

## Helping Your Pet Live a Longer, Better Life

In 2011, the American Pet Products Association estimates that Americans will spend \$50.84 billion dollars on caring for their pets. Even in challenging economic times, pet owners are doling out hard-earned cash to buy premium foods and supplements, accessories, and grooming products, many of these with promises of improved health and wellbeing for their pet.

But what really makes a difference in your pet's life? What are scientifically proven methods to ensure your best friend will be around, healthy and happy, for years to come? When it comes down to the facts of the matter, the truth is a lot less glamorous than some of the fads, but it's also a lot more affordable.

### Weight Loss

The latest research into pet longevity indicates that keeping a dog at a body condition score of 4/9 (that's on the lean side, but not so as you can count ribs) adds an average of two years to the dog's life. It also significantly delays the onset of osteoarthritis and other degenerative joint diseases. The key to successful weight loss in a pet needn't be high-dollar foods. Instead, feed a limited amount twice a day, reduce caloric intake, and make up for bulk by adding no-salt canned green beans or pureed pumpkin (the kind you make a pie from, without sugar added) to the bowl. Treats can be baby carrots, if at all. If you feel your willpower weakening, just think about how much you want your best friend to be around for years to come! And don't forget exercise as part of your pet's regimen.

### Dental Care

Too many pet owners think of dental care for their pets as a luxury, cosmetic issue, or a way to resolve their pet's "doggie" breath. But clinical studies prove that dental disease can cut a pet's life short and cause a number of debilitating illnesses along the way including cardiovascular disease, stroke, and bacterial pneumonia. The plaque that lurks inside your pet's mouth showers his or her internal organs with a continuous dose of bacteria – a scenario that doesn't bode well for the future. Proper dental care is essential to your pet's lifelong health.

### Basic Safety

A good fence, strict observation of leash laws, and secure transport can profoundly affect your pet's longevity; just ask any veterinarian who has spent time in an emergency or critical care unit. Animals that are admitted due to "HBC" (hit-by-car), overwhelmingly present with complicated and life-threatening injuries including pelvic fractures, ruptured bladders, and punctured lungs. Similarly, a loose dog in the back of a pickup truck is an invitation to disaster. Don't turn your dog into a projectile on a busy highway – keep him in the cab with you!

Proper diet and exercise, dental care, and basic safety may not capture headlines, but these are the foundations of a healthy and long life for all the animals in your family so that you can continue to enjoy their companionship for many years to come.