while you're on vacation, rather than taking a pet along or having someone check in on them occasionally.

LESS STRESS

When a pet owner takes a trip, a facility that specializes in their care will provide more one-on-one attention than they'd receive if left at home for most of the day. They'll be specially trained in case of emergency. Your pet will also avoid the stress of a long ride in a car or plane, an experience that can sometimes be nerve-racking for you, too. Unfamiliarity with their surroundings and price can sometimes stand as impediments, so shop around and then try to be consistent once you've found a place that gives your furry friend the smoothest possible transition. Particularly concerned owners may want to specifically look for facilities that feature pet cams or more regular check-ins. Some even produce daily reports.

SMART SELECTION

Costs can vary depending on services, length of stay and your locale, so you'll need to make boarding your pet a part of the overall budgeting process for the trip. Ask your veterinarian, friends and family,



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and the experts at your local animal shelter for recommendations. Once you've narrowed the list down, then schedule meetings to get a feel for how they handle the process — and bring your pet. Pay close attention to issues like temperature, ventilation, outdoor play areas,

general cleanliness and staff knowledgeability. Once these concerns are addressed, the decision may simply come down to feel. Does your pet seem comfortable?

SAYING GOODBYE

With proper research and

pet preparation out of the way, all that's left to do is drop them off at the boarding facility. You both may be anxious or sad when it's time to leave, but don't make it a long goodbye. Maintain a calm and happy demeanor. Emotional scenes can spark separation anxiety or

other changes in behavior, making for a more stressful situation while you're away.

Go over your pet's needs with staff one more time, including food and medication routines, then leave your contact information and exit for your big trip.

Becoming a Vet

If pet care is more than a hobby, consider becoming a veterinarian.

It's a multi-step process but at the end you'll have the preparation, training and knowledge you need as a doctor of veterinary medicine to expertly attend to the health and wellness needs of a variety of animals.

GETTING STARTED

Most schools require a bachelor's degree, and it must include specific courses. Ask a guidance counselor for more specifics, or research prerequisites using the Veterinary Medical School Admission Requirements page at applytovetschool.org. Beyond class, the typical applicant arrives having already accumulated hundreds of hours of experience working with animals, according to the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges. Most schools emphasize work done under the direct supervision of a vet, including various job shadowing programs and internships. Gaining this kind of diverse experience aids in getting accepted, but it will also help you decide if being a veterinarian is the right career path for you.

ATTENDING SCHOOL

If you've already got your eye on a particular school, contact their admissions office directly. If not, applying through the Veterinary



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Medical College Application Service ensures that your candidacy is announced to multiple schools. Include recommendations from the vets you shadowed or interned with, as well as an essay detailing your passion for pet care. Most doctor of veterinary medicine programs span four years. The first two are devoted to course-

work in labs and classes, beginning with basic sciences and then moving into more complex studies like neurology. Curricula vary, but by the third year most then move into situations where you'll gain more practical experience. The final semesters are spent in clinical rotation, with hands-on training.

FINAL STEPS

You'll have to pass the North American Veterinary Licensing Examination before becoming a doctor of veterinary medicine. Beyond your four years of study and training, you may want to bolster study habits by enrolling in preparation programs specifically aimed at the NAVLE.

They'll include helpful aids like practice questions as well as mock tests. The test can be taken in either the fall or spring semesters of your final year in vet school. Waiting until the spring allows more time to prepare, while taking the NAVLE in the fall also provides the option to retest if that becomes necessary.

Caring for Older Pets

As our pets age, their needs do, too. Here's how to be ready.

They've given you years of love and devotion, but time has a way of catching up with us all. An older pet may require a special diet, or experience health issues that require more frequent visits to your veterinarian.

COMMON ISSUES

In many cases, animals become susceptible to many of the same issues as people do when they get older. Common problems may include arthritis, diminishing eye sight, various cancers, dental and weight issues. If you notice that your furry friend is starting to slow down, it's important to discuss things with their veterinarian. Discomfort when attempting to sleep, or newfound trouble with stairs or car rides are common signs of trouble. As they become more sedentary, obesity becomes a risk — and weight problems may lead to more serious conditions like heart disease or diabetes.

CHANGING NEEDS

Your pet's diet should change as they do. They have different dietary needs, and will be experiencing challenges that didn't exist when they were in the prime of their lives. Changes in metabolism can lead to weight gain, but also to new sensitivity to the



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weather — in particular if you live in very warm or cold climates. Exercise remains important, in particular as it relates to preventing weight-related issues, but may also need to be moderated to accommodate for their aging bodies. If they're suffering from arthritis or seem more

prone to becoming cold, splurge on an orthopedic or heated dog bed.

WARNING SIGNS

It's important to be aware of specific warning signs as pets grow old. A marked decrease in appetite or thirstiness is a red flag, according to

the American Veterinary Medical Association. It may mean issues with digestion or their pancreas. Regular checkups become even more important during this time of their lives. Make sure their exams include annual blood work, since disease may be indicated by their red- and

white-cell counts, and by kidney and living function. If your older pet becomes disoriented, a visit to the vet may be required to check for cognitive issues. Keep a close eye out for any wound that is slow to heal. That could be a sign of cancer, or an issue with their immune system.

Don't Forget the Leash

Leashing your dog isn't just the law — it's good for them

A leash protects your best friend in a number of important ways. They won't be able to sprint into traffic, or inadvertently get lost after running away. Leashes are also an important tool in creating a reward system. They are a number of choices available, however, so review all of the options before deciding which one is right for your pet.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Leashing your dog is usually part of the local system of law. They also serve as a “good neighbor” policy, preventing your pet from bothering others or trespassing. It keeps them from jumping onto people, or become entangled with other dogs, too. Animal bites and accidents with moving vehicles are greatly reduced, while leashes also aid in improved behavior. You'll experience improved companionship too, since a leash-obedient pet is more pleasurable to spend time with. Leashed dogs also aren't as likely to be exposed to things like distemper or parvo.

BEST CHOICES

There are almost as many leash choices, it seems, as there are breeds of dogs. Ask your veterinarian for help in determining the leash that best suits your pet. Web searches and discussions with friends and neighbors may also help



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you narrow it all down. If correctly used, a leash can help effectively control your dog so trouble is avoided. Many pet owners employ a retractable leash, since its spring-loaded design also allows a big more freedom during your regular

walks. A button on the handle typically determines cord length. Just remember to keep the leash short when you walk near streets or in areas with lots of people and other pets. It takes a moment to retract your leash back a safe length.

WHAT TO AVOID

It's much safer to buy a constructed leash than to use a slip lead, where a flat leash has a metal ring at the end. The end of the leash passes through the ring, then is looped over the dog's head. But

accidentally over-pulling on a slip lead can damage your pet's neck or windpipe, the American Humane Society warns. The slip lead should only be used in emergency situations, such as when a regular collar breaks.