

5 New Year's Resolutions for Pet Lovers

Five surefire recommendations for making your four-legged companion's life a bit happier and healthier in the new year.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- When making New Year's resolutions, it's always a good idea to include furry family members in your plans
- One of the best ways to keep resolutions once you've made them is to start small and avoid the temptation to bite off more than you can chew
- The good news: the right small changes can make a big difference in your pet's health, so there's nothing wrong with starting small as long as you stick with it!

One of the problems with keeping New Year's resolutions is that often, we simply set our expectations too high. That's why I encourage pet parents to think small when it comes to planning positive changes for furry family members in the new year. When a goal is doable, it's more likely to actually get done, so here are five suggestions for making incremental positive improvements in your pet's life in 2024.

1. **Schedule at least one wellness exam with your veterinarian** — Visits to the veterinarian shouldn't be for **unnecessary re-vaccinations**. A true and thorough wellness appointment should involve a hands-on, nose-to-tail examination of your cat or dog, along with appropriate blood tests and other diagnostics to check organ function. These visits (I recommend two a year for most pets) are invaluable, proactive tools to stay on top of your pet's health and catch problems as early as possible.

Often pets aren't seen by a veterinarian until an illness is in an advanced stage. This usually means the animal has been suffering for some time, and sadly, it often means there's no way to stop or reverse the progress of the disease. Not every condition can be detected by a physical exam, of course, but you'd be surprised how many potential health crises are averted by an alert pet owner who detects a problem and makes an appointment with their veterinarian.

I also encourage you to have a **holistic or integrative practitioner** on your pet's health care team. There is a lot that can be done to improve the health and quality of life of your animal companion beyond what traditional Western medicine is able to offer.

2. **Make one small improvement in your pet's diet** — The most important thing most pet parents can do for their animal companion's health in the new year is feed a fresh, balanced, species-specific diet. When it comes to helping your pet have a long, healthy life, there is no single thing more important than providing him with the right nutrition.

Find out where your pet's current diet ranks on my list of **13 pet foods**, and if you learn that it's on the lower

end of the ranking, set a goal for 2024 to start working your way up the list.

To be optimally healthy, dogs and cats need quality protein, fats, and a small number of vegetables and fruits that provide antioxidants and fiber to animals who no longer hunt whole prey.

Your pet needs unadulterated, fresh, whole foods that are moisture dense. They don't need grains, fillers, artificial preservatives, colors, additives, chemicals, byproducts, or processed or genetically modified (GM) foods. Although animals can eat some processed foods, they aren't designed to consume a lifetime of dry or canned diets.

3. **Add one item to your daily or weekly pet care routine** — Suggestions:

- **Brush your pet's teeth**, ideally every day, but at least several times a week
- Talk to your integrative veterinarian about adding an appropriate **nutritional supplement** to your pet's diet
- Massage or stretch your dog once a week
- Clip a few nails. Clipping a few nails at a time can be **less stressful** than doing all of them at once
- **Take your cat for a walk** outdoors or a few minutes of fresh air and sunshine once or twice a week

4. **Exercise your pet for one extra hour a week** — Regular exercise is essential to the physical and mental health of dogs and cats, and many pets today get very little.

One extra hour a week is 60 minutes over seven days, or less than 10 extra minutes a day. If you and your pet take weekends off, you need to add just 12 extra minutes of exercise to your regular routine Monday through Friday.

Another option is to take your dog for an extra half-hour walk on Saturdays and Sundays. If your pet is a cat, you could add 15 extra minutes of active play four times a week.

5. **Take one step to add enrichment to your pet's day** — Extra time spent with your dog can be a wonderful way to enrich his daily life. If you spend that time getting involved in an obedience or **nose work** class or one of dozens of other dog-centric activities, even better.

Spending an extra few minutes each day with your cat is also enriching for her, especially if you use the time to **increase her fitness** through interactive play.

Environmental enrichment means enhancing your pet's surroundings and lifestyle so that he is presented with novelty in his environment, opportunities to learn, and encouragement to engage in instinctive, species-specific behaviors. Ways to **enrich your dog's environment** can include:

- Providing a supply of different types of toys in varying shapes, sizes, textures, colors, and scents
- Insuring he receives adequate daily exercise/playtime
- Taking him on different types of walks
- Providing him with regular opportunities for social enrichment, for example, visits to the dog park, play dates with other dogs, or involvement in activities such as agility and nose work

Enriching a kitty's environment involves creating minimally stressful living quarters and reducing or eliminating events that cause anxiety. Any change to your cat's daily routine is experienced (by her) as a

stress-inducing event. The goal is to minimize change and maximize the amount of control kitty feels over her situation.

Enrichment may also mean adding or changing things in your pet's environment that encourage her to perform or mimic natural feline activities like climbing to a high spot or hunting "prey" (cat toys).

If there's room for improvement in your pet's lifestyle, today is a really good day to think about what you can do differently to help your four-legged family member enjoy better health and a longer life.

Sources and References

[The Spruce Pets 12/21/22](#)
