

firstline[®]

Helpful tips and handouts

What to do when there's nothing to do

Team members: Here are some ideas for how to fill down time during your shift.

1. Check on all patients

- Ensure that all patients are clean, warm, and dry.
- Check their weight and temperature.
- Take them on potty walks.
- Give medications when due.
- Prepare medications to send home with clients.
- Ask technicians what you can help with.

2. Sort through products and supplies

Check treatment areas, pharmacy, and exam rooms:

- Check syringes and needles, heparin syringes, and catheters.
- Keep bandage trays full.
- Check stock of cotton swabs, gauze, ear cones, etc.
- Make sure solution containers and spray bottles are full.
- Fill soap dispensers and paper towel holders if necessary.

3. Clean the clinic

- Clean exam rooms.
- Wipe down every surface, including clinic doors, cabinets, countertops, drawers, shelves, floors, and cages.
- Wipe down laboratory and remove blood from centrifuges.
- Keep laundry moving.

4. Laboratory

- Clean microscope lenses of oil—use wipes and alcohol.
- Collect abandoned blood tubes—make sure they're packaged and ready to go.
- Dispose of all unneeded slides and blood and urine tubes.



5. Check the dental cart

- Verify stock of dental diet samples, oral health chews, and other product giveaways (make sure products are labeled and bagged according to size).
- Cut bandanas into three sizes (small, medium, and large) to send home with patients.

6. Replenish supplies of client handouts and forms

- Stock brochures in the waiting area.
- Make sure these documents are in the treatment area: hospital day sheets, surgery sheets, home care instructions.

7. Work with sterilization and cleaning instruments

- Clean, vacuum, and mop surgery suite.
- Clean surgical instruments.
- Put surgery packs together.
- Run autoclave.
- Ask veterinary assistants for help.

If you still have down time, ask the practice manager for more fun tasks—or you can wash walls!

Information courtesy of Brian Conrad, CVPM, practice manager for Meadow Hills Veterinary Center in Kennewick, Wash.

How to administer subcutaneous fluids to your cat

Kidney disease can be uncomfortable for your cat, but learning to administer subcutaneous fluids at home can work wonders toward helping him or her feel better. It takes a little practice, but learning to perform the procedure will prevent a potentially stressful trip to the veterinarian—few cats enjoy being placed in a carrier, after all—and allow you to help manage your cat's condition from the comfort of your own home. Follow these steps to administer fluids:



1. Assemble your supplies

Your veterinarian should provide you with a fluid bag and line, complete with clamps and needles. You'll also want to find some sort of makeshift IV stand, like a clothes hanger—the higher the bag hangs, the better the fluids will flow.



2. Find a cozy spot

Try to administer fluids during a quiet, peaceful time when your cat is relaxed—possibly when she's lounging in the afternoon sunlight.



3. Check the fluid level

Before you begin administering the fluids, check the level inside the fluid bag. This will give you a starting point so you can administer the correct amount based on your veterinarian's recommendation.



4. Tent the skin

Pet your cat for a few minutes, then use your fingers to "tent" the skin between her shoulder blades. This is where you'll insert the needle.



5. Insert the needle

With a firm grip, insert the needle under the skin and hold it in place. Continue to reassure your cat. *Note: Use a new needle each time you administer fluids.*



6. Unclamp the fluid line

Unclamp the fluid line while holding the needle in place. Your cat may meow, but she shouldn't be in any pain—most cats don't even notice the needle.



7. Watch the insertion site

If you notice a lot of fluid leaking out, it means you may not have inserted the needle correctly. Don't panic; simply remove the needle and try a new spot.



8. Clamp the fluid line

When you've administered the correct amount of fluid, clamp the fluid line.



9. Remove the needle

Pull out the needle while gently pinching your cat's skin. You may notice a slight bulge—that's normal and should subside as her body absorbs the fluids.

6 Halloween dangers for pets

Here are the biggest Halloween pet hazards to watch out for this year—and all year.



Chocolate

Why it's dangerous: Chocolate is more poisonous to pets than any other candy. Chocolate contains methylxanthines, chemicals similar to caffeine that can quickly sicken dogs. In general, the darker the chocolate, the more poisonous it is.

