

# General Health Info

## Fleas

Although other insects may flourish in a dirty environment, fleas don't seem to care about your house keeping ability. Clean houses are just as susceptible as unkempt abodes to the little critters.

Fleas live over the winter on wild animals such as squirrels, chipmunks and raccoons. As the weather starts to warm up in the spring, the fleas lay thousands of eggs each day, that fall off the wild animals and into your yard.

The eggs hatch into larva and eventually develop into adults which hop on the nearest animal - namely your pet. Sometimes, even if your pet doesn't go outside, you unknowingly carry the fleas inside.

The fleas' astronomical reproduction continues all summer and the population peaks this time of the year. Often, dry weather causes many of the eggs to dry out and die, but in humid conditions they flourish.

Once you see one flea on your pet, you can be sure there are many more that you can't find. The larvae of these little pests hide in dark places like deep down in the carpet.

The key for flea control is prevention, but it's a little late for that now. Had you put "Muffy" on a flea prevention program in the spring we wouldn't but having this discussion.

Now is the time for flea warfare. To combat an infestation we need to attack the flea on three fronts; on the pet, in the house and in the yard.

Flea baths kill the fleas that are on your pet and are a good way to start, but as soon as you rinse the shampoo off, fleas can jump right back on.

Use of a flea dip after bathing does help repel fleas for one to two weeks. There are herbal dips available that use plant oils to repel fleas. This natural approach allows us to avoid using harsh chemicals on your pet.

I am not a fan of flea collars because they are often not very effective and some animals develop an irritation on their necks from the collars.

There are a number of convenient prescription flea treatments. Advantage is a once a month topical flea killer that is administered to the skin of the dog or cat. It kills the adult flea within hours of landing on your pet and is ideal for animals that are allergic to fleas.

Frequent bathing or soaking of the skin can wash this medicine off. You can, however bath your pet every two weeks and apply Advantage after every other bath.

Top Spot is another topical flea treatment. It lasts longer than Advantage and cannot be washed off easily because it settles in the skin glands. It helps kill ticks as well as fleas.

Next, on to the house. Foggers are effective but messy. You have to evacuate the house to use them effectively.

I prefer a premise spray for inside the home because it can be directed under furniture where it is needed most. Consult your veterinarian for advice on what is working well. Be sure to treat every room of the house, even the areas that the pet does not enter. Remember, the flea is a wily opponent.

As for the yard, there are a number of chemical sprays that can be administered to your yard using your garden hose. If you have a large yard, concentrate on the shaded areas as this is where the conditions are right for the development of the flea larvae.

A more natural and very effective approach is the use of nematodes. These are microscopic parasites that kill flea larvae. They are harmless to humans and pets and have been used to kill harmful insects on strawberry farms for years.

### **Tips on Medicating Your Pet**

Let's talk about medicating our pets. Dogs tend to be relatively easy to medicate. The best method is to hide the pill in a small treat like a piece of hotdog or cheese. Granted, we do not want to feed a lot of these treats to our pets, but the small amount needed to hide a pill for short-term treatment should not be harmful.

For the 5% of the dogs who do not gobble down treats without sifting through them with their tongues, you may have to be more aggressive. Coat the tablet with butter and slide it over the tongue to the back of his throat with your finger.

Cats are often tough customers when it comes to medicating. They rarely fall for the old "hide the pill in a treat trick." And when you try to stick the medicine in their mouth, four additional legs seem to sprout, with all the scratching and squirming.

The first step is to make your kitty into a burrito. Place a bath towel on the floor and place your kitty on the towel cross ways, so there is lots of towel on either side of her. Now wrap one side of the towel then the other tightly over the cat so that all four legs are contained and neutralized and only the head is out. Have an assistant grasp the towel tightly at the neck.

Place the palm of your left hand on the cat's head, fingers facing forward. Wrap your fingers and thumb around and grasp her head under the cheekbones. Point her nose toward the ceiling.

With the pill between the thumb and forefinger of your right hand, open kitty's mouth with your right middle finger. Drop the pill down the middle of her throat. (Accurate aim is crucial.)

