

Winter Woes

How to give your pet the best care possible this winter



LIKE US HUMANS OUR pets can suffer detrimental effects from the cold and wet weather, but also enjoy the perks of being indoors in a warm environment that we do. One of my clients had a chicken called Pickles, which used to come inside every evening to lay in front of the lovely warm fire with their two dogs - she knew what she needed!

Keeping your pet warm with a cosy and comfortable place to sleep is a priority. Hypothermia (abnormally low body temperature) can be life threatening and kittens and puppies are at greater risk of succumbing, but animals of any age may be affected. Alfie, a gorgeous Tonkinese cat came in to see us one morning after he had been missing overnight. His owner found him stuck behind a big storage container outside and he was very subdued, not moving much and definitely not his usual boisterous and smoochy self.

Besides some pain from bruising, probably from a fall, I found that he was pale, slightly dehydrated and his body temperature was so low it wasn't even showing a reading on the thermometer. He was severely hypothermic! We immediately set Alfie up on warm intravenous fluids, placed him on a heating pad and wrapped him in special thermal coverings to get his body temperature up. After a short time his thermometer reading was 34 degrees, nowhere near the normal 37 degrees, but at least now it was registering.

An hour later his colour was much better and his temperature was normal. He was moving around and he scoffed down a whole bowl of food - a very rewarding outcome!

ARTHRITIS

Arthritis is a painful condition and is usually noticeable as a stiff gait first thing in the morning (often worse in cold weather), which improves with a bit of exercise or movement.

Ensuring that your pet eats good quality food with optimal amounts of Omega 3 fatty acids, which are natural anti-inflammatories, helps them to maintain a good weight (obesity puts a lot of additional strain on sore joints) and joint health. Chondroprotective (joint protecting) agents like glucosamine are also an invaluable support for arthritic joints. There are many supplements available but as with all supplements it is important to remember that they aren't created equal, some work better than others and getting guidance from your vet is recommended.

Warm and soft bedding will go a long way to keeping them comfortable and regular, gentle exercise as well as massage will help to alleviate tension in their muscles.

OLDER PETS

During winter older animals' circulation as well as their ability to thermoregulate and keep themselves warm may be limited. In addition, problems such as arthritis and incontinence are more obvious and animals are less inclined to move around, stopping regular wear of their nails that can grow long enough to put strain on their nail beds or even grow inward into their pads, which is extremely painful.

Their decreased flexibility also makes it difficult for them to groom themselves, especially if they are obese, leading to knotted coats, which are uncomfortable and

also harbor parasites such as fleas. Some dogs and cats require their nails to be trimmed every six to eight weeks and their coats to be regularly brushed.

ANTIFREEZE

Cats and dogs are attracted to the sweet taste of antifreeze and will often lick some up if it spills on the floor. It is highly toxic and causes irreversible damage to the kidneys. Symptoms of poisoning are stumbling, vomiting and depression and unfortunately the mortality rate is high. If you suspect that your pet has come into contact with antifreeze, contact your vet immediately.

CAT FLU

Although cats may suffer from this condition at any time of the year, the colder weather may make it more prevalent. "Cat Flu" is a general term given to cats suffering from runny eyes, sneezing, a runny nose and respiratory difficulties. It may be caused by a number of viruses and bacteria that are different to those that cause flu in humans. Vaccination can be helpful to prevent the disease and limit its severity as it can be quite contagious.

From a holistic perspective, the presence of an infection illustrates that the immune system may not be functioning optimally. As always good nutrition with as much raw, natural food as possible that is free of chemicals and preservatives, as well as high in optimal amounts of nutrients such as antioxidants and omega 3 fatty acids, can make a huge difference to the body's ability to naturally combat infection.

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