

Want to Stretch Your Pet's Life? 10 Ways to Help

Who doesn't want their beloved pet with them as long as possible? Maximize the number of days you get to spend with your pet with this 10-point checklist. Surprisingly, each one can impact your pet's longevity and quality of life in a significant way. How many are you already doing?

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Dogs and cats need “the right stuff” from their human guardians to help them live long, healthy lives. Although you can't influence the genes your pet inherited, there are many things you can do to enhance your dog's or cat's quality of life and lifespan
- The foundation for good health and longevity is proper nutrition. Keeping your pet at a healthy weight through portion control and exercise is also crucial
- Twice-yearly wellness exams, a minimalist approach to vaccinations, and daily dental care will also be extremely beneficial to your pet's long-term health
- Other ways you can make a big difference for your dog or cat: supervise him at all times when he's outdoors; maintain his frame with alternative therapies like chiropractic; make an informed sterilization decision; and reduce or eliminate his exposure to environmental toxins

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Does your pet have the right stuff? Or, more to the point are you providing your dog or cat with the right stuff to help her have a happy, healthy and long life?

There are some things about your pet that you don't have much influence over, for example, her genetics or breed predisposition. But as your furry companion's guardian, there are many things you can provide that can dramatically improve her longevity and quality of life.

10 Ways to Give Your Pet the Right Stuff for a Long Life

1. **The right nutrition** — The food you offer your dog or cat serves as the foundation of a long, healthy life. The right diet supports your pet's immune system, his digestive health, musculoskeletal system, and much more.

Remember to always to feed balanced, GMO-free, preferably organic, species-appropriate meals prepared by you, with raw food components. For many people, preparing their own homemade pet food is how they feed a nutritious diet without breaking the bank. It's also how they ensure the quality of food their pet eats.

If you don't have the time or inclination to make your own pet food, another option is to feed your pet a balanced, commercially prepared raw, or dehydrated raw diet. If your pet has medical issues and you are concerned about pathogens in raw food, look for brands that have undergone high-pressure pasteurization (HPP). These pathogen-free foods are actually the cleanest, most sterile pet foods currently on the market.

2. **The right weight** — When feeding your pet for good health and a long life, you must also offer the appropriate portions for his size, age, and activity level. Calculate how many calories your dog or cat should consume each day to maintain an optimum weight, and practice portion control to insure your four-legged family member doesn't become a pet obesity statistic.

Overweight cats and dogs have a poor quality of life – and a significantly shorter life — compared to their lean counterparts. They also inevitably suffer a long list of obesity-related health problems, most or all of which can be avoided by simply maintaining your pet at a healthy weight.

3. **The right exercise** — A well-exercised pet is naturally much healthier than her under-exercised peers, and your pet's overall physical conditioning contributes to (or detracts from) her longevity.

Both dogs and cats need the mental stimulation that playtime and exercise provide so they don't grow bored or develop neurotic coping mechanisms. Your furry companion is a natural athlete. Regular aerobic exertion and playtime are necessary for a sound frame, good muscle strength and tone, and mental stimulation.

4. **The right healthcare** — Schedule twice-yearly veterinary wellness visits. Remember animals don't get sick overnight. The progression from health to illness (or from illness back to health) happens in stages. Dogs and cats typically look and behave normally on the outside even though trouble is brewing beneath the surface. Often it's not until they're quite sick that they start showing signs.

The goal of regularly scheduled wellness visits is to stop a slide toward ill health before full-blown disease develops. For example, your proactive vet will want to learn that your dog is Lyme positive before symptoms develop. Or they want to see that your cat's kidney enzymes are slightly elevated even though she seems fine. Identifying and acting on these changes prior to an actual health crisis is what proactive veterinary medicine is all about.

Pets age exponentially, compared to humans. Their lifespans are generally 10-20 years, depending on breed and genetics. That means their wellness protocols (including diet, supplements, and exercise programs) will change dynamically over time, based on physical exam changes and bloodwork changes. Physical exams must be frequent enough to address minor changes before degeneration occurs.

Partner with a proactive veterinarian who reviews and if necessary, redesigns your pet's lifestyle protocols every six months. This will ensure that you're catching any subtle changes as your pet ages, and also slowing down the aging process with the best possible protocol customized to your pet's unique physiology and lifestyle.

