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When Does Your Pet Need the Vet

By Susan Paretts

Just like people need regular medical care to maintain their health, pets need to see the vet for regular checkups—especially if they're under the weather. This gives your vet the opportunity to examine your pet, answer your questions, and provide any medications your furry friend needs to stay healthy and happy. There are several reasons your pet might need to visit the vet.

To Get Spayed or Neutered

Spaying or neutering your pet prevents unwanted puppies or kittens and protects against some health issues, too. Spayed and neutered pets have a decreased chance of developing certain infections and some types of cancer, according to the American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The pets also tend to behave better and are less likely to urine mark.

Your vet can perform this procedure to remove your pet's reproductive organs, preferably when your pet is between two and nine months of age.

For a Checkup

Even if your pet seems perfectly healthy, she'll need to see the vet at least once a year for a checkup. Ken Tudor, DVM, of the Well Dog Place in Claremont, California, recommends that most pets should see the vet twice a year, especially if they're eight years old and up. Pets age more rapidly than humans and the difference of a few months can be the equivalent of several years between visits, he says.

"Your vet can give your pet a thorough physical from nose to toes so he can determine if she has any health problems," Tudor says. This way, you can nip any health problems in the bud with proper treatment.

To Treat an Illness

When your pet gets sick, it's time to see the vet. Any changes in your pet's activity level or eating habits could be signs of illness. According to Dr. Tudor, increased water consumption and urine production may be a sign of a serious problem like kidney disease, diabetes, liver problems or a uterine infection in unspayed females. He said drinking and peeing more could signal thyroid issues, too—hyperthyroidism in cats or hypothyroidism in dogs.

"If you notice your pet licking or biting repeatedly at any areas of its body, it could mean that that spot itches or hurts," Tudor says. This irritation could be caused by a physical injury, arthritis, an allergy or an infection. Also, he recommends that if the inside of your pet's ears smell unpleasant, have your vet check them out.

Tummy troubles may require medical evaluation, too. While your pet may occasionally vomit or have diarrhea, if it happens several times in a row, see the vet.

To Get Medication or Special Food

Pests like fleas, ticks and mosquitoes carry diseases that can make your pet sick. These bugs are most active when the weather is warm, according to Darlene Richard, a licensed veterinary technician in Las Vegas, Nevada. If you find these pests on your pet's coat when grooming her with a flea comb, like the one offered by ConairPRO Pet, head to the vet. Richards recommends getting some oral or topical preventative medications from your vet to keep fleas and ticks at bay.

If your pet has an ongoing medical issue, your vet can also provide you with the medication or therapeutic food needed to treat it. Prescription diets can help treat health conditions like crystals in the urine, stomach upset and kidney problems.

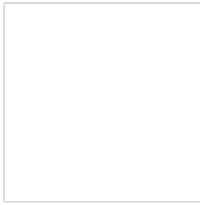
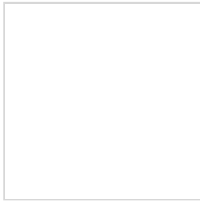
For a Dental Cleaning

To prevent periodontal disease, take your furry friend to the vet for regular dental cleanings. While your pet is under anesthesia, the vet uses special instruments to remove tartar and plaque buildup from the teeth, above and below the gum line. The cleaning will get rid of the bacteria that cause painful conditions like gingivitis, tooth loss and other health issues.

Unless you've noticed a problem between visits, normally your vet will examine your pet's teeth and gums during regular checkups to determine whether it's time for a dental cleaning.

The veterinarian plays an important role in keeping your pet healthy, so don't hesitate to call the office with questions or make an appointment when needed. Your vet will provide care, advice and resources to help keep your furry buddy in tip-top shape for many years to come.

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