

# DON'T FALL FOR THESE DOG AND CAT HEALTH MYTHS

By Andrea Vardaro Tucker, ELS

Think you know everything about caring for your 4-legged family member? Test your knowledge below.



## MYTH 1:

### IT'S OK TO LEAVE YOUR PET IN THE CAR BECAUSE IT ISN'T HOT OUTSIDE.

No temperature is safe to leave a pet alone in a vehicle. Even in less-than-sweltering temperatures, cars can rapidly heat up—cracking the windows won't help. And in cold weather, a car can become like a refrigerator just as fast. Leaving the car running so the heat stays on can also be dangerous; carbon monoxide could poison your pet if your car is idling in an enclosed space, like a garage, or has an exhaust leak.

## MYTH 2:

### BRUSHING A PET'S TEETH EVERY DAY ISN'T NECESSARY.

You'd never consider going a day without brushing your teeth, so why should your pet? When plaque builds up for a day or more, it can harden to form tartar, which can lead to periodontal (dental) disease. Ideally, you'd start brushing your pet's teeth when he's a kitten or puppy, but with some patience, most older pets can adapt too. For pets who balk or shy away from toothbrushing, don't worry—we have detailed advice about how to ease into the habit on page 29. Your veterinarian can also give you some pro tips!

## MYTH 3:

### CATS PEE OUTSIDE THE LITTERBOX TO SPITE YOU.

Your cat's not trying to tell you he's "pee'd off" by peeing outside his litterbox; he might be suffering from anxiety or another serious health issue, such as bladder stones, diabetes, kidney disease, or a urinary tract infection. Even healthy cats may mark their territory by spraying it with urine, but frequent accidents mean your pet needs a veterinary exam. See your vet immediately if your cat is peeing more than usual, seems to have pain when urinating (vocalizing during urination may be a sign of pain), passes bloody urine, can't urinate at all, or only passes a few drops of urine. (If your veterinarian has ruled out a medical cause, turn to page 21 to learn solutions for helping your cat keep it inside the box.)

## MYTH 4:

### PARASITE PREVENTION IS ONLY NEEDED IN SPRING AND SUMMER.

The risk of pets encountering pests like fleas, ticks, and mosquitoes—and the heartworms mosquitoes carry—may be greater in warm weather, but prevention throughout the year, as recommended by your veterinarian, is your safest bet for protecting against unpredictable temperatures or parasites overwintering

(seeking shelter from the cold) in your home. Plus, intestinal parasites are active during all seasons. Your pet's vet will recommend the best parasite prevention products for your fur baby.

## MYTH 5:

### FOOD IS THE BEST WAY TO SHOW YOUR PET LOVE.

Most pets would argue this myth is true, but pet parents have to stay strong in the face of begging dogs or cats and avoid overfeeding them. Excess weight and obesity can cause health problems like osteoarthritis and other orthopedic disorders, skin ailments, liver trouble, and heart disease. To keep your pet's weight in an ideal range, feed your pet meals and snacks according to your veterinarian's recommendation, and show affection through cuddles, active playtime, and interactive games. (Speaking of games, if you and your dog are getting tired of spending so much time inside during the colder months, see the article on page 8 for boredom-busting playtime ideas.)

*Andrea Vardaro Tucker is a board-certified editor in the life sciences and copyeditor for HealthyPet. Her family's West Highland White Terrier, Cole, thinks cuddle time is the best way to show her love.*