

This May Work for Dogs, but Never, Ever for Cats

Dogs and cats are very different creatures and their basic needs vary, too. For example, while certain human medications might work just fine for your dog, the tiniest amount of this one could kill your cat. Please don't make these assumptions about dogs and cats.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Dogs and cats may be our favorite four-legged friends, but they have a number of differences that make one a canine and the other a feline — totally different animals
- Cats don't pant to cool themselves like dogs do, they can't handle medication as well and, as carnivores, they need their protein even more than scavenging dogs do
- Canines and felines alike enjoy scavenging, but dogs are better at it because cats typically hunt to kill, with less focus on scavenging, and as far as personalities, cats tend to be more independent while dogs seem to thrive on interaction
- Dogs pant to cool themselves off. Cats rely on other cooling mechanisms
- If you see a cat panting, more than likely he's experiencing something completely different than being overheated

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Whether you consider yourself to be a cat person or more of a dog devotee, or you have one or more of each pet persuasion, you may consider your pets to be, collectively or singly, your best four-legged friends. Cats have their tendencies, foibles and unique health traits, and so do dogs. You feed them differently, handle them differently and can legitimately expect different behaviors. Here are nine of them to consider:

1. **Cats and dogs have different systems; hence different treatments** — Very much like humans of all kinds who can get the sniffles and other cold symptoms, dogs and cats share some of the same health issues, but then again, some illnesses are completely unique to each species. According to veterinarian and certified veterinary acupuncturist Dr. Jeffrey Levy, based in Manhattan, dogs have a greater tendency to experience arthritis symptoms and other troubles related to **mobility**. He added a few other important health particulars, from Paw Culture:

*"Dogs more frequently experience skin disorders, trauma, parasites (fleas and ticks), pancreatitis and lymphoma. In cats, we see many cases of inflammatory bowel disease, food allergies, asthma, diabetes, immune deficiency and feline leukemia. Cats can, of course, injure themselves, but are naturally cautious and less likely to develop wear and tear on their joints."*¹

2. **Cats and dogs are both carnivores — with an important distinction** — Felines and canines are both **carnivores** (meat eaters), but with a very important distinction. Cats are obligate carnivores, whereas **dogs are scavenging carnivores**. Dogs are scavenging, or facultative carnivores, which in general terms means they are primarily meat-eaters, but can survive (but not thrive) on plant material alone if necessary (cats, on the other hand, cannot).

However, just because dogs fed plant-based diets are able to stay alive doesn't make them omnivores or mean that they're suited for a vegetarian diet. Dr. Jeff Werber, a Los Angeles veterinarian who's also an expert contributor to CBS News segments of "The Early Show" and "Sunday Morning," explains that a cat's system is not designed to produce the amino acids they need, so it's crucial they obtain them through their diet. He asserts:

*"A few of those essential amino acids are only available in meat proteins — the two most necessary are taurine and arginine. Taurine is necessary for eye health and healthy skin, and very important for heart health."*²

Arginine, he explains, is a requirement for the production of ornithine, another amino acid with the ability to bind to ammonia so it won't turn into a toxin within the cat's body. Werber adds that without arginine:

"Ammonia build-up can't be neutralized, so it will become toxic to the cat. Cats need a meat/fish diet to get their protein from animal sources and get these essential amino acids."

3. **There's a reason dogs pant, but cats don't — Dogs pant** to cool themselves off. Cats rely on other cooling mechanisms: pads on their feet and sweat glands in their noses act as natural coolants (dogs also sweat from their paws and noses). If you see a cat panting, more than likely he's experiencing something completely different than being overheated. It may be a sign of pain or stress or a cardiovascular problem.

Another reason cats don't need to pant to cool off is they don't generally exert themselves to the point of overheating, Werber says. They're better at pacing themselves and seem to be in better tune with how their bodies are handling heat than dogs.

4. **Cats aren't "rude" to cherish their space, and dogs are social butterflies** — Certified dog trainer Teena Patel, also the owner of University of Doglando, believes that because dogs and humans evolved together, they've "developed a very purposeful relationship over the generations," Paw Culture notes. Patel says:

*"We haven't developed the same type of relationship with domesticated cats. Dogs were originally domesticated to perform services for humans: herding, guarding, hunting; in the process, they've become dependent on humans for direction, sustenance and affection."*³

Patel further contends that dogs are pack animals, and as such are highly social animals who enjoy assuming a role within family structures, which may be why they more readily respond to verbal commands and other directives. They also seem to enjoy staying in close proximity of their humans.

Cats, on the other hand, might hunt mice, but not on command; it's more of an instinct. Making it even more interesting, though, is that they're often proud to bring the humans their catches. Cats tend to be more creative, solitary and independent (which some may interpret as "snobbish," even though they don't necessarily characterize humans in the same way), while dogs are more of a predictable, known quantity as far as their behavior is concerned.