5. **The right vaccination protocol** — As the truth about the potential dangers of vaccines slowly emerges, more veterinarians are acknowledging that vaccines are not the benign "preventive" tools they were once thought to be. If your vet is still recommending yearly core vaccinations, ask that antibody titer tests be done instead to measure your pet's current immunity. The fact is that most pets who were properly vaccinated as puppies or kittens are protected for life against most life-threatening viral diseases.

Similarly, if your vet is recommending non-core vaccines, you should have a frank discussion with him (or her) about the actual risk your pet runs from whatever diseases he wants to vaccinate against. Do your own

research on the risks and benefits of all non-core vaccines as well, which are generally not as safe or effective as core vaccines.

6. **The right dental hygiene** — Studies link gum disease and heart disease in humans and dogs (studies on cats are hard to find, but it's reasonable to assume a similar link exists for felines). If your pet develops periodontal disease, the surface of the gums will be weakened. This tissue breakdown allows mouth bacteria to invade your pet's bloodstream and travel throughout his body.

If his immune system doesn't kill off the bacteria, it can reach the heart and infect it. Studies have shown that oral bacteria, once in the bloodstream, seem able to fight off attacks by the immune system.

Brush your pet's teeth every day, or several times a week at a minimum, in conjunction with providing appropriate raw bones, chews, and dental bones. You should also do routine mouth inspections in which you look inside your dog's or cat's mouth, feel around for loose teeth or unusual lumps or bumps on the tongue, under the tongue, along the gum line, and on the roof of the mouth.

It's also important that your vet completes a thorough oral exam during each wellness visit. He or she will alert you to any existing or potential problems in your pet's mouth, and recommend professional teeth cleaning, if necessary.

7. **The right supervision** — As much as you may want to allow your pet to run free in the great outdoors, it's generally a bad idea except in certain very specific circumstances. Most of the time the risks (automobile traffic, thieves, animal predators, poisons, rotting food, disease-carrying wildlife, etc.) far outweigh the benefits.

Your dog should be on a leash whenever you leave the house. Exceptions might be at an off-leash dog park, or on a hiking trail or beach that allows off-leash dogs. He should also be dependably responsive to verbal commands like sit, stay, drop it, etc. If your cat goes outside, he should be in a harness with a leash, or in a safe outdoor cat enclosure. It's best that your pet's paws get regular contact with the earth to ground him.

8. **The right body maintenance** — Keeping your dog or cat active through exercise is one of the best ways to maintain musculoskeletal integrity and organ health. Additional health maintenance therapies are also advisable if you want to provide an optimal quality of life for your companions. Some of these include:

- Chiropractic treatments
- Acupuncture
- Physical therapy
- Massage
- Stretching

In order for your dog or cat to enjoy not just a long life, but also a vibrant life, she needs the ability to move around comfortably until her final days. Whatever you do to keep your pet's frame in good working order will go a long way toward maintaining her quality of life, throughout her life.

9. **The right birth control** — Each of the organs your pet was born with has a job to do, and organ systems are interdependent. Removing any organ, including the organs of reproduction, has health consequences. There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that desexing dogs, especially at an early age, can create health and behavior problems.

"Desexing" involves the traditional spay or neuter surgery where all the sex hormone-secreting tissues are removed. "Sterilization" renders the animal no longer able to reproduce, but leaves his or her sex hormone-secreting tissues undamaged.

Whenever possible, leave pets intact. However, this approach requires a highly responsible pet guardian who is fully committed to and capable of preventing the pet from mating. An alternative is to sterilize without desexing. This means performing a procedure that will prevent pregnancy while sparing the testes or ovaries so that they continue to produce hormones essential for health and well-being.

This typically involves a vasectomy for males, and either a tubal ligation or modified spay for females. The modified spay removes the uterus while preserving the hormone-producing ovaries.

If neither of these options works for you and your pet is a dog, hold off on spaying or neutering until your dog is at least 18 months to 2 years of age.

10. **The right environment** — Reduce or eliminate your pet's exposure to toxins. These include chemical pesticides like flea and tick preventives, lawn chemicals (weed killers, herbicides, etc.), tobacco smoke, flame retardants, and household cleaners (detergents, soaps, cleansers, dryer sheets, and room deodorizers).

Because we live in a toxic world and avoiding all chemical exposure is nearly impossible, offer a periodic detoxification protocol to your pets.

Sources and References

[PetMD, September 28, 2023](#)
