



Summer Precautions for our Pets

It's 99 degrees out. A heat wave is upon us. We are enjoying the barbequing, the opportunity to bask in the sun exercise outdoors for a change. How can we keep our pets from succumbing to the heat and other dangers of summer?

Many of the precautions we can take to protect our pets are pretty common sense. If you want to be in air conditioning, then make sure your dog or cat is indoors in the air conditioning. Don't leave them out in the fenced in yard for more than 10 minutes in the blazing heat. If they are outside for only 10 minutes they should still have a source of fresh water and shade. A baby pool full of fresh water is a favorite for dogs.

Plan ahead for the groomer and make the appointment. Don't make the mistake we made. Our favorite groomer is so popular that we should have made the appointment to have our Springer Spaniel shaved down a month ago. We missed the window and she had to live through several days of heat wave looking like a furry moppet. She also brought waves of dirt into the house on those bustles of fur. Now that she is groomed she is so much more comfortable she prances about feeling clean and cool.

In the heat wave be sensitive to your dog's need for less exercise. Just because you are paying a dog walker to take your dog for a walk at high noon three days a week does not mean that your dog wants to go on that walk at noon on a 99F day. Just like us they are feeling the effects of the humidity. Also they don't have shoes. If they are being walked on pavement their pads may burn in weather that is so hot. If your routine is changing because of the heat consider that your dog may need a change in routine due the heat. Plan fewer or shorter walks at dawn or early evening to avoid the heat.

Pets need to drink more water in this heat just as we do. Keep the water bowl full all day. It is easy to overlook in a busy household. Your pet's appetite may be decreased due to the heat. Your dog will pant more because dogs don't sweat through glands in their skin. They dissipate heat by panting.

Never leave your dog in a car in the summer. One minute can turn into 10 and that is enough time for your pet to die from hyperthermia. A car at 70 degrees Fahrenheit can increase 40 degrees in 10 minutes and can kill any pet or person quite efficiently.

Hyperthermia is heat stroke. When the pet's temperature is above 105 F the body can no longer work to cool itself.

During heat stroke the pet may appear distressed, will pant excessively and become restless. As the hyperthermia progresses, the pet may drool large amounts of saliva from the nose and/or mouth. The pet may become unsteady on his feet. You may notice the gums turning blue/purple or bright red in color, which is due to inadequate oxygen.

If your pet is restless and panting immediately remove it to a cool area. Apply cool wet towels to the entire body. Do not immerse in ice water as this causes all the small vessels in the skin to constrict. Constricted vessels can't bring circulating blood from inside the pet towards the cool skin surface. Take a rectal temperature if possible and get your pet to the veterinarian.

If you are enjoying a BBQ please remind your guests to please not feed leftovers to the cute dog with the pleading eyes. If a just a few guests each start slipping some food during a three-hour event your dog could ingest a lot of inappropriate food. If you don't know and trust all the guests coming to the event it may make sense to put your dog in a quiet secure room or kennel for the duration of the party. Also secure the trash because the leftover corncobs make great foreign bodies and may require surgical removal. High fat chicken skin, steak fat and hotdogs will at the very least cause diarrhea and vomiting and at the worst cause excruciatingly painful pancreatitis. Have a safe place for your cat to hide, perhaps an upstairs room with a litter box and food and water during the event so a guest does not let cat outdoors by mistake. Make sure your birds are caged so they don't fly out the door as guests' come and go.

Keep your eye out during walks with your dog for trash that they could ingest in a split second. Avoid food scraps on the ground as they go bad very quickly in the heat. Spoiled food will cause violent gastric upheaval. Recently during a walk one of our patients dove on a hotdog beside a lake and ended up with a fish hook embedded in the esophagus. A fisherman had left it beside the pond with the fishhook in. Luckily it was removed via endoscopy and the dog was fine.

Savor the long summer days. Enjoy walks at dawn or dusk. Just a few common sense precautions will help you have a peaceful and healthy summer season with your pet.

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