Keep her nose pointed straight up and stroke her throat. When she licks her nose it means mission is accomplished. Coating the pill with tuna oil or butter helps it slide down easier.

If this technique fails, there is a pilling device available that consists of a small plastic tube, plunger and rubber tip that holds the pill. The tablet is placed in the holder and that end is inserted to the back of the pet's throat. Then push the plunger, and bingo, the tablet is deposited.

Yet another idea is to ask your veterinarian if the medicine comes in a liquid form. Often animals will tolerate drops better than pills.

When using a dropper for liquid medication, do not hold the pet's mouth open while administering the fluid. This is likely to make the pet choke and resist further medicating. All you need to do is work the tip of the dropper into the mouth right behind the fangs, and squirt.

Your veterinarian needs to know if you are having problems medicating your pet, or if your pet is having an adverse reaction to the medication. Often, the vet office will have helpful suggestions. Remember, the remedy is of little help if it remains outside the animal.

## Seizures

Watching your pet seizure is a very difficult thing to do, but it is important to keep your composure. Be sure to actually time the event as they always seem to last longer than true elapsed time. Any seizure lasting longer than ten minutes can cause permanent brain damage. Get on the phone to an emergency veterinarian and prepare to transport if three to four minutes go by.

Move any furniture or other objects out of the way so your pet does not hurt himself during the convulsion. Do not put your fingers into his mouth; you will only succeed in getting hurt. A seizing patient never swallows his tongue.

The term seizure refers to uncontrolled muscular activity due to extreme excess firing of many nerve cells in the brain. A seizure is a symptom of a brain malfunction and is not a disease itself.

There are many types of seizures so they may appear differently in different animals. If only a small part of the brain is affected you may see a partial seizure. In this case, only a part of the body, such as one leg, is affected. The animal usually maintains consciousness throughout the event.

A grand mal or generalized convulsive seizure, which is what you have described, involves the entire body and is characterized by loss of consciousness. This is the most serious type and the most disturbing to watch.

There can also be a sudden loss of consciousness without the convulsion. This is called a generalized nonconvulsive or petite mal seizure. This type can be difficult to differentiate from a fainting spell, which may be caused by a heart condition.

Many conditions can cause a pet to seizure. Toxins such as lead, arsenic, strychnine found in pest poisons, organophosphates found in some flea products, antifreeze, cyanide and others can poison an animal's brain causing seizures.

Certain internal metabolic problems such as liver failure and low blood sugar can lead to seizures. Hypocalcemia, or low blood calcium, can also trigger these attacks. This condition most commonly occurs in mothers that lose too much calcium to their nursing pups.

Nutritional problems such as thiamine deficiency can cause seizures. Structural abnormalities that the animal may be born with such as hydrocephalus, or conditions the pet may acquire, such as a tumor, can all lead to seizures.

Encephalitis, distemper and tetanus are infections that cause seizures. Finally, if no other cause of recurrent seizures can be found, we determine the pet has epilepsy.

As you can imagine, it may take some extensive testing to find the cause of your pet's problem. The bare minimum involves a thorough physical exam and blood work. Some cases may require a spinal tap and MRI to get to the bottom of it.

If the cause of the seizure can be determined, the problem is treated accordingly. If the diagnosis of epilepsy is made, the pet may be medicated with anti-seizure medication such as Phenobarbital.

The goal of anti-seizure medications is to decrease the length and frequency of your pet's seizures. They do not cure epilepsy; they simply control the convulsions. These potent drugs are usually only prescribed if the patient seizures more than once a month or if the seizures are dangerously lengthy.

Holistically, nutrition and acupuncture have also been successful in controlling seizures, sometimes even when medications have failed. This approach has the benefit of causing fewer side effects.

Whatever approach you choose, your veterinarian will want to establish a pattern of seizures before prescribing a treatment, so time them and keep track of the dates. Working closely with your veterinarian will ensure the best possible care for your seizing pet.

