

Pets Are Living Longer With Advancements in Veterinary Medicine

Cats and dogs are receiving regular check-ups despite weak economy.

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Experts say that cats and dogs are living longer as their owners become more educated about their health care. Cat and dog owners are trying to do the best they can during a slumping economy, and when it comes to pet care, people aren't skimping, according to Dr. Bill Grant II, president of the California Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA).

"Even though we're dealing with, for the most part, disposable income, pet care has not been affected by the economy," he said. "Surprisingly, people are still taking every available precaution they can to provide health care for their pets. I really haven't seen a significant downturn at all with the care of their pets."

This means providing regular veterinary check-ups and consultations regarding vaccinations, nutrition and exercise as kittens and puppies age. According to CVMA, younger and otherwise healthy animals should get a veterinary exam every year at a minimum.

For senior pets, exams are recommended more frequently to catch early signs of medical problems. However, Grant said, every animal is different and it's important to speak with a vet about an individual pet's health needs.

"Animals age more rapidly than humans, especially large-breed dogs," he said. "One year to a human can be as many as seven years biologically for a pet. Due to this relatively rapid aging, postponing a veterinary visit for just a couple of months could be the human equivalent of delaying a potentially life-saving test for years."

With the latest advancements in veterinary care, including wider availability of advanced imaging techniques, MRIs, CAT scans, chemotherapy and radiation therapy, it's not unusual to see cats and dogs living into their 20s, he said.

A slight change in appetite or activity may be the first sign of what could become a serious health issue for an aging pet, according to the CVMA. Some owners are unaware that their pet's changing condition may be a symptom of a treatable medical condition rather than age-related.

The following tests are recommended for older pets: Complete blood count to diagnose anemia, inflammation, infections and blood disorders.

Urinalysis to diagnose urinary tract infections, diabetes and kidney disease.

Blood-chemistry panel to evaluate kidney, pancreas, liver and thyroid functions.

Parasite evaluation for roundworms, tapeworms, heartworms, fleas and ticks.

With frequent, regular exams, a veterinarian may be able to detect and treat diseases early on, and sometimes prevent them, as well as suggest life-stage-appropriate changes in an individual pet's needs. "It just really can't be underscored enough," Grant said.