Healthy New Year to You – and Your Pet!

If you're like millions of Americans, you're pledging to shed some pounds in this New Year. Maybe you'll get a fitness club membership. Stock the fridge with more veggies. Vow to take the stairs instead of the elevator. But what about your pet? Has it been a while since Fido got a good workout at the dog park? Is Fluffy's belly swinging dangerously close to the floor? Your pets can't make important lifestyle changes for themselves; they depend on you for a healthy diet and regular exercise. "Obesity in pets leads to multiple chronic health issues," said Mark Hiebert, DVM, Whitewater Veterinary Hospital. "In general, an obese pet will have a shorter lifespan than its leaner counterpart."

Dr. Hiebert said the obese dogs he sees tend to suffer from osteoarthritis that can be debilitating as a dog ages. He said obese dogs are also at higher risk of diabetes. Obese cats also are more likely to become diabetic and to develop a liver disease called hepatic lipidosis, which can be fatal if left untreated.

"There's no question that obesity robs our pets of both length and quality of life," Dr. Hiebert stated.

But how do you know if your pet is obese?

"It's really not about the pounds because a cat, for example, with just two or three extra pounds can be 20 percent over her ideal weight," explained Dr. Hiebert. "So more important than what the scale says and how an animal looks is my ability to count an animal's ribs with my fingers."

If you suspect your pet is obese, your veterinarian can help. First, your veterinarian will determine if any other health problems may be exacerbating the issue. Once those have been ruled out or treated, the veterinarian will look at diet and exercise.

Dr. Hiebert said the biggest cause of obesity in pets is chronic overfeeding, followed by a lack of exercise. He contends that properly measured portions can sometimes be even more effective than diet foods for weight loss that's gradual and lasting.

"Also, spending time with your pet and giving your cat or dog exercise are really the best and healthiest ways to show love for your pet," noted Dr. Hiebert. "We tend to equate giving treats with showing love but too many treats are just plain harmful."

As for getting more exercise, it can be a challenge for both people and pets in a frigid state like Wisconsin. Dr. Hiebert offers these suggestions.

Consider giving your dog a day or two a week at a local doggy day care facility. These facilities have both indoor and outdoor play areas, so exercise is always possible regardless of the weather.

Check your local humane society for indoor play opportunities for dogs. Some humane societies offer such play times during the winter.

Turn your home into a playground for your cat. Simply walk around your house trailing a safe toy on a long handle or string and let your cat chase it. (Be sure to store anything with a long string out of the reach of your cat. Some cats will eat string, which can cause serious internal injury.)

And, once your pet is on the right track, be sure to keep her weight and overall health in check by taking her to your veterinarian for annual wellness exams.

For more information on these and other topics visit
wvma.org
or talk with your veterinarian.

Veterinarians: Healing the Cow, Protecting the Milk

There you are, staring into the dairy case. Some milk jugs say “organic.” Add those to the Vitamin D, the 2%, the 1%, the lactose-free, the chocolate and your head starts spinning. Then you seem to recall hearing something about antibiotics and milk. “What was that? Am I thinking of something else?” you ask yourself as annoyed shoppers start lining up behind you.

You can stop racking your brain: There are no antibiotics in the milk you buy. Not a trace.

“If a cow is treated with antibiotics to relieve an infection, its milk and meat are not allowed into the food chain until the antibiotic has cleared the cow’s system,” explained Kristi Orchard, DVM, MPH, a bovine veterinarian at Waterloo Veterinary Clinic, Waterloo, Wisconsin.

In fact, much of the antibiotic approval process used by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) hinges on the time it takes for the antibiotic to clear a cow’s system. FDA-established “withdrawal” times for antibiotics ensure that an antibiotic does not end up in the dairy products at your local grocery store.

“And from a food safety standpoint, antibiotics are extremely valuable to veterinarians for treating bacterial infections,” noted Dr. Orchard, who earned her master’s degree in public health from the UW School of Medicine and Public Health in 2006. “Antibiotics control infections in dairy herds and help to ensure high-quality milk and meat for the consumer.”

Milk and dairy products are some of the most regulated and tested foods in the country.

Dr. Orchard explained that all milk is strictly tested for antibiotics on the farm and at the processing plant. A series of checks and balances in the food system protects the consumer, and any milk that tests positive for antibiotics is disposed of and is not used for human consumption.

“Additionally, using antibiotics is part of a veterinarian’s compassionate care of animals,” she said. “When a cow becomes ill, it’s my responsibility to use antibiotics to reduce pain and

suffering and to slow the growth of bacteria that's infecting the animal."

As a profession, veterinarians are committed to only using antibiotics when deemed absolutely necessary for the prevention, control and treatment of cattle disease.

"The proper and successful use of antibiotics comes from the expertise of the veterinarian as well as a valid veterinarian-client-patient relationship," said Dr. Orchard. "That means a veterinarian must be familiar with the client, their farm and the cows' condition in order to prescribe an antibiotic for treatment."

So, now you're armed with information about antibiotics. But when it comes to choosing Vitamin D, 2%, 1%, lactose-free, chocolate or strawberry, well, you're on your own.

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