



Paw Prints

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Columnist

Extending your dog's life

Most pet parents like to think they are providing a healthy, happy life for their dog. You try to feed him quality food, give him lots of love, and toss the ball around the backyard whenever you have time. But there is a lot more that goes into raising Rover.

Since most dogs have a cheerful manner, it can be difficult to tell if there are things that you can do differently to improve their lifestyle.

Obesity is one of the most common problems in dogs today and it can shorten Rover's lifespan. According to the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention, an estimated 53 percent of dogs

were overweight last year. Many folks are overfeeding their pets without even realizing it. It's important to understand what a healthy weight for your dog is, and why it's important to maintain that weight.

Obesity can lead to bone and joint problems, injuries, diabetes, cancer and death. Make sure to get your dog the proper exercise and feed just enough food to keep Rover at a healthy weight. Limit doggy treats or fattening snacks. If your dog is overweight, increase your pet's exercise routine, even if that means getting creative. If it's cold outside play catch in a safe area indoors.

Another way that can increase your dog's lifespan is to get him to the vet annually for a routine check-up. Even though Rover may seem healthy on the outside, there could be something brewing on the inside that you are unaware of. The sooner he is checked, the better his chances for having something nipped in the bud.

Periodontal disease (gum disease) is another common problem in dogs. According to the United States Humane Society, veterinarians estimate that 85 percent of dogs over five years of age suffer from the condition, which develops after food and

bacteria collect along the gum line and form plaque in a dog's mouth.

A build-up of oral bacteria can ultimately lead to all sorts of health problems for your furry friend — including heart valve problems, as well as infections in the kidneys. So, grab a toothbrush and scrub Rover's teeth as often as you can.

It's really not that difficult to brush your dog's teeth and there are even chew toys and bones that assist in reducing plaque.

Are you neglecting daily exercise for Rover?

Just because your furry friend played hard at the dog park on Monday doesn't mean that the rest of the week goes by without any exercise. Exercise not only helps to keep the weight off but provides mental stimulation for your dog. And keeping up your pet's fitness routine gives him a healthy way to expel energy.

Finding an activity that you and your dog both enjoy is a good way to start a good daily routine. Such as walks around the block, or toss the ball in your yard or even games of hide-and-seek in your house.

Remember to keep your dog on a leash when walking him outside. Letting Rover roam free without you



PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER MCNAMEE

Starr gets lots of exercise indoors by playing catch and chase.

watching opens the door for a whole world of possible tragedies.

Spaying and neutering is still the best way to guarantee reducing the risk of several cancers.

Additionally, each heat cycle that a female dog goes through makes her more prone to development

of mammary cancer. Intact males are also more likely to develop prostatic disease and testicular cancer than neutered males. There are many clinics that offer low-cost spay/neuter.

The good news is that it's never too late to bump up the level of care that you put into raising Rover!

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