What to watch for: Symptoms in dogs that have ingested chocolate include vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy or agitation, increased thirst, an elevated heart rate, and, in severe cases, seizures.

Candy

Why it's dangerous: It's hard enough for a human to stop at just one piece of candy, so imagine how difficult it is for a pet. Large ingestions of sugary, high-fat candy can lead to pancreatitis, which may not show up for two to four days after the pet ingests the candy.

What to watch for: Pets that have ingested candy may show signs such as decreased appetite, vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, abdominal pain, and even kidney failure or organ damage.

Candy wrappers

Why they're dangerous: The candy itself isn't the only threat. Ingestion of foil and cellophane wrappers can cause life-threatening bowel obstructions, which often require surgical intervention.

What to watch for: Symptoms in pets that have ingested candy wrappers include vomiting, decreased appetite, not defecating, straining to defecate, or lethargy.

Raisins

Why they're dangerous: While good-intentioned neighbors may hand out raisins as a healthy alternative to candy, very small amounts of raisins (or grapes) can cause kidney failure in dogs and cats. Some dogs develop idiosyncratic reactions at any dose—in other words, ingesting any amount can cause serious damage.

What to watch for: Pets that have ingested raisins may show signs like vomiting, nausea, decreased appetite, abdominal pain, and severe kidney failure.

Glow sticks and jewelry

Why they're dangerous: Pets love to chew on things they're not supposed to, and cats in particular seem to love these items. Over the past year, 70 percent of Pet Poison Hotline's calls relating to glow sticks and jewelry involved cats. In addition to the choking hazard, the contents of glow sticks can cause pain and irritation in the mouth.

What to watch for: Keep an eye out for mouth pain, as well as profuse drooling and foaming at the mouth.

Costumes

Why they're dangerous: You may love that cute animal costume, but does their pet? Some costumes can cause discomfort in pets, and any metallic beads, snaps, or other small pieces (particularly those made of zinc or lead) can result in serious poisoning if ingested. Finally, don't ever dye or apply coloring to a pet's fur, even if the dye is labeled non-toxic to humans.

What to watch for: If you do dress your pet in costume, make sure it doesn't impair the pets' vision, movement, or air intake.

From your veterinarian

4 TIPS for bringing your cat to the veterinarian

We know it can be tough to wrangle your cat for a trip to the veterinarian's office. Many cats dislike the cat

carrier as well as riding in the car, so heading in for an annual checkup can sometimes be a stressful proposition. Follow these four tips when you head to your next veterinary appointment to reduce your cat's stress and make for a calmer car ride.



1 Make the carrier your cat's second home.

Cat carriers are typically associated with many unpleasant things. Many cat owners keep the carrier in a closet or in the garage, so the cat hasn't rubbed on it or slept inside it. Cats who haven't transferred their scent to the carrier, therefore, see it as a foreign object. So give your cat time to mark the carrier with facial rubbing—she'll feel like it belongs to her, and you may find it easier to place her inside. If you have room, make the carrier a part of your family room furniture. That means leaving it out all the time with the door open. Place a soft towel inside to make it a little more cozy. Pretty soon, your cat won't think twice about entering the carrier.

2 Turn the carrier into a meal center.

Put part of your cat's daily food in the carrier to help your cat associate something good with the carrier. Even better: Use a bit of especially yummy food, like canned food or even a little tuna. Or try tossing your cat's favorite treat in the carrier when she wants to be left alone. This will reward her for seeking solitude in the carrier and continue to reinforce the notion that the carrier isn't so bad after all.

3 Try a different kind of carrier.

If you have an emergency and don't have time to let your cat adjust to the carrier, try using a pillowcase as a carrier. With the cat on your lap, slip the pillowcase over her body, head first. Knot the top of the case and support the bottom when holding your cat. Alternately, you can use any type of item your cat likes to nap in—two laundry baskets connected together could also work. These items aren't a trigger for fear like your standard carrier might be.

4 Consider using a synthetic product.

Using a product that contains a feline facial pheromone can help calm cats during stressful events. These products can be sprayed on blankets, towels, or bandanas before you head to the veterinarian. Many cats become less agitated when their owners use these sprays, so purchasing one could make your life easier when it's time to take your cat for a car ride.