## **Physical Therapy**

There are some general guidelines for physical therapy that can help. This course of action is suitable for the aftercare of joint surgery as well as for injured joints. In either case, be sure to get the OK from your veterinarian in case there are extenuating circumstances.

Restricting the pet's activity after an injury or surgery is an important step. I usually recommend that the pet be taken outside on leash walks only. Also no running, jumping or steps are allowed.

Restricting exercise does not mean strict cage confinement, although there are times where this may be required. Again, check with your veterinarian. Over-restriction of activity might lead to muscles constricting and protracted lameness.

Physical therapy involves manipulating joints within their normal range of motion to keep them from freezing up. These techniques also help to maintain normal blood flow to the healing site.

When doing range of motion (ROM) exercises, firmly hold the bones above and below the joint being manipulated, and gently flex, extend and rotate the joint in every direction it is meant to move in. Do not force the joint farther than it will easily bend. When you meet resistance, stop.

Another aspect of physical therapy is the judicious use of hot and cold packs. Remember that our pets' skin is much more sensitive to heat than ours. Be sure the hot pack is not scalding hot.

Also, damp heat is much more beneficial than dry heat. Instead of using an electric heating pad, use towels soaked in warm water. Avoid getting any incision or open wound wet.

As any person who has gone through physical therapy will tell you, the procedure can be painful at times. How much you can help your pet will depend on his level of cooperation and threshold of pain.

Having made these introductory statements, here are the steps for physical therapy:

1. Apply ice to the site for 10 minutes immediately after the injury/surgery.
2. Then alternate ice on for 10 minutes and off for 10 minutes for 30 minutes every 8 hours. (Start and end with ice.)
3. After the injured area is no longer hot, usually 48-72 hours after the injury/surgery, do as above only add heat between the ice applications for the next week.

4. Starting the day after the injury/surgery do ROM of joints above and below the affected joint. Be careful not to bend the affected joint.
5. After 2 weeks do ROM of the affected joint.

### **Degenerative Myelopathy**

Degenerative Myelopathy (DM) is a disease that causes progressive paralysis starting in the rear legs. The continued paralysis may develop rapidly, or have a waxing and waning course. Eventually the bladder and colon become affected leading to incontinence.

The age of onset is 5 to 14 years. It affects mostly German Shepherds but a few cases have been reported in other large breed dogs. This predisposition suggests that genetic factors are involved in the development of the disease, although the exact cause of DM is unknown.

Some researchers believe an autoimmune disease causes DM. This term refers to a condition where the animal's immune system attacks its own tissues. In the case of DM, the immune system attacks the nervous system. Of course, what triggers this attack is a mystery.

There is no test specifically for DM so the diagnosis is made by ruling out other diseases that cause paralysis such as a spinal tumor or ruptured disc. This involves blood work, X-rays and myelogram or MRI.

Until recently, there was little hope for these unfortunate canines. Although there is currently no cure for this devastating disease, researchers have made progress. Veterinarians at the University of Florida have been studying the condition for twenty years. They have developed an integrative protocol involving exercise, dietary supplementation, medication and other supportive measures.

This treatment plan has been shown to slow the progression or result in clinical remission of DM in up to 80% of the patients. A homemade diet, which consists of boneless pork center loin chop, tofu, carrots and spinach, is recommended. To this is added bone meal, vitamins and certain herbs.

Two medications are key to this treatment plan. They are aminocaproic acid and n-acetylcysteine. These drugs can irritate the stomach so must be used with caution in animals prone to GI upset. The Florida researchers even mention that acupuncture can be helpful in the treatment of DM and has no side effects.

The University of Florida has an excellent web site on this subject, which gives all the details of this DM treatment protocol. They even have links to the web site of a pharmacy that can provide the drugs and supplements. The address is "[http://neuro.vetmed.ufl.edu/neuro/DM\\_Web/DmofGS.htm](http://neuro.vetmed.ufl.edu/neuro/DM_Web/DmofGS.htm)".

If your veterinarian is not aware of this research, I urge you to download this information and present it to him or her. The success of this approach using conventional medicine, nutrition and alternative tactics demonstrates the value of an integrative approach to disease.

