



# Paw Prints

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Columnist

## New Year's resolutions for your pet

Ready to take on the new year? Resolutions are a great way to start the year off, whether they are a list of things to accomplish or fun ideas to make 2018 your best year yet.

So many of you are animal lovers and pet parents; shouldn't you be including your furry friends among your top priorities for the new year?

Just as your pets can improve your physical and mental health, there are many ways that you can improve the lives of your cats and dogs in return.

Make this new year a fresh start for your pet that needs a change in his routine — such

as a new diet and exercise regimen or more play time with you. Whether you need to get back on track with his daily walks or make that vet appointment you've been meaning to schedule, there are plenty of ideas for goals to help your pet have a happier and healthier 2018.

One resolution could be to be more aware of how much your pet is eating. And one way to do that is to measure out their food each day. According to PetMD many owners "eyeball" their pet's daily intake and pour that into their food bowl, usually resulting in overfeeding and weight gain. Try using a measuring cup. Cut down on how much you dish out treats or consider swapping in a fresh treat instead such as blueberries or small pieces of sweet potato.

Another resolution is to give your pet more exercise. Exercise is beneficial to keeping your pet happy, active, and at their optimal body condition.

Take a walk each day with your pooch, or spend time playing with your cat around the house. Cats love the thrill of chasing a laser toy and toys that trigger a cat's predatory instinct are a great way to get them off the couch and engaged in a little aerobic activity.

Exercising with your pet

will increase your bond while adding some physical activity into both your lives. Play also keeps your pet's mind sharp, even five minutes a day spent tossing a ball or dangling a toy mouse can mentally stimulate them.

Pets can get bored with the same old routine day in and day out. Resolve to try a new activity with your pet in the coming year. From hiking to kayaking, camping to running, try incorporating your pet into a new exercise routine. It will get you both out of the house, and both pet parent and pet will reap the rewards of a healthy physical activity.

As your pet gets older, his medical needs can be quite expensive. Another great resolution is to start saving up now. Just as parents save money for their children to go to college, pet parents should start a special account just for pet-related expenses down the road. Having a savings account for your pet will ensure that you never have to compromise when it comes to getting your furry family member the best care possible.

Resolve to groom your pet every day. Brushing your cat or dog serves many purposes. It removes excess fur from the coat, reducing the amount you find on your clothes and

furniture. It helps distribute oils from the skin to the fur, keeping the coat shiny and healthy. Lastly, daily grooming is also a bonding activity that demonstrates to your pet how much you love him by taking care of him in a soothing manner.

Studies show that mental stimulation can help reduce cognitive deterioration in aging animals. In other words, keeping your older pet's brain active can make it healthier. Resolve to teach your pet new tricks and practicing those he already knows is a great way to keep those neurons firing. Puzzle feeders, which force a pet to think through a task in order to be rewarded with a treat, are also an excellent way to keep your furry friend's mind engaged.

Resolve to bring more joy into your pet's life this year. And one easy way is by setting up pet play dates. Play dates for your furry friend will help socialize him and get Rover used to new faces and other animals and people. Call up a friend with a dog that is similar in size to yours and get together at a nearby park. Interaction with other animals is great for your pet's mental health, and can help vastly improve their social skills.

And perhaps the most important resolution for any pet



PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER MCNAMEE

**Resolve to take your older dog to the vet twice each year.**

parent to make is to bring your pet to the veterinarian this new year. Make your pet's health one of your biggest priorities!

Just like humans, pets need to visit the vet once per year; for older pets, the visits should be more frequent (about twice a year). Many medical conditions such as diabetes, arthritis, or obesity are common in aging pets and much easier to manage when detected in the early stages of the disease process. Veterinary visits are also the perfect time to ask for advice, update your pet's food, or get an expert opinion on any behavioral issues that may be affecting your bond with your pet.

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