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Healthy Pet > Pet Care > Article

Winter Pet Care



Misconceptions About Winter

Many people believe that because their pets have a coat of fur they are able to withstand the cold better than humans. This is not the case. Like us, animals are accustomed to the warmth of indoor shelter and cold weather can as hard on them as it is on people. Forcing animals to be outside during harsh weather can lead to serious illness.

Tips for Indoor Safety in Winter

- **If you use a space heater or light a fire, watch your pets closely.** They are as attracted to the warmth as you are, so make sure their tails or paws do not come in contact with flames, heating coils, or hot surfaces that can cause severe burns. Also, if a pet knocks over a heating source, the entire house is in danger of catching on fire.
- **Have your furnace checked for carbon monoxide leakage before you turn it on, both for your safety and your pets'.** Carbon monoxide is odorless and invisible, but it can cause problems ranging from headaches and fatigue to trouble breathing and even death.
- **Provide your pet with a thick, soft bed in a warm room on chilly nights.**

Tips for Winter Safety

Follow these guidelines to protect your pets in cold weather:



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provide them they can drink quality antifreeze, oil and other chemicals.

- **Your pet's health can also affect how long it can stay outdoors.** Conditions like diabetes, heart disease, kidney disease, and hormonal imbalances can compromise a pet's ability to regulate their own body heat.
- **Very young and old animals are especially vulnerable to the cold.** The cold can be especially hard on the joints of older animals that become stiff and tender. Stay directly behind older pets when they are climbing stairs. Stiff and arthritic pets can experience significant injury if they slip on ice, so beware of conditions when you walk them.
- **If you live near a pond or lake, be especially careful of ice.** Animals can easily fall through the ice and it is difficult for them to escape on their own. Keep your pet on a leash and stay with them when outdoors.
- **Pets who go outdoors can pick up rock salt, ice, and chemical ice melts in their foot pads.** Keep your pet's pads from getting chapped and raw by wiping their feet with a washcloth when they come inside.
- **Beware of your pet becoming trapped.** Animals left outdoors can be very resourceful in trying to find shelter. They dig into snow banks and dive under porches, into window wells, and cellars where they can become trapped. Always provide warm, accessible shelter and watch them closely.
- **Check under your car hood, honk, or rap on the hood before you start your car or truck engine.** A cold cat will curl up against almost anything—including engines—to stay warm.

Breeds that deal better with the cold

Long-haired breeds like Huskies do better in cold weather than short-haired breeds like Dachshunds. Cats and small dogs that must wade shoulder-deep in snow will feel cold sooner than larger animals.

Winter gear

If your dog will tolerate them, consider equipping them with **special booties** that protect their paws from cold, chemicals, and salt. Booties will also keep your dog from licking the salt off its feet, which can cause inflammation of the digestive track. Also, if your dog will tolerate a **sweater**, use it to provide added warmth, remembering however, that pets lose most of their body heat through the pads of their feet, their ears, and their respiratory tract.

Symptoms of Cold

When outdoors with your pet, watch for the following signs of exposure:

- Whining
- Shivering
- Appearing anxious
- Slowing down
- Stopping movement
- Looking for places to burrow

If you notice any of these signs, return your pet indoors immediately.

Medical Problems

Keep an eye out for two serious conditions in pets that are caused by cold weather:

- **Frostbite** happens when an animal's (or person's) body gets so cold it pulls all the blood from extremities to the body's core to stay warm. An animal's ears, paws, and tail can get so cold that ice crystals form in the tissue damaging it. Frostbite can be tricky because it is not immediately obvious. Sometimes the tissue doesn't show signs of damage for several days. If you suspect your pet may have frostbite, contact your veterinarian immediately.
- **Hypothermia** is body temperature that is below normal. This condition occurs when an animal is unable to keep its body temperature from falling below normal. It occurs when an animal spends too much time in cold temperatures, or when an animal with poor health or circulation is exposed to cold. In mild cases, the animal will shiver and show signs of depression, lethargy, and weakness. As the condition progresses, muscles will stiffen, the heart and breathing rates slow, and the animal will stop responding to stimuli.

What to Do for Hypothermia:

- Get your pet indoors and warm.
- Wrap your pet in blankets and take it to the veterinarian.
- Your veterinarian will, if necessary, monitor your pet's heart rate and blood pressure and give warm fluids through an IV.

FAQ

Q. I think my pet may have ingested some antifreeze. What are the symptoms of antifreeze poisoning?

A. The first sign of anti-freeze poisoning is that your pet will appear drunk. Get your pet to the veterinarian immediately and tell your veterinarian that you suspect your pet has consumed antifreeze.

It takes about three hours for a pet's digestive system to fully absorb antifreeze. The "drunk phase" will occur from 30 minutes to 12 hours after ingestion, depending on the amount ingested. Next, the antifreeze's ethylene glycol enters the pet's liver and kidneys where it is oxidized into toxic products that acidify the blood and begin to destroy renal tubular cells in the pet's kidneys. Next the pet's blood begins to acidify. This creates trouble for nerve function, respiration, and other body processes. Ultimately, the antifreeze's glycolic acid is broken down into oxalic acid. This goes through processes that shut down your pet's kidneys and can be fatal if not treated within four to eight hours.

Q. How long can I leave my dog outside in winter?

A. You should never leave your pet outdoors in temperatures below freezing. Small dogs or those that lack thick long fur can tolerate less cold than breeds such as Huskies. If you are cold, it is likely that your pet is cold too. Bring them inside the moment you start to feel cold yourself. Also, be sure to provide a warm shelter for your dog to use anytime they are outdoors.

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