5. **Cats can't taste sweetness, but dogs can** — One interesting aspect of a cat's palate is that they're not able to detect sweetness, while dogs can. There are a couple of great benefits to that; cats, who are notorious for "getting into stuff," aren't necessarily interested in your chocolate stash, which is good, because although veterinarians say it doesn't happen often, chocolate can be toxic to a cat's system if they eat enough of it.

Conversely, dogs have a history of foraging that runs the gamut of the entire taste spectrum, which is good when dogs need sustenance for survival. Dr. Sarah Proctor, clinical assistant professor and director of the veterinary technology program at the University of New Hampshire's Thompson School of Applied Science, observes:

*"Cats are built to eat prey and a mouse has very little carbohydrate and pretty much no sugar in its body when eaten by a cat, so the cat would have no evolutionary drive to maintain a taste for sweetness. Since dogs' diets are broader, the taste of sweet could be beneficial as the dog forages for varied types of foods."*⁴

6. **Dogs typically handle prescription medications better than cats** — Believe it or not, dogs have more similarities to humans than cats do, Proctor maintains, which is why human drugs don't adversely affect them the way they do cats, which can sometimes be in scary ways. One reason is because cats only have a small amount of the liver enzyme glucuronyl transferase, which is required to break down pain medications such as Tylenol, and because they can't break it down, it stays in cats' systems, where it can become toxic.

Dogs, however, can handle acetaminophen, aka Tylenol, in low doses, but even the tiniest amount can kill a cat. "Lilies are also very toxic to cats, but not for dogs," Werber notes. (But be sure to keep medications stored safely away from both dogs and cats.)

7. **A cat's hunting prowess compared to a dog's** — You may have already guessed that both cats and dogs scavenge (and you may have a few horror stories because of it). That scavenging instinct has everything to do with practically every other aspect of their lives, from how and what they eat to how they interact with the rest of the animal kingdom.

All you have to do is watch the way dogs and cats play to get a very different sense of their approach. Dogs, you may have observed, enjoy puzzles and search games, while cats just live for the moment they can pounce on their feather teaser "prey." Patel breaks it down:

*"Dogs tend to be better scavengers, and as a result, they're more resourceful in that sense. Cats typically hunt to kill, with less focus on scavenging."*⁵

8. **Dogs can go on hunger strikes, but cats can't** — One of the physical differences between cats and dogs is that domestic, overweight cats are prone to hepatic lipidosis, or fatty liver disease. When they consume fewer calories than required for maintaining weight, Proctor explains, their livers aren't built to efficiently convert fat into energy. When an overweight cat stops eating, whether it's due to stress, illness or something else, their bodies begin breaking down fat stores for energy, which can happen too quickly and cause too much fat to enter their liver at one time.

Metabolically normal dogs or cats have livers that convert fat to energy, which may cause them to lose weight, but isn't dangerous. Nature has built-in mechanisms that allow healthy carnivores to go extended periods of time without a meal. However obese, sedentary pets consuming metabolically stressful foods do not have their enzymatic machinery honed for these stressors. Fat accumulating in liver cells can lead to liver cell

damage and liver disease, Proctor pointed out.

Unfortunately, it’s a common problem in animal shelters when overweight cats become so stressed that they stop eating. If it should become a problem, the way to deal with cats who aren’t getting enough calorie intake may involve a feeding tube, because cats won’t always eat just because they need to.

9. **Dogs love praise; cats couldn’t care less** — There’s something to be said for anyone who maintains their equilibrium without constant praise, and that’s certainly the modus operandi for cats. You can tell them they’re beautiful or sweet or adorable and it seems their feline response is, “Of course.” Dogs, nearly everyone knows, seem to have an inborn sense of their relationship to their favorite humans and readily express human-like emotions.

You often see memes dedicated to a dog’s guilt at getting caught or joy in a long overdue reunion. Cats rarely display such emotional sentiments. If it seems that dogs are easier to train than cats, that’s why. One reason is because you generally know what dogs want — they want a treat or praise, which motivates them to cooperate in training.

While cats are certainly smart enough to allow themselves to be trained, they have to be inspired. Patel says this might involve offering a treat they won’t get any other time. Paw Culture notes:

“One of the reasons most people believe dogs are easier to train is that humans have been doing it for centuries, so it simply feels more natural — plus, dogs love a pat on the head along with some ‘good boy’ praise, while cats really don’t care as much.”⁶

Dog and Cats — Different but Irreplaceable

We love so many things about our pets. Very much like children, they can act up or get on our nerves at times, but we still consider them worth their weight in gold. Only animal lovers fully understand the joy and companionship these dear dogs and cats bring, but one thing is for certain, canines and felines are two different animals, and that’s in the most literal sense.

Sources and References

^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6} [Paw Culture 2016-2017 \(Archived\)](#).
