

From your veterinarian

## Protect your cat or dog with wellness visits

Twice-yearly wellness exams are important for keeping your cat or dog in tip-top shape. Your veterinarian will ask questions like those below to develop a wellness program that's right for your pet and may include important screenings included in the wellness checklist.



### Crucial questions about your cat or dog

#### QUESTIONS FOR DOG OWNERS

1. Does your dog come into contact with other people's pets?
2. Do you ever forget to give your dog its monthly heartworm dose?
3. Is there wildlife in your area, including deer, squirrels, raccoons, or skunks?
4. Has your dog ever experienced behavioral problems?

#### QUESTIONS FOR CAT OWNERS

1. Have you ever seen fleas or ticks on your cat?
2. Does your cat go outside?
3. What is the total number of other pets in your household?
4. Has your cat ever suffered an injury requiring emergency care?

### Wellness checklist

#### ADULT DOGS (1 TO 6 YEARS)

- Immunizations
- Parasite check
- Heartworm check
- Dental health
- Blood panel
- Chemistry panel
- Urinalysis

#### ADDITIONAL EXAMS FOR SENIOR DOGS (7+ YEARS)

- Osteoarthritic check
- Chest radiograph
- Thyroid check

#### ADULT CATS (1 TO 6 YEARS)

- Immunizations
- Parasite check
- Heartworm check
- Dental health
- Blood panel
- Chemistry panel
- Urinalysis

#### ADDITIONAL EXAMS FOR SENIOR CATS (7+ YEARS)

- Osteoarthritis check
- Renal disease screen
- Thyroid check
- Blood pressure check



## HOW DOES YOUR PET'S MOUTH LOOK?

Dental disease is a silent process that may cause many other illnesses, including kidney, heart, and blood infections. When pets don't receive the dental care they need to keep their teeth clean and their gums healthy, their mouths can harbor bad bacteria. Ask your nurse or veterinarian for more information.



### Stage 1

Here is a healthy mouth with normal bacterial flora, sound gums, and minimal plaque buildup.



### Stage 2

You can see the inflammation caused on the gum tissue from the bacterial buildup in the beginning stages of dental disease. While the teeth still appear somewhat healthy, the health of the mouth is starting to decline.



### Stage 3

This shows an unhealthy oral cavity with unfavorable bacteria, gum and inner lip ulcerations, receding gums, root exposure, and plaque buildup. Some tooth loss is probable. This condition may be painful.



### Stage 4

This mouth is full of pus, bacteria, and disease. The teeth are falling out and the gums are severely inflamed and infected. The roots are infected and exposed. Tooth loss is eminent. This condition is probably painful.

From your veterinarian

## 5 facts about flea allergy dermatitis

*Your pet can't stop itching, but why? Here's a look at flea allergy dermatitis (FAD), a condition your pet could be suffering from, even if you've taken all the standard precautions against fleas. Read through the information, then consult with your veterinarian to find the best treatment option for your pet.*

### 1. FAD is common.

According to the Companion Animal Parasite Council (CAPC), flea allergy dermatitis accounts for about 50 percent of all canine and feline dermatological cases reported to veterinarians. Watch for scratching around the tail base, rear, and groin in dogs, and scratching or crusty bumps around your cat's neck. Cats with FAD also tend to lick constantly, often to the point of exposing bare skin.

### 2. FAD can affect your pet even if you've administered a topical or oral parasite preventive.

Most of the more popular parasite preventives work great for the average pet, particularly when used year-round. But they're not magic. When a flea jumps on your pet, the preventive doesn't kill it instantly—there's always a bit of a delay. If your pet suffers from FAD, a few bites over time can result in hours of scratching or licking.

### 3. Fleas aren't always present with FAD.

You can search and search and come up empty. Your veterinarian may not even be able to spot a flea on



your pet. Fleas are fast, and some pets have thick coats. The fleas don't want to be spotted, so even a thorough search can overlook them. And all it takes is a quick walk near a nest of fleas to expose your pet to a whole new batch.

### 4. Your other pets won't necessarily itch.

Not all pets are affected with FAD. So even if you've administered parasite preventives to all of your pets and they all spend the same amount of time outdoors, one might spend all day scratching his itchy coat while the other remains unaffected.

### 5. Even indoor cats can suffer from FAD.

Fleas don't just nest outdoors. Your other pets could carry them into the house, or they could sneak in with your human guests. As long as they have a warm place to thrive, they pose a threat to your pets.

