

## How to Avoid Spending Money at your Veterinary Clinic

Obviously, your dog needs to visit the vet clinic occasionally, just like your car needs an oil change on a set schedule, but here's how to avoid becoming a "regular" at the clinic.

### **1. Don't buy dogs with severe health problems.**

If the puppy has a deformed or missing leg, cleft palate, severe heart murmur, is significantly smaller/stunted compared to littermates, or any other major problem -- think very, very carefully before taking that puppy home. Ask your veterinarian what expenses you may encounter over the life of any "problem" puppy are likely to be, so you know what to budget for.

*Please* check your bank account also. If you "rescue" the puppy but don't have the \$3000-5000 to fix his immediate problems, you have NOT rescued him! or improved his life. If you don't have the money for him, leave the puppy for someone else who does.

### **2. Get a dog that is low risk for health problems.**

In order to define low risk, we need to first discuss what high risk is....

- Dogs that struggle to breathe (brachycephalics).
  - If it lacks a muzzle/nose, you need to know that most of these have a teeny tiny trachea, super long soft palate, and almost no nostrils. Some of these problems can be somewhat fixed (\$\$\$\$) but be aware that after you spend \$5000 on that Frenchie, you might need another \$1000-4000 to make sure the pup can actually breathe the rest of his or her life.
- Dogs that are silver, blue, or gray.
  - These dilute colors tend to have [Color Dilution Alopecia](#). You can't fix it because it is due to their color. Some dogs have very mild CDA (minimal hair loss on sides/flanks) and some have severe CDA (almost entirely bald, or with just a strip of hair running down their back). They are adorable as puppies, but rarely as adults.
  - These dilute colors are high risk for skin infections and allergies -- and if you thought that cute puppy was expensive, you're not going to enjoy learning how expensive Apoquel is (over \$60/month) or Cytopoint (over \$60/month and for giant breed dogs up to \$200/month) or hydrolyzed protein diets (\$77 for a 17.6lb bag), in addition to exam fees, antibiotics, anti-fungals, and shampoos.
- Dogs with poor proportions
  - Short legs and a long back - especially if these dogs get overweight they are very high risk for back problems. Are you ready for a middle of the night drive to a specialty clinic for a \$5000 back surgery to give the dog a 50/50 chance to walk again?
- Dogs referred to as micro or teacup sizes.
  - There's just so many congenital abnormalities that can occur with a teacup sized dog!
- Small breed dogs without sufficient dental space in their mouth (eg brachycephalics) or known to accumulate tartar quickly (eg Dachshunds, toy poodles, etc).
  - Dental cleanings +/- radiographs and extractions can run from 300-3000, and some dogs will need dental cleanings once or twice a year.

Obviously, there will always be people who WANT that blue Frenchie or that Dachshund or that white Bulldog. If that's you -- just be prepared to spend money.

Dogs that come from reputable breeders are significantly lower risk for development of health problems, because multiple generations of ancestors and their siblings (vertical and horizontal pedigree) have had health testing.

For example, breeding OFA Excellent hips to OFA Excellent hips results in a 3% incidence of hip dysplasia. Breeding two dysplastic dogs together results in a 30-65% incidence of hip dysplasia depending on the severity of the parents. Buying puppies from parents without hip scores is like playing Russian Roulette -- are you getting a pup with a 97% chance of normal hips or a pup with a 35% chance of normal hips?

Source: Table 1 on page 8. <https://www.ofa.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/OFA-2018-The-Use-of-Health-Databases-and-Selective-Breeding-.pdf>

Here's how to find a reputable breeder: [http://www.clairedvm.com/finding\\_reputable\\_breeder.pdf](http://www.clairedvm.com/finding_reputable_breeder.pdf)

Dogs that come from reputable rescues or shelters may be lower risk (or have any current health problems dealt with already).

Here's how to find a reputable shelter/rescue: <https://www.animalrescueprofessionals.org/general-blog/slidefind-reputable-animal-rescue/>

Do NOT ever buy from a pet store or puppy mill!

Be cautious when buying breeds known to have short lifespans or high incidence of cancer (ask the breeder lots of questions about longevity!)

Boxers  
Irish Wolfhounds  
Golden Retrievers  
Dobermans  
Bernese Mountain Dogs  
Etc.

### **3. Do the preventative maintenance on your dog.**

- Vaccinations. In-patient parvo treatment is going to be at least \$700 in a rural clinic to \$7000 in a big city specialty clinic depending on how long your puppy has to stay. Rabies is 100% fatal and no amount of money will change that. Just do the vaccines.
  - Here's the AAHA vaccination guidelines that we follow:  
[https://www.aaha.org/globalassets/02-guidelines/canine-vaccination/vaccination\\_recommendation\\_for\\_general\\_practice\\_table.pdf](https://www.aaha.org/globalassets/02-guidelines/canine-vaccination/vaccination_recommendation_for_general_practice_table.pdf)
- Spay or neuter if not planning to breed your puppy. If your female pup develops a pyometra (uterine infection) it is going to be significantly more expensive than a normal spay -- anywhere from 500-2000 or maybe more.

