**Pet Preventative Care—Healthy pet Week, April 8-14, 2018—Website Content**

**Preventative Care:**

Today’s focus will be on preventative care for your pet. Like the other topics covered this week, preventative care is very important for the overall health and well-being of your furry friend. Preventative care is a wide ranging aspect of your pet’s health care. It is dependent on many factors like lifestyle for both owners and pets and regional differences. This is why it is so important to have an establish veterinary/client/patient relationship with a licensed veterinarian who can help you make decisions on preventative care measures you should take with your pet. Age, sex, breed, lifestyle and regional differences are all important considerations in your preventative care plan. Your veterinarian is your best source of information based on their education in this field and their relationship with you and your pet. Together you can come up with a preventative care plan for your pet that fits the needs of your pet.

All pets come with special care instructions. Feed daily, love forever and yearly checkups. We know you have the first two covered, but what about the last one? Yearly checkups are equally as important! They are essential to your furry friend’s happiness and well-being. They are the best way to keep your pet healthier, longer! During a veterinarian’s physical exam, your pet gets checked from tongue to teeth to toes to tail. (Plus all the parts in between!) An in-depth, medical checkup not only assesses your pet’s current health status, but also helps to prevent future problems, such as obesity, periodontal disease and diabetes. It also provides you and your veterinarian an opportunity to discuss all the ways to keep your pet in good shape and to answer any questions you may have. We can cover any topic you want in the comfort of our exam room.

As mentioned, preventative care is a broad topic. We will cover some of the most basic components of preventative care in pets including vaccinations, parasite control, heartworm prevention and considerations for geriatric patients. There are countless resources available to you with recommendations on these areas. Again, consultation and recommendations from your veterinarian are most important, but your veterinarian can also guide you to other reputable resources on preventable health care. Several organizations recognized by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) have developed informative websites that will be highlighted here.

General Preventative Care: American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA)/American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) - Preventative Care Guidelines 2011: <https://www.aaha.org/pet_owner/aaha_guidelines/preventive_healthcare_guidelines.aspx>

1. **Vaccinations:**

Vaccinations are a way to stimulate your pet’s immune system against certain infectious diseases. Age, lifestyle, region, and type of species, all contribute to understanding your pet’s risk with infectious diseases and developing an appropriate vaccination protocol to reduce that risk. It is important to note, vaccinations do not prevent your pet from being exposed to infectious diseases that can be present in the environment. Vaccinations are designed to help a pet’s immune system respond more quickly to an infection and hopefully reduce symptoms and speed recovery. At times, even with appropriate vaccination protocols in place, a patient may require veterinary care of overcome severe illness due to infectious disease.

When it comes to vaccinations, it is also important to be aware of federal, state and local government regulations. Zoonotic disease is also a vital consideration in vaccination plans, as zoonotic diseases pose risk to both humans as well as pets. Here are some valuable sources for vaccine guidelines, organized by species, that may help you during your conversation with your veterinarian on vaccinations for your pet.

Canine: American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) - Canine Vaccination Guidelines 2017: <https://www.aaha.org/pet_owner/aaha_guidelines/aahas_canine_vaccination_guidelines.aspx>

Feline: American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) - 2013 AAFP Feline Vaccination Advisory Panel Report: <https://www.catvets.com/guidelines/practice-guidelines/feline-vaccination-guidelines>

Equine: American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) - Core Vaccination Guidelines 2017 <https://aaep.org/guidelines/vaccination-guidelines/core-vaccination-guidelines>

1. **Parasite Control:**

There are a number of internal and external parasites that can infest your pet. A parasite lives off of a host animal itself or by the nutrients the host provides. Either way, they can serve as a health risk to your pet. Parasites like fleas, ticks, intestinal worms and mites are just a few which can affect our pets on a daily basis. Poor hair coats, weight loss, failure to gain weight and skin irritation are some of the symptoms that can occur due to parasites. More severe symptoms could include anemia, diarrhea, immune dysfunction and severe systemic illness. Parasites also have the potential to serve as vectors and transmit infectious diseases like Lyme disease, Erlichiosis, Mycoplasma and tapeworms, among others. Though these parasites offer a risk to your pet, they can be easily managed through preventative medications. Your veterinarian can help you select parasite control based on your pet’s exposure risk as well as certain difficulties with route of administration (i.e. “Doc, my dog won’t take a pill). It is important to note that not all parasite controls work in the same manner. Your veterinarian’s knowledge of parasite life-cycles, individual product MOA (mode of action) and patient/household situation will allow them to help you make an informed decision on which preventative medications are best for your pet.

1. **Heartworm Prevention:**

Heartworm disease is a very serious disease caused by a worm that is transmitted to our dogs, cats and other small mammal pets. Once an animal is infected with heartworms by the mosquito, the worm can develop the heart, lungs and associated blood vessels and cause severe disease in the form of heart failure, lung disease as well as cause damage to other organs. Heartworm prevention is an important part of preventative care in order to keep your pets from suffering from this severe and life-threatening disease. Heartworm testing can be done by your veterinarian to establish your pet is free of the disease. Once this has been established, it is recommended that your pet start year-round heartworm prevention. Heartworm prevention works by killing the heartworm larva that mosquitoes transmit to your pet. There are several heartworm preventative products available to you with a prescription from your veterinarian. The American Heartworm Society (<https://www.heartwormsociety.org/>) is an excellent established resource for veterinarians and the public on information regarding diagnosis, prevention and treatment of heartworm disease. For a more in depth discussion on heartworm disease, check out their website and available recourses and talk with your veterinarian about how to protect your pet against heartworm disease. <https://www.heartwormsociety.org/pet-owner-resources/heartworm-basics>

1. **Geriatric patients:**

Geriatric patients can have a large range of health care needs. Conditions that can develop may be due to breed or genetic predispositions, while others could be related to lifestyle or previous illness. Either way, you and your veterinarian can work together to develop a plan to meet the needs of your aging friend. Your veterinarian may recommend monitoring/treating your pet’s specific condition through blood testing, more frequent examinations, weight monitoring, physical therapy, etc. Some conditions require long term medicinal therapy. All medications have side effects and it is important to have a conversation with your veterinarian to go over these side effects and how they should be managed. The key is having a relationship with a veterinary medical professional that understands your pet’s specific condition as well as you and your pet’s specific needs. Together you can make your pet’s “golden year” some of the best.

Preventative care is a vital component in the overall health and well-being of your pet. Your pet is important to you and it is important that you consider these basics in preventative care and start the conversation with your veterinarian on how to start a preventative care plan on your pet today.