Regular wellness exams are crucial for keeping your cat happy and healthy. Use these tips the next time you head to your veterinarian to make it much easier on both you and your cat.

Information courtesy of Dr. Sally J. Foote, Okaw Veterinary Clinic, Tuscola, Ill.

Comstock/Getty Images

10 steps to a great cat adoption

Thousands of kitties across the nation are waiting for a permanent home, so it's always the perfect time to make new feline family members. Use this cat adoption checklist to make your next adoption a good one.

1. Consider more than one cat. Cats require exercise, mental stimulation, and social interaction. Two cats can provide this for each other.

2. Find a cat whose personality meshes with yours. In general, cats with long hair and round heads and bodies are more easygoing than lean cats with narrow heads and short hair, who are typically more active. Ask your veterinarian or adoption counselor to help you find the right cat for you.

3. Schedule a veterinary visit within the first few days after the adoption. Make sure to bring along any medical records you received from the adoption center. Getting your new cat to a veterinarian early will help make sure there are no underlying illnesses or injuries and allow you to develop a plan to help your new pet live the happiest, healthiest, longest life possible.

4. Make sure everyone in the house is prepared for a new cat. Visiting the shelter or animal control facility should be a family affair. When adopting a new cat to join your existing pets, discuss with the adoption facility or your veterinarian how to make a proper introduction.

5. Budget for both short-term and long-term costs. A cat adopted from a shelter may be a bargain, considering many shelters provide spaying or neutering, initial vaccines, and a microchip. But make sure you're prepared for the routine expenses you'll incur throughout the cat's life.

6. Stock up on supplies before the cat arrives. Try to create a homelike environment for your new cat right away. You'll need a litter box, litter, food and water bowls, food, scratching posts, safe and stimulating toys, a cushy bed, a brush for grooming, a toothbrush, and nail clippers.

7. Cat-proof your home. A new cat will quickly teach you not to leave things lying out. Food left on the kitchen counter will teach your new friend to jump on counters for a possible lunch. Get rid of loose items your cat might chew on, make sure the cat isn't chewing on electrical cords, and pick up random items like paper clips, which kittens may swallow.



8. Go slowly when introducing your cat to new friends and family. It can take several weeks for a cat to relax in a new environment. It's a great idea to keep the new addition secluded in a single room with all of its supplies until it's used to the new surroundings. Socialization is important, but remember: take it slow.

9. Include your new pet in your family's emergency plan. Add phone numbers for your veterinarian and closest 24-hour animal hospital to your "in-case-of-emergency" call list, and be sure to have a several-day supply of cat food and medications on hand.

10. Think twice before giving a cat as a gift. While it's a nice thought, surprising someone with a cat doesn't allow for a "get-to-know-one-another" period. Remember, adopting a cat isn't like purchasing a household appliance or a piece of jewelry—this is a real living, breathing, and emotional being.

Help clients understand the importance of following these tips, and before you know it, you might be welcoming some new happy, healthy patients into your practice.

7 common Valentine's Day toxins for pets

Valentine's Day is just around the corner, which means Americans are bringing home candies and flowers. Unfortunately, some of these well-intentioned gifts can be toxic for pets. Watch out for these seven common culprits of pet poisonings.



1. Roses

Roses are red, violets are blue, but biting a thorn can do damage to you—or to pets.

Threat to pets: Although roses don't often cause serious poisoning beyond gastrointestinal upset, there's risk for trauma to the mouth and paws from the thorns. Additionally, if a large enough portion of the rose head or stem is ingested, a bowel obstruction may result.

Signs: Vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, abdominal pain or discomfort, drooling, and reduced appetite. **Prognosis:** Excellent with supportive care at a veterinary hospital.

2. Lilies

Lilies (*Lilium* spp. and *Heremacallis* spp.) are frequently sold in fresh bouquets and make a beautiful but deadly alternative to Valentine's Day roses. The most common bouquet lilies include the Stargazer lily, Tiger lily, and other Asiatic lilies.

What's in them: The toxin, which remains unidentified, can be found in the petals, leaves, pollen, or even the water in the vase.