Common treatment options for FAD include a 10- to 14-day dose of a mild steroid, along with a vigilant protocol for flea control. Most pets will find relief from itching within one to two days. Talk to your veterinarian to find what will work best for your pet.

Source: Dr. Carlo Vitale, San Francisco Veterinary Specialists

# Why punishment fails; what works better

Think some form of punishment is necessary when training your dog? The following examples will show you why it just doesn't work and can make matters even worse.

By Valarie V. Tynes, DVM, DACVB

**P**unishing a dog often doesn't work or can even make a behavior problem worse. Three important rules must be met for punishment to be effective.

1. The punishment must occur every time the unwanted behavior occurs.
2. The punishment must be administered within a second or two of the inappropriate behavior.
3. The punishment must be aversive enough to stop the dog from repeating the unwanted behavior in the future but not be so aversive as to frighten the dog.

Meeting all three of these criteria can be difficult. That's why punishment often fails to solve behavior problems and should not be the first training method of choice. Positive reinforcement training, in which animals are rewarded for appropriate behaviors, is safer and more effective.

As seen in the two examples below, punishment teaches an animal what you don't want it to do but fails to teach it what you expect of it.

## EXAMPLE A

**Problem behavior:** A dog gets on the furniture.

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**Owner's response:** Every time the owner sees the dog on the furniture, she yells at it and threatens it with a rolled up newspaper. When she does this, the dog slinks off the furniture.

**Result:** The dog continues to get on the furniture, although it is less likely to do so in the owner's presence. Because the dog still gets on the furniture when the owner is away, it is being rewarded part of the time for the unwanted behavior, and the first rule above is not being met. So the punishment does not solve the problem. If the owner gets increasingly

frustrated with the dog, she may increase the severity of the punishment, and depending on the dog's temperament, it may respond by becoming fearful of the owner and avoiding her. Some dogs might even begin growling and snapping when the owner approaches.

**Suggestion:** Success will be more likely if the owner blocks the dog's access to the furniture whenever she can't be around (e.g. confine the dog to a crate or a different room in the house). Or the owner can make the furniture less appealing by covering it with plastic. Commercially

available devices for keeping animals off surfaces such as elastic mats, plastic mats with rigid points (or plastic carpet protector material laid upside down) can also be used. A comfortable bed should also be made available to the dog in the vicinity of the favored furniture, and the dog should be rewarded every time it is caught resting on the bed.

### EXAMPLE B

**Problem behavior:** A dog greets people by jumping on them.

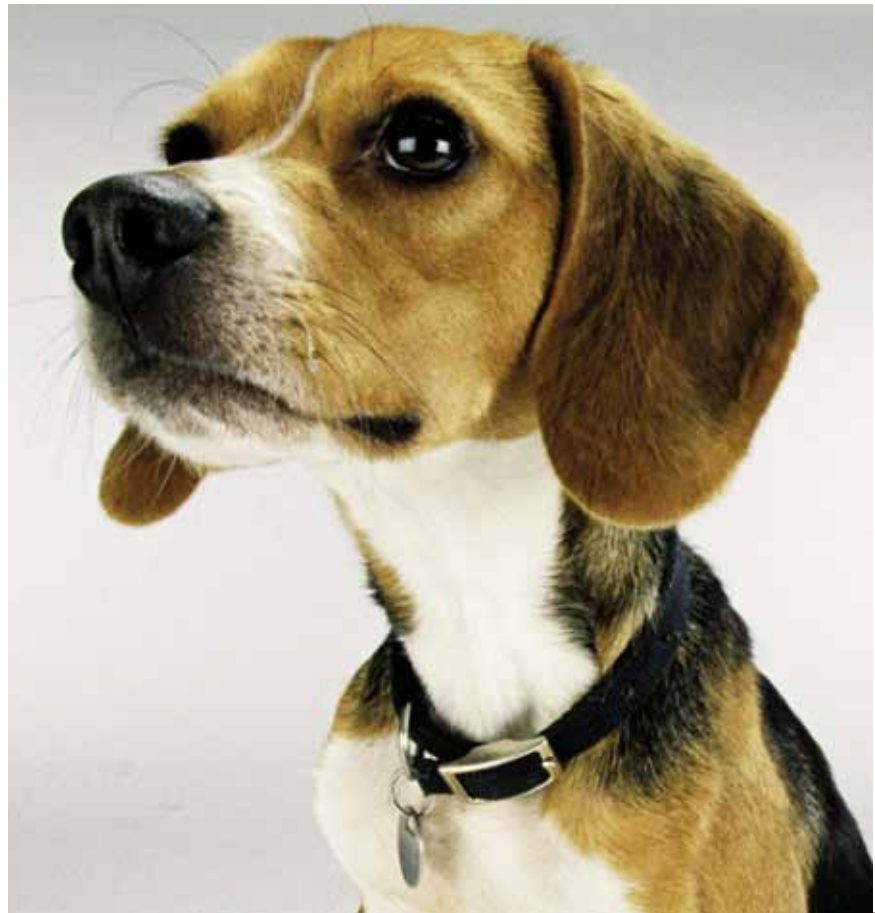
**Owners' response:** Whenever the dog jumps on its owners, they kneel it in the chest or kick it.