## **Canine Reproduction**

Dogs usually go into heat for the first time at between 6 and 8 months of age, although a rare early bloomer may cycle at 5 months. The heat period usually lasts about three weeks, but this can vary greatly.

You can tell that your dog is in heat by the swollen vulva and vaginal bleeding. You'll also probably notice that she has become very popular with male dogs. You may get some love hungry studs hanging around your house all day.

Never let a female in heat outside off a leash or unattended. The less you want puppies, the more likely it is that she will get pregnant. (Murphy's Law, corollary #52). Believe me, an 8-foot fence will not keep a determined male dog out of your yard.

Female dogs usually come into heat twice a year. Most females bleed during the first half of the heat and are the most fertile during the second half.

The best way to prevent pregnancy in dogs is to have them spayed. There are drugs available to keep females from coming into heat, but the side effects are risky. There is also an injection that can stop a pregnancy if administered within 72 hours of the breeding. This "miss mating" shot also comes with risks.

Whether or not a dog becomes pregnant, she goes through the same hormonal changes. This means that, unlike most other animals, it is normal for dogs to have "false pregnancies." Different dogs manifest this condition to different degrees. A female dog may get a swollen abdomen and mammary glands and even drip milk, without being pregnant.

A pregnant dog carries the puppies for about 63 days. This gestation period may vary by up to 7 days.

By the 28<sup>th</sup> to the 35<sup>th</sup> day of pregnancy, it is usually possible for a veterinarian to determine if a dog is pregnant by carefully feeling her abdomen. Of course, this pregnancy test can be hindered if the animal is over weight or of a large build.

After 45 days, the fetal skeletons begin to calcify so X-rays can detect the pups. This test has the added benefit that the number of puppies can be determined.

There are other pregnancy tests for pets including sonograms and special blood tests, but these are not always readily available.

A pregnant female needs extra nutrition. At about day 35, the female should be weaned onto puppy food. Most pregnant dogs require 1.5 times the normal amount of food for their maintenance at the time of birth.

Once the female starts into labor, she should produce a puppy within 1 to 2 hours, and no more than 1 hour should elapse between puppies. If there are problems with delivery, call your veterinarian. Be sure you know your veterinarian's after-hours emergency procedures, as these things never happen during regular hours.

As the puppies grow, the mom may need up to 3 times her normal amount of food to support lactation. Keep nursing dogs on puppy food until the puppies are weaned.

## **Diabetes**

Sugar diabetes or diabetes mellitus is caused by a shortage of insulin in the animal's blood stream. It results from damage to the insulin producing cells in the pancreas.

Insulin is the hormone that helps the sugar (glucose) in the blood stream to enter the cells of the body. Without the proper amount of insulin, the glucose derived from food goes into the blood but cannot move into the cells. This causes the blood glucose level to rise above normal.

All of this extra glucose is removed from the blood by the kidneys and excreted into the urine. As the excess glucose spills into the urine, it carries extra water with it. This causes the pet to lose more water than normal in the form of excessive urination.

The loss of body water leads to excessive thirst. It is important to understand this relationship because if water is restricted from an animal in this condition in the attempt to ease the excessive wetting situation, the animal may become dehydrated.

The first signs of diabetes that most pet owners notice are that the pet drinks and urinates excessively. The excess sugar in the urinary tract can lead to frequent bladder infections.

If left untreated, the condition of the diabetic pet deteriorates and she may lose weight and become weak. Cataracts may form causing blindness.

Eventually, the untreated pet will develop vomiting, severe weakness, coma and death. Because symptoms develop gradually, often the disease has progressed to advanced stages before anyone realizes there is a problem.

Diagnosis is made by complete physical exam and blood and urine samples showing above normal glucose levels.

Oral diabetic medicines are less effective in animals than in people. Add to this the fact that most animal cases are detected in later stages and you can see why the treatment of choice is insulin injections.

Insulin is usually given once a day, but sometimes twice a day injections are needed. Multiple small meals of a high fiber diet help keep the blood glucose on an even keel.

