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# A Fresh Start to the New Year

with your Pet

**F**orget all those New Year's resolutions that revolve around you - 2009 is a great year to resolve to improve your pet/s quality of life.



- Start a pet calendar or diary. Calendars and diaries are really helpful to track dates of medication, worming and vet checks. Your diary should also contain important numbers like kennels, catteries, dog walkers, pet minders and vet clinics. Other contacts should include a 'pet friend' - contact details for a friend living close by who can stand in for you should a personal emergency occur.
- Microchip and register your pet with your local council. A microchip and pet registration quickly identifies who owns the animal, where the animal resides and how to contact the owner. Pets that are wearing a current licence tag are often returned home by animal control agencies without being taken to the pound. This can save a lot of time reuniting the pet with the owner as well as saving the owner from having to pay shelter fees or animal control fines. Did you know that parrots can also sport microchips?
- Update your pet's microchip information if you've recently moved. Your pet's chip is only a code and doesn't contain contact info. You need to keep contact information current and up-to-date, otherwise the chip is near to useless in facilitating contact. All dogs and cats should be microchipped. Also ensure you have a backup, a tag your pet wears all the time that has your contact information recorded.
- Desex, desex, desex. Call it spaying, neutering or even getting fixed, it's the responsibility of all urban pet owners. Want some more reasons why getting the snip is important? Our shelters are crying out for you to be the responsible pet owner. Many lives are lost and much money is spent on strays and unwanted litters of kittens and puppies. Spaying or neutering your pet will decrease pet overpopulation and will likely have health benefits for your pet as well. Spayed females have a lower incidence of ovarian, uterine and mammary cancer and decreased uterine infections. Neutered males have a decreased risk of testicular cancer and fewer prostate problems.
- Annual check-ups are vital for your pet's health. Get your pet to see your veterinarian for an annual check-up. A little preventive maintenance in the form of a check-up can save you a lot of money down the road and could be a life-saver for your pet. Make sure you see the same veterinarian each year as he/she will have 'baseline' of your pet and recognise small variances in their health and fitness. Schedule six-monthly checks for your golden oldies - older pets' health can change through the year. More regular and routine check-ups can alert you to subtle changes in their general health.
- While on the subject of vets, why not look into the benefits of pet health insurance? Pet insurance can prove to be a financial saviour when accidents or sudden illness strike. Many insurance policies also 'reward' you with yearly rebates on heartworm, flea and worming medication.
- Basic general hygiene can keep your pets healthier and make them more enjoyable to be around. Keep your pet clean, well groomed, properly fed and properly exercised. Look at improving the quality of your pets' food and ensure it's nutritionally balanced.
- Make the commitment to keep your pet in your yard or on a leash whenever your pet is out of your home. Pets running at large risk becoming lost, getting hit by a vehicle, getting stolen and picking up diseases. Perhaps this is the year to make your cat an inside cat.
- It's imperative that your pet wears a collar. Collars allow for better control of your pet, give a place to attach identification tags and licences, and serve as an attachment point for leashes as well. Collars that are too big are an escape risk and those that are too tight create a health danger for your dog. You should be able to slide two fingers beneath your pet's collar (that's two fingers on top of each other, not side-by-side). Remember that puppies and kittens grow, so their collars need to be continually adjusted. Even adult pets' collars can become too tight, so it is advisable to check the fit of the collar often. Break-away collars give peace of mind for those of you worried about in-home collar safety. And a reminder that crated puppies should never wear collars.
- Got a niggling feeling that your dog has a few behaviour issues? Then save up and get the advice of an expert dog behaviouralist to sort through those issues. A recommended management plan and some helpful advice is a great way to start correcting some behaviour problems.
- One-on-one time is invaluable for building a strong bond. People living in multi-pet households often forget the value of individual time with each pet. Sure, walking two dogs saves time but each dog has a different personality, behaviour traits and/or fitness needs. Your older dog won't need as much time in the park as the young one, so set aside extra time for one-on-one, quality time. Use your time with your older mate for some new training techniques. Cats and birds need individual attention too, so don't forget to include some play and face time.
- Donate to a shelter. There's strong evidence to support the theory that philanthropy and random acts of kindness can benefit your health while helping those in need. Although donating money is what most people think of in terms of giving to a shelter, supplies like old blankets and towels are also in great demand.
- Check out your local obedience schools and enrol to improve your dog's manners and your skills. Local dog training clubs are the best place to start, with many only charging a nominal fee of a couple of dollars for each session. This is a great opportunity to fine-tune your obedience training as well as getting some fun social interaction. You may make some new friends, and at the very least will get some fresh air.

And finally...perhaps giving up the ciggies, cutting down on alcohol and improving your own fitness really will make a difference in the health and happiness of your pets.