**Result:** The dog avoids the husband (the largest man in the household; he has kicked the dog hard enough that it is now afraid of him) but continues to jump on everyone else. Many dogs are highly motivated to greet people by getting close to their faces. In most cases, kneeling or kicking such a dog is less powerful than the dog's desire to greet people by jumping on them. In addition, since not all people the dog meets will kneel it or kick it, the punishment doesn't meet the first rule. The third rule is also not met because the dog doesn't always perceive the kneeling as punishment and, in fact, is reinforced for jumping because it's getting attention.

**Suggestion:** Rather than trying to punish the dog for jumping, the owners should use positive reinforcement to teach the dog to sit to greet everyone. Sitting is an alternative behavior that can be rewarded with petting or a food treat.

### APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION

These examples highlight the fact that when the punishment criteria are not met, behavior problems can worsen, and the bond between the pet and the owner can be damaged beyond repair. When punishment is used incorrectly, it will



Your veterinarian will help you develop an appropriate behavior modification program that focuses on positive reinforcement.

appear unpredictable and confusing, so many pets become anxious or fearful around the owner that administers the punishment. When punishment is used in an attempt to train an animal that is already afraid or anxious, its fear and anxiety are likely to worsen and may lead to aggression.

If your dog is exhibiting inappropriate behavior, consult your veterinarian. He or she will help you develop an appropriate behavior modification program that focuses on using positive reinforcement or will refer you to someone with extensive experience in developing such behavior modification programs. ❖

# 10 signs of illness in cats

*Sometimes it's difficult to identify when your cat's not feeling well. Watch for these signs of illness, and consult with your veterinarian as soon as possible if your pet begins to show any of them.*

## 1 Inappropriate elimination

A cat that urinates inappropriately could have any number of conditions associated with the behavior, including lower urinary tract disease, kidney disease, urinary tract infection, and diabetes mellitus. It can also be a sign of arthritis, which makes it difficult for cats to get into the litter box.

## 2 Changes in interaction

Cats are social animals, so changes in interactions with humans or pets can signal disease, fear, anxiety, or pain.

## 3 Changes in activity

A decrease in activity is often a sign of arthritis or systemic illness, while an increase in activity can be caused by hyperthyroidism.

## 4 Changes in sleeping habits

If your cat is sleeping more than normal (keep in mind that average adult cats may sleep 16 to 18 hours a day—though much of that is “catnapping”), it could be a sign of an underlying disease.

## 5 Changes in food and water consumption

Most cats are not finicky eaters. Decreased food intake can be a sign of several disorders, ranging from poor dental health to cancer. Increased food consumption can be caused by diabetes mellitus, hyperthyroidism, or other health problems.



## 6 Unexplained weight loss or gain

Sudden weight loss can be a sign of hyperthyroidism, diabetes mellitus, or a host of other diseases. Obesity, on the other hand, can cause an increased risk of diabetes mellitus, joint disease, and other problems.

## 7 Changes in grooming

Patches of hair loss or a greasy or matted appearance can signal an underlying disease. Cats who

have difficulty grooming often suffer from fear, anxiety, obesity, or other illnesses. An increase in grooming may signal a skin problem.

## 8 Signs of stress

Stressed cats may exhibit signs of depression, hide more, or spend more time awake and scanning their environment. These signs may indicate a medical condition, so it's important to rule out physical ailments before addressing the stress behaviorally.

## 9 Changes in vocalization

An increase in vocalization or howling is often seen with an underlying condition like hyperthyroidism or high blood pressure. Many cats also vocalize more if they're in pain or anxious.

## 10 Bad breath

Bad breath is an early indicator of an oral problem—studies have shown that 70 percent of cats have gum disease as early as age 3.