Blood glucose levels fluctuate throughout the day and insulin needs vary from patient to patient. Therefore, in order to determine the correct dose for a particular animal, the pet needs to have hourly blood glucose analyses. This necessitates a stay in the hospital at the start of therapy.

Once the pet is on the proper dose, the owner is encouraged to check the urine glucose at home with special test strips from the pharmacy. The pet also needs to have blood tests monitored, as the insulin dose may need to change periodically.

Most diabetic cases respond well to insulin therapy. The biggest hurdle is the owner's fear of giving their pet injections.

## **Mange**

Mange is the skin disease caused by mites. Mites are microscopic parasites from the spider family. There are several distinct types of mites that cause problems in our pets and therefore several kinds of mange. We will discuss the two most common forms.

Diagnosing mange can be difficult. There are many skin diseases and they all look similar. The test of choice for mange is a skin scraping. The veterinarian scrapes the surface layers of skin and looks for mites microscopically.

Because relatively few mites can cause a bad skin condition, they can be hard to find. Ten skin scrapings could all be negative and mites could still be the problem. So

negative skin scrapings do not rule out the disease. But, finding several mites on a scraping is enough to diagnose mange.

The first type of mite is called demodex and is responsible for demodectic mange. These tiny bugs can be found in the hair follicles of normal animals. In fact, if you plucked one of your eyebrows and looked at it under the microscope, you might find a demodectic mite.

Normal animals with a healthy immune system keep the number of these mites under control. In some other animals however, these mites can reproduce uncontrollably and cause mange.

Demodectic mange usually appears as areas of hair loss without much redness or itching. Of course, there are always exceptions. Some pets with demodectic mange do itch. Demodex is not contagious from animal to animal nor from pets to people.

This disease can affect small patches of skin. In such cases a topical treatment, Goodwinol ointment, can be applied with much success.

Occasionally, demodectic mange can affect the entire surface of the body. This is called generalized demodectic mange. The generalized form is much more serious. Animals with this condition have a major problem with their immune system and are often in overall poor health.

Conventional treatments for generalized demodex involve dips or other medications to kill the mites. These treatments are somewhat toxic and often fail. This is not surprising since the mites are not the problem. The animal's immune system is the problem.

Medications may be needed to bring the mites under control, but at the same time the animal must be made healthier through proper nutrition and supplements. Besides a natural whole-foods diet, extra vitamin E, vitamin C, chelated zinc, and essential fatty acids boost skin immunity.

The second type of mite is the sarcoptic mite. As you might guess, it causes sarcoptic mange.

This form causes an intensely itchy, red rash and is often first seen on the edges of the earflaps, elbows, ankles and underside. It often quickly spreads over the entire body.

Sarcoptic mange is highly contagious from animal to animal. Direct contact is not needed for the spread of this disease. Your pet can simply walk where an affected animal has been and pick up some mites. They can even live on human skin for a short period causing an itchy rash.

Once properly diagnosed, sarcoptic mange is usually easily treated with special dips. It is important to clean up the environment to avoid recontamination. Of course the same nutritional recommendations as for demodectic mange apply here.

### **Feline Urinary Problems**

Urinary tract problems are very common in cats. The blockage you describe is usually caused by crystals that form in the cat's bladder, then lodge in the urethra (the tube that leads from the bladder to the outside).

Crystals form just as often in both male and female cats, but males are more frequently blocked because their urethras are longer and narrower.

Crystals in the bladder irritate the lining and cause pain. This manifests as straining to urinate, urinating small amounts at a time, increased frequency of urination and blood in the urine.

Often the cat will associate the pain of urination with the litter box and in an attempt to avoid the pain, will start urinating outside the litter box. For this reason, any cat caught urinating out of its box should have a urine sample checked for signs of disease.

If crystals get lodged inside the urethra and urine flow is blocked, the situation quickly becomes a crisis. The cat will visit the litter box frequently and squat without producing any urine. Often the cat will cry in pain.

As urine backs up into the cat's system, toxins in his bloodstream cause nausea, vomiting and inactivity. Within hours the condition progresses to kidney failure and death. Any animal straining to urinate without success needs to be seen by a veterinarian immediately.

