

How to give your pets the best care in the new year

By Lisa Bloch

The new year brings intentions to improve our lives, so it's a good time to take stock of our role as pet parents. Are we doing all we can to ensure our furry, feathered, or scaled friends are safe, healthy, and happy?

Veterinary care

If you grew up with parents like mine who were well-meaning but a bit “old-school” when it came to animals, your family probably only took their pets to the veterinarian when they needed to get spayed or neutered, or if they were really sick. Thankfully, most people now realize the importance of vaccinations and regular checkups for our pets.

Animals are good at hiding pain and other symptoms, so it's important they're seen by someone trained to know what to look for. A cat not using the litterbox or a dog exhibiting anxiety may be expressing symptoms of a medical issue, so it's always a good idea to contact your veterinarian when behavior issues arise, as well as medical.

Identification

It's a heart-wrenching feeling when your pet becomes lost. Nextdoor is filled with posts for missing pets but luckily, many animals are reunited with their worried families thanks to something the size of a grain of rice. Microchips have revolutionized our ability to find the guardians of pets that become lost. They're safe, inexpensive, and serve as your pet's permanent ticket home. Microchips are easily implanted via injection between the pet's shoulders. The guardian's information is then matched to the chip and kept in a national database. Shelters and veterinarians use a handheld scanner that can read a chip in seconds. Be sure to update your information with the chip company if you move or change phone numbers.

Your dog or cat should also wear a collar (breakaway for cats) and tags with the pet's name, your name, and phone number easily visible. Collars are especially important for cats that are allowed to go outside. Marin Humane strongly encourages people to keep cats indoors only, however, if you do let your cat outside, having a collar and/or tag with your information on it is critical.

Dogs should also have their license attached to their collar. Not only is it another form of identification, but it's required by law in Marin County. To be licensed, your dog must be up-to-date on their rabies vaccine — something that keeps all of us safer.

Behavior help

A pet that misbehaves is often not the happiest of pets. Mental and physical boredom can lead to destructive behavior, excessive barking, or other troublesome habits. Anxiety and fearfulness can also make for difficult-to-manage behaviors. But if we address the causes of the behavior and set our pets up for success through training or increased enrichment and exercise, we're ensuring a happier pet and a more peaceful home for everyone.

Our pets give us so much and ask so little. Please include them when creating resolutions and make it a great year for every member of your family.

Marin Humane offers microchipping by appointment. It's free for cats, thanks to a generous donor, and \$25 for dogs. The shelter also offers behavior consultations and training classes. To learn more, go to marinhumane.org.

Lisa Bloch is the director of marketing and communications for Marin Humane, which contributes Tails of Marin articles and welcomes animal-related questions about our community. Go to marinhumane.org, email lbloch@marinhumane.org, or find us on social media @marinhumane.