Threat to pets: These lilies are extremely toxic to cats and cause acute kidney failure within one to two days of exposure. If not treated, the exposure will likely result in death. The ingestion of just one to two leaves or petals is enough to cause sudden kidney failure. Even ingesting small amounts of pollen from a cat's fur is considered toxic. Dogs don't develop kidney failure but may have mild gastrointestinal upset.

Signs: Within a few hours of exposure, cats may display salivation, vomiting, reduced appetite, and lethargy. Within 18 to 30 hours, severe and debilitating dehydration develops. Within 30 to 72 hours cats may stop producing urine and become gravely ill.

Prognosis: The rapid onset of treatment at a veterinary hospital is imperative for a good outcome. If treatment is started after the kidneys have stopped producing urine, the prognosis is poor.



3. Chocolate and cocoa

You might have heard that chocolate, a classic Valentine's Day treat, can be toxic to pets. The question is, how much is too much? Chocolate and cocoa contain theobromine, a chemical similar to caffeine that's highly toxic to dogs and cats. When it comes to chocolate, dark equals dangerous. The darker or more concentrated the chocolate, the more theobromine it contains. Therefore, the most dangerous chocolates are baker's chocolate, semi-sweet chocolate, and gourmet dark chocolates. White chocolate has very little theobromine and won't cause chocolate poisoning in pets.

Threat to pets: It's the dose that makes the poison. Pets that ingest a few M&Ms or one to two bites of a chocolate chip cookie are unlikely to develop chocolate poisoning. For milk chocolate, any ingestion of more than 0.5 ounces per pound of body weight may put dogs at risk for chocolate poisoning. Ingestions of more than 0.1 ounces per pound of body weight of dark or semi-sweet chocolate may cause poisoning. Almost all ingestions of baker's chocolate can result in poisoning and are considered emergencies. The effective toxic dose for very young or geriatric animals and those with underlying disease can be considerably lower than otherwise healthy adult patients. Due to the large amount of fat in chocolate, some pets may develop pancreatitis after eating chocolate or baked goods containing chocolate.

Signs: Ingestions of small amounts of chocolate may cause mild vomiting and diarrhea. Larger amounts can cause severe agitation, tachycardia, abnormal heart rhythms, tremors, seizures, and collapse.

Prognosis: If treated at a veterinary hospital the prognosis is Excellent in pets with mild signs of poisoning, such as mild stomach upset or slight restlessness. Poor in those with severe signs of poisoning, such as collapse and seizures.

7 common Valentine's Day toxins for pets (cont.)



4. Chocolate covered raisins

Don't forget that grapes, currants, and sultanas also fall into this same category of toxins.

Threat to pets: These fruits cause acute kidney failure in dogs. There's speculation that they may cause kidney failure in cats and ferrets as well. All pets (especially dogs) that ingest grapes, raisins, currants, or sultanas should be monitored closely and treated appropriately. If a small dog eats just a small number of grapes or raisins, this is considered an emergency.

Signs: Vomiting within hours of ingestion. Within one to four days of ingestion: increased urination, increased thirst, lethargy, and reduced appetite.

Prognosis: Excellent if animals are treated at a veterinary hospital before signs begin. Once they have begun to go into kidney failure, the prognosis is worse.

5. Chocolate-covered espresso beans (caffeine)

Dark-chocolate-covered espresso beans are a problem for dogs and cats because they contain large amounts of both theobromine and caffeine.

What it's in: Caffeine is most commonly found in coffee, coffee beans, coffee grounds, tea, used tea bags or coffee grounds, soda, energy drinks, and diet pills. Theobromine, a cousin chemical to caffeine, is also found in chocolate.

Threat to pets: Pets are more sensitive to the effects of caffeine than people are. While one to two espresso beans won't contain enough caffeine to poison most pets, the ingestion of moderate amounts of coffee beans, coffee grounds, tea bags, or one to two diet pills can easily cause death in small dogs or cats.

Signs: Within one to two hours of ingestion, the following signs may develop: mild to severe hyperactivity, restlessness, vomiting, cardiac problems, hypertension, abnormal heart rhythms, tremors, hyperthermia, seizures, and collapse.

Prognosis: If treated in a veterinary hospital, the prognosis is excellent in pets with mild signs of poisoning, such as slight restlessness or a minimally elevated heart rate. Poor in those with severe signs of poisoning, such as collapse and seizures.

