

Save Money on Vet Bills

Tips on how to avoid costly vet visits for most common ailments in cats and dogs.

Posted: June 4, 2009 3:00 a.m. EDT

Diligent care and prevention are key to saving on vet costs for cats and dogs. Pet health issues can cause pet owners a great deal of money in medical expenses. But, according to the Connecticut Veterinary Medical Foundation (CVMF), some ailments can be easily prevented or at least minimized.

In general, the ideal way to avoid pet health problems is through early detection and prevention. Arnold Goldman, DVM, president of the CVMF and director of the Connecticut State Animal Response Team, recommends twice-yearly physical exams after the age of 7.

“And always examine your pet regularly at home for lumps and other abnormalities,” he added. “Weigh your pet regularly. Any changes should be reported to your veterinarian.”

Below is a list compiled by the CVMF of the top reasons why people bring their pets into the vet’s office. The foundation has provided tips on how to avoid making that costly trip.

1. **Motor vehicle trauma** Use a 6-foot leash for dogs — not a retractable lead — when outside, especially near roads. Do not rely on an electric fence as it may be inoperative when least expected. Do not rely on the belief that the pet will never leave the yard or escape from the house. According to the CVMF, it takes just one squirrel to lure a pet away and lead to a serious injury, with trauma care costs potentially exceeding \$5,000.
2. **Arthritis** Keep dogs and cats lean as obesity can cause arthritis (as well as diabetes and other ailments). Avoid running dogs on pavement. Do not force dogs with “specialized” conformation to perform like a wolf. For example, toy breeds cannot run alongside their owners.
3. **Gastroenteritis** Use a leash and harness or stroller at all times, if you take your cat on supervised walks. Do not allow pets to eat anything from off of the ground. Do not vary a pet’s diet or feed them “people food.” Do not allow pets to make contact with another pet’s stool or where other parasites may be present.
4. **Skin Disease** Practice strict tick and flea control. When a pet has a history of skin disease, see a veterinarian early for preventive measures to avoid more costly interventions later. See a veterinarian early for ear discomfort as ear disease is most often linked to allergic disease, according to the CVMF.
5. **Periodontal Disease** Start brushing your pets’ teeth when they are puppies or kittens so they learn to accept the practice as normal. Brush teeth and gums. Allow for regular professional dental cleanings from age 2 and up. According to the CVMF, 85 percent of dogs and cats have moderate to severe periodontal disease due to a lack of brushing and cleanings.
6. **Bloat** Feed pets two meals daily of a measured amount of food. Avoid exercising after eating. Beware of non-productive vomiting and abdominal distention, which are signs of bloat.

The Connecticut Veterinary Medical Foundation is associated with the Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association. The foundation is a nonprofit organization that aims to enhance the health and welfare of domestic animals.