

With the Holiday season now behind us and the New Year barely started, I want to share my suggestions for some New Years resolutions you may not have thought of. Hopefully you'll find some ideas that will enhance your pet's life as well as your own.

1. **Resolve to take your pet in for a health checkup.** If it's been a while since your pet has been in to the veterinarian's office it's probably time to take him in for a physical exam and routine blood tests. These visits allow for early detection of health problems. Pets have a way of hiding signs of illness until they are more advanced and difficult (not to mention more expensive) to treat. Even more important, these visits give you the opportunity to learn new ways to *prevent* health problems. Most veterinarians agree that once-a-year checkups are best for young and middle aged pets (less than 7 years old), and twice yearly exams for older pets.
2. **Resolve to get some weight off your pet.** Some pets may not need to commit to this resolution-but most will. Even mild obesity can increase health risks for your pet. The formula for weight loss is not a complicated one. If a pet is to lose weight, calories used must exceed calories consumed. If simply reducing the amount of food you feed does not get the weight off, look for hidden sources of calories such as treats from the table and "dog biscuit" snacks. Ultimately, your pet's veterinarian can be a big help in tackling this sometimes stubborn problem.
3. **Resolve to get your pet some regular exercise.** Physical activity is an important part of keeping resolution #2 (weight loss), but it also helps maintain strong cardiovascular and orthopedic function. A side benefit to regular exercise...if pets are exercising, usually their guardians are too!
4. **Resolve to keep your pet's teeth clean.** If your pet is 4-5 years old, take a close look at his or her teeth; not just the ones in front, but pull the lips way back and look at the "cheek teeth". You may not like what you see (or smell). What would you expect after not brushing for 5 years? If your middle age pet is like most, he/she probably needs a dental cleaning. Like in humans, good oral hygiene is important to maintaining overall good health. One caution: According to the State of California Veterinary Board, dental cleaning is a medical procedure. This means a licensed veterinarian must supervise the procedure. Consult with your veterinarian to be sure your pet's teeth are cared for in a safe and effective way.
5. **Resolve to enroll in a behavior/training class with your dog.** I have noticed that dogs and dog owners who spend time together in training lessons seem to share a closer bond and a more rewarding relationship. Many types of programs are available. The phone book, pet shops, and of course, your veterinarian are all possible sources for information on what's out there.
6. **Resolve to donate time and/or resources to an animal welfare organization.** The Benicia/Vallejo Humane Society can always make good use of your volunteer time or financial gifts. Another local group, Solano County Friends of Animals, also tries to help lost or abandoned animals and would greatly appreciate any help you could provide. These groups, and others like them, continue to be the last hope for some animals and are deserving of any support you can offer.
7. **Resolve to practice effective flea control.** With the introduction of Advantage® and Frontline® several years ago, flea infestation of domestic pets has become quite uncommon. But most pets remain allergic to fleas, and even one bite can make them very itchy. Regular, year-round use of these products is necessary to keep most pets comfortable. If you put off applying these products until you see fleas in the house, get bit yourself, or worse, your pet starts to itch, you're likely looking at several months of effort to regain control of the problem.
8. **Resolve to appreciate what your pet does for you.** Each day of the year your pet brings you so much, but asks little in return. The daily dose of unconditional love and trust we get from our pets is surely heartwarming, but all too easy to take for granted. For some, a pet is their only companion when no one else has time. In addition to relieving stress, reducing blood pressure, and improving the quality (and some believe the quantity) of our lives, pets can teach a child (read: future generations) the

values of compassion and responsibility. We would all do well to remember how important these animals are to us.

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