When a blocked cat comes into a veterinary office the bladder is quickly catheterized. This procedure usually requires anesthesia. A urine sample is analyzed to determine the cause of the problem. The bladder is flushed and the cat receives fluids, often intravenously.

A pet with this condition often needs to remain in the hospital for several days while recovering. Veterinarians like to be sure the cat can urinate on its own before sending him home.

There are several types of crystals that can cause this problem. It is important to determine the exact cause by urinalysis so the condition can be treated correctly.

Treatment involves a special diet that eliminates the minerals involved in the crystals and adjusts the urine pH. Prescription diets sold only by veterinarians are best. Most over the counter urinary diets decrease the frequency of one type of crystal, but can increase the frequency of others.

Once a cat shows signs of crystals in the urine, he is at risk of blockage for life. Even animals on the prescription diets need to have their urine monitored periodically to be sure the problem is under control.

There is some speculation that urinary crystals may be promoted by feeding dry food to cats. Eating dry food can cause slight dehydration in some cats resulting in highly concentrated urine, which is more likely to crystallize.

It has been shown that dry food is not very effective at keeping pets' teeth clean, so feeding canned food is probably healthier for cats. Of course, the healthiest diet is home made food from a balanced recipe.

## **Ear infections**

Ear infections are one of the most common maladies affecting our canine friends. Cocker spaniels are notorious for having ear problems. There seems to be some genetic influence involved, but I'm sure there are many other factors as well.

Ear infections are generally believed to be caused by bacteria or yeast. Any simple ear infection can turn into a chronic nightmare if it is not treated right from the

start. For this reason, even mild ear infections should be treated daily with cleaning and antibiotic drops.

Cleaning the ears properly is a key to clearing the infection. This procedure not only helps to flush out the infection and debris, it also keeps the ear medication from building up in the ear canal.

To clean the ear, use a safe and effective ear cleaning solution. Fill the ear with the liquid. Massage the ear at its base on the side of the head. (You should hear the solution churning in the ear.) This breaks up the wax deep down where you cannot reach. Next, let the pet shake its head. This flings the wax out to the surface. Finally, swab the ear with a cotton ball.

The ears should be re-checked by the veterinarian at the end of the treatment to be sure the infection is eradicated. Too often, pet owners stop treating ear infections when the pet stops scratching at the ears.

If a small infection remains deep in the ear, it will often be resistant to the antibiotics when it again rears its ugly head. Only a veterinarian's otoscopic exam can assure the infection is totally cleared up.

In chronic cases, it is important to be sure you are using a medicine that will kill the particular organism that is causing the problem. It is often necessary to do cultures to determine which antibiotic will work the best.

Occasionally, systemic diseases predispose a pet to chronic ear infections. Be sure to have your dog tested for low thyroid (hypothyroidism) and other imbalances. Hypothyroidism is not uncommon in cocker spaniels.

I find that many dogs with chronic ear infections have seasonal allergies as well. Often the ears flare up at the same time as the skin, suggesting that allergies can play a roll in this ongoing condition. In these cases, allergy medicines and proper diet can help alleviate the problem.

Sometimes, the best that can be hoped for is control of the ear inflammation. This requires consistent treatment on a regular basis with the appropriate medications. Frequent follow-ups with your veterinarian are helpful to monitor your pet's progress.

### **Reasons to Have Your Female Pet Spayed**

The most obvious reason to spay your pet is that spaying prevents the pet from being able to reproduce. If doing your part to stop the pet overpopulation problem that causes thousands of animals to be put to sleep every day is not enough motivation to get your pet spayed, there are many other benefits to spaying as well.

When an animal is spayed they no longer come into heat. This means no messy discharge to clean up for dog owners and no midnight opera singing by your kitty virtuoso.

It also means no visits from unrelenting, unwanted suitors. Remember that a male can smell a female in heat from miles away. It takes only a few minutes of unchaperoned outdoor activity to result in a litter of puppies or kittens.