6. Chocolate-covered macadamia nuts

Macadamia nuts can result in poisoning in dogs if ingested. This type of poisoning hasn't been reported in cats.

What's in it: The toxin in macadamia nuts hasn't yet been identified, but the mechanism may involve motor neurons, neuromuscular junctions, and muscle fibers or neurotransmitters.

Signs: Within three to six hours, dogs exhibit lethargy, vomiting, and hyperthermia. Within six to 12 hours, hind limb weakness and tremors occur. Additionally, there may be signs of abdominal pain, lameness, and joint stiffness.

Prognosis: With proper veterinary treatment, the prognosis is good. Recovery generally occurs within 24 to 48 hours.



7. Xylitol

Xylitol is a commonly used and naturally occurring sugar substitute. It can be used alone or in combination with aspartame or other sweeteners.

What it's in: Xylitol is used in many sugar-free chewing gums, breath mints, candies, and baked goods. It's also found in some smoking-cessation products like nicotine gum. Xylitol can be purchased in bulk for cooking at home, and because of its dental-plaque-fighting properties, nontoxic amounts can be found in some pet oral-care products.

Threat to pets: Xylitol may cause a life-threatening drop in blood sugar as well as liver damage in dogs. To achieve a potentially toxic dose, a 10-lb dog would only have to eat one piece of gum. The amount of xylitol typically found in most pet oral-care products is very small and, when used properly, isn't expected to cause poisoning unless the dog ingests a very large amount.

Signs: Within 10 to 15 minutes of ingestion, dogs may lose coordination and start vomiting. Collapse and seizures may quickly follow. In rare cases, these signs won't appear until several hours after ingestion.

Prognosis: Excellent when the ingestion is caught early and blood sugars are monitored frequently at a veterinary hospital. Guarded if the dog has already begun to develop liver failure.

4 holiday hazards to your pets

Are you looking for the perfect present for your pets this holiday season? How about a hazard-free household? Here are four holiday hazards to avoid to keep pets happy—and healthy—this season.



1. Decorations

While holiday decorations can make a home feel more festive, they can be tantalizing traps for pets. Keep decorations and ornaments higher up on trees so they're not consumed by pets. If a pet decides the colorful garland or tree trim might make a tasty snack, they can and will get stuck in the pet's intestines, necessitating immediate surgical removal. Also, exposed cords from electric lights can cause electrocution or oral burns if chewed.

2. Gift wrap

When it's time to pull all the gifts out of hiding to be wrapped, make sure your pets aren't in the room when you spread out all the wrapping paper, bows, and ribbons. If a cat gnaws on a ribbon, it can literally "stitch" the cat's intestines together as it passes through the digestive system.

3. Holiday feast

While turkey and ham make up the majority of traditional holiday meals, turkey and ham bones can become lodged in the pet's intestines if swallowed in large pieces. Don't offer table scraps to pets. Cats and dogs could become seriously ill or even choke to death.

4. Flowers

The poinsettias you may use as holiday centerpieces are toxic to most household pets if they're chewed and swallowed in large enough quantities. The level of toxicity is proportionate to the size and weight of the pet, but don't spend time on the math: Just choose other types of floral arrangements that don't endanger your family pets.

4 ways to improve client compliance on fecal tests

1 Clients may not know what a fecal sample is, so don't be afraid to use the word "poop." Keep your communication simple and clear. You want your clients to understand you.

2 Ask the client to obtain the sample at home is easier on you and on the pet. When you obtain the sample at the clinic, it's easier on the client. Weigh the pros and cons before sending home a fecal collection container. If the owner is elderly or wheelchair-bound, for example, it may be better to try to obtain the sample during the pet's visit.

3 If you're sending home a fecal collection container, ask the owner to prepay for the fecal test. This greatly increases the chances the client will return a sample. It also makes it quick and easy to drop off the sample, and it guarantees you charge for the test.

4 Always label the fecal container before you put the fecal matter in it. After all, one jar of poop looks pretty much like the next. It's also wise to always document a client's refusal in the patient's medical chart when a pet owner declines fecal testing—or any other recommended test—for their pet.

