

## Our Pets Need Preventative Healthcare Too!

There are many similarities between human medicine and companion animal medicine. Living similar lifestyles, our pets can develop many of the same ailments that people do. Some of the same diagnostic tools and procedures used to analyze our health are also common in veterinary medicine. Treatments and therapies for animals can also be similar to that of humans, often using products manufactured by the same companies who make products for human medicine.

To prevent diseases and ailments, we see our personal doctors and dentists at regular intervals for examinations, consultations and treatments. These regular trips to the doctor and dentist keep us healthy, allow us to maintain or increase our quality of life and help to control healthcare costs. However, illnesses that are not diagnosed or ignored and left untreated can reduce our lifespan and possibly diminish our quality of life. Illnesses discovered in advanced stages will be much more expensive to treat and the prognoses will likely be less promising. These principles of **preventative healthcare** also apply to managing the healthcare of our pets. As guardians, our pets rely on us to care for their health and well-being. As a veterinarian, I prefer to prevent problems today than treat them in the future.

Most people are familiar with the concept that one year in a human life is equivalent to seven years in the life of a dog or cat. Although a generalization, this ratio accurately reflects the fact that the metabolic rate of our pets is much higher than humans. Since our pets mature faster, ailments and diseases also manifest themselves at a faster rate. For this reason, preventative healthcare is vital to the well-being of our pets.

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**Dr. Martha Edwards**

Unfortunately, many pet owners believe that vaccinations are all that is necessary to maintain the health of their pets. Although vaccinations are very important, they alone will not keep our pets healthy. The best way to ensure that our pets stay happy, healthy and long lived is to provide preventative healthcare for them that includes, a comprehensive annual examination, a possible spay or neuter procedure, oral and periodontal care, heartworm, flea and tick prevention, diet management and vaccinations.

Preventative healthcare starts with a comprehensive annual examination. This annual examination should include an ocular exam, a palpation exam (lymph nodes, organs, and joints), an oral/periodontal examination, pain identification and management, illness diagnosis and prevention and discussing specific breed disposition to illness.

An oral and periodontal examination can find and prevent common problems like tooth decay, gingivitis (inflammation of the gums), periodontitis (inflammation and infection of the ligaments and bones that support the teeth) and other ailments cause by poor oral health.

Heartworm infestations left unchecked can lead to the death of the host. Consequently, heartworm prevention is very important and our pets must be treated year round. Many heartworm medications also treat other parasites like hookworms and roundworms. Preventing flea and tick infestations will eliminate the exposure to many diseases and will also keep our pets more comfortable.

Preventative healthcare should also include a discussion about diet. Like humans, our pet’s metabolic rates slow as they age. Like humans, over-consumption will lead to obesity which leads to numerous diseases. Food content needs to be regularly evaluated and matched to our pet’s needs. Food portions need to be controlled as our pets age. Providing counsel to pet owners regarding proper diets and portion control is a key part of preventative healthcare.

Lastly, our pets need vaccinations to prevent common diseases that can be debilitating or fatal. In the Keys, it is recommended that dogs receive Rabies, Distemper, Parvovirus, Leptospirosis (when living in Raccoon habitats) and Bordetella when exposed to multiple dogs. It is recommended that cats be vaccinated to ward against Rabies, Upper Respiratory Disease and the Panleukopenia Virus. Cats that spend time outdoors or live with cats that spend time outdoors should be vaccinated for the Feline Leukemia Virus (FELV).

The quote attributed to Benjamin Franklin, “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” also applies to our pets. Preventative healthcare for our pets can prevent future problems, increase the quality of life of our pets and save money in future medical costs. By following these principles of preventative healthcare, we can ensure that our pets are happy, healthy and live a long and enjoyable life!

*Dr. Martha Edwards*