On the health front, a spayed female is less prone to certain hormone-related cancers such as malignant mammary tumors. Also, for a spayed pet, ovarian and uterine cancers are not a concern since these organs have been removed.

Another health benefit of spaying is that it prevents uterine infections called pyometras. These life-threatening afflictions are difficult to diagnose and not at all uncommon in older, unspayed females.

If you are considering the idea of breeding your pet, be sure to think it through. Do you really know what you are getting into? Ask any professional breeder and they will tell you that there are a lot of things that can go wrong.

It may seem that giving birth and raising young ones should come naturally to dogs and cats. This is not always true. Sometimes there is trouble with the delivery and a c-section is needed. Also, some females are poor mothers and the owner ends up bottle-feeding the entire litter every two hours for a couple of months.

It is unfortunate that some people buy a female pure-breed dog at the pet store for hundreds of dollars and start seeing dollar signs in their heads as they multiply that price times the number of puppies the dog might have. Most pet store dogs are sold as pet quality. This means that they do not meet breeding standards. Their puppies have little value due to poor genetics.

Do your pet and yourself a favor and get her spayed. The surgery is usually performed when the pet is from six to eight months of age, and before the first heat. However, it is never too late. Animals can be spayed at any age. Many humane societies have spay/neuter programs to help low income families afford the surgery for any pet. There is no excuse for the abundance of unspayed animals.

## **FIV**

FIV stands for Feline Immunodeficiency Virus. This is the cat form of HIV, but don't worry, people cannot catch it from cats. However, FIV can be just as deadly to cats as AIDS is to people. Early warning signs include fever, diarrhea, vomiting, abscesses, gingivitis, weight loss and swollen lymph nodes.

Just like people with AIDS, cats with FIV can be infected and not have any symptoms at all. These carriers then spread the disease to other cats. It is passed on by direct contact from cat to cat. Felines most at risk are outdoor cats, cats that fight, or share food and water with other cats, and cats in multi-cat households.

There is no drug that kills this virus. There are some treatments to strengthen the cat's immune system that sometimes help them fight off the infection. Unfortunately, once a cat is having problems, it is often too late to help them.

All kittens and new cats to the household should be tested for FIV. Any cat that comes up positive should be kept separate from all other cats. Some cats that test positive for FIV can live for years before having problems. It is important to realize that these animals are more susceptible to many diseases because of their impaired immune systems. For these cats, the slightest infection can become life threatening. At the first sign of any problem, they should be taken to the veterinarian.

## **How Much Food to Feed**

The exact amount of food to feed a pet needs to be determined on an individual basis. There are many factors involved in this evaluation.

The type of food you are feeding needs to be considered. If your pet gets the cheapest pellets on the market, with lots of fillers, you will probably need to feed more volume.

The age of the animal is important in determining caloric intake. Growing, active puppies require more calories than do middle aged dogs. Inactive canine senior citizens need least of all.

Each animal also has its own genetically based metabolism. Just like some of us, some pets seem to put on weight just by looking at food. Other animals eat and eat and never gain weight.

Closely related to metabolism is the amount of exercise the pet gets. Most of our pets do not get enough regular exercise. Come to think of it, it would do most of us just as much good to get out there and walk the dog. As a breed, labs need lots of activity to stay fit.

Speaking of fitness, animals that are recovering from disease or injuries need a higher level of nutrition to fully heal.

Also, internal and external parasites play a roll how much food our pets need. Internal worms often steal nutrition from pets or even damage the intestinal lining causing an energy drain. Fleas and ticks drink blood, which requires pets to take in more nutrition.

Most pet foods give guidelines on how much to give based on the animal's weight. These instructions are a starting point.

Keep tract of how much food your pet is getting, including treats. Also monitor your pet's weight. If, over time your pet is losing too much weight, feed him more. If he gains too much weight, cut back on the amount of food. If your pet is extremely overweight, consider getting him a low calorie food.

Each time your pet is examined, ask your veterinarian for his or her evaluation of your pet's fitness. Your veterinarian can help you choose the right food for your animal.