- Here's how to be a reputable breeder if you do plan to breed:  
[www.clairedvm.com/so\\_you\\_want\\_to\\_breed\\_your\\_dog.pdf](http://www.clairedvm.com/so_you_want_to_breed_your_dog.pdf)
- Dental chews/treats to help reduce tartar/plaque formation (note these only work BEFORE tartar builds up).
  - Here is a list of VOHC approved treats:  
[http://www.vohc.org/accepted\\_products\\_dogs.html](http://www.vohc.org/accepted_products_dogs.html)
- Dental cleanings as needed. A quick clean/polish will always be cheaper than full mouth extractions. If you let your dog get to the point that tooth roots are rotten, she has abscessed teeth, and a "trash mouth", it's going to be expensive. Dentals will run 300-3000 depending on your location in the country and how many teeth need to be pulled.
- Trim their nails as needed. Broken nails will always be more expensive than regular nail trims, and long nails/improper gait can lead to tendon and joint damage.
  - Facebook groups for nail trimming:
    - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/nail.maintenance.for.dogs>
    - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1741980532798065>
    - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/328759898056576>
  - Training your dog to accept nail trimming:
    - <https://tractive.com/blog/en/health/dog-nail-trimming-how-to>
    - <https://www.caninetofive.com/the-at-home-guide-to-trimming-your-dogs-nails/>
    - <https://www.akc.org/expert-advice/health/how-to-trim-dogs-nails-safely/>
    - <https://www.vetmed.wsu.edu/outreach/Pet-Health-Topics/categories/procedures/dogs/clipping-your-dog's-claws>
- Flea and tick preventatives. Flea allergies can lead to nasty skin infections (\$\$), fleas can carry tapeworms (\$), and ticks can carry diseases that will kill your dog or make them incredibly sick (\$\$\$\$). Garlic, diatomaceous earth, coconut oil, etc are not effective flea/tick preventatives. Use products like Simparica, Bravecto, Nexguard, Advantix, Frontline, Advantage Multi, etc as recommended by your veterinarian. They're really only \$10-20/dog/month so not that expensive.
- Heartworm preventative. If you live in an area where heartworms are found -- <https://www.heartwormsociety.org/in-the-news/558-ahs-announces-findings-of-2019-heartworm-incidence-survey> -- which is most of the U.S., then keep your dog on heartworm preventative. The preventative is \$10-20/dog/month and is frequently bundled with flea/tick preventatives. Treating a dog that is heartworm positive is usually around \$1000, if identified and treated before heart failure develops.
- Regular exams at your vet clinic. This may be a quick physical exam as a young dog or twice yearly bloodwork as a senior dog. Make sure you have your pet looked at frequently enough that we can identify problems when they are small and easier to deal with.

#### **4. Feed your dog an appropriate diet.**

Do not feed grain free due to risk of heart disease (dilated cardiomyopathy - DCM).  
<https://vetnutrition.tufts.edu/2018/11/dcm-update/>

Feed a food from a manufacturer who controls the product all the way from acquisition to packaging, owns the plants where it is manufactured, who does feeding trials, who has nutritionists on staff, and who provides the ingredient info. These are considered WASVA compliant diets. Current brands that meet this criteria are (in no particular order):

Hills/Science Diet  
Purina  
Iams  
Eukanuba  
Royal Canin

You can check other brands to see if they meet this criteria (or even answered the questions) at:  
<https://petnutritionalliance.org/chart/index.php/manufacture-report>

If you have your heart set on feeding homemade food, wait until after your puppy has reached his/her adult height (after 12 months of age), and then you have two options to help formulate a BALANCED diet:

Balance It - [https://secure.balanceit.com/recipegenerator\\_ver4/index.php?rotator=EZ](https://secure.balanceit.com/recipegenerator_ver4/index.php?rotator=EZ)  
Use a Veterinary Nutritionist - <https://acvn.org/nutrition-consults/>

### **5. Do not let your dog get fat!**

Most veterinarians are notoriously anti-conflict. If your vet actually tells you that your dog is overweight -- he is absolutely overweight.

If you are unsure if your dog is overweight, the Purina Body Condition Score Chart is available here:  
<https://www.morrisanimalfoundation.org/sites/default/files/filesync/Purina-Body-Condition-System.pdf>

Fat dogs live 2 years LESS on average than normal weight dogs -- see the studies at <https://www.purinaproplanvets.com/media/1379/getresourceaxd-2.pdf>-- but more importantly, fat dogs cost you money.

- Cruciate tears (expect TPLO, TTA and Deangelo surgeries to cost \$2000-4000 for each leg)
- Joint disease (glucosamine, pain meds, routine bloodwork, etc)
- Diabetes (special diet, insulin, regular glucose monitoring)
- Pancreatitis (\$500-3000 hospitalization stay depending on severity and your location in the country)
- Skin infections (all those folds that provide warm moist places for bacteria to grow!)
- Etc

And lastly.... fat causes inflammation, and chronic inflammation can lead to cancer.

Vet clinics don't charge for use of their scale. If your dog needs to lose weight, take them every 2-4 weeks to the clinic and check their weight to be sure you're making progress.

### **6. Keep your dog safe.**

Things that are not safe...

- Riding loose in the bed of trucks
- Riding tied in the bed of trucks with a long enough tether to get over the side of the truck
- Riding loose in a vehicle (they can go through the windshield in an accident or their flying body can injure/kill people in the vehicle)

- Running loose next to a road
- Playing fetch across a road (use some common sense)
- Running off lead with a poor recall in a place where coming immediately when called is essential (train your dog!)
- Chasing horses or cattle or wildlife
- Fighting with other dogs (keep your dog away from aggressive dogs)
- Eating non-food items (string, balls, squeakers, socks, rocks, and kids toys are the usual culprits)
- Spending lots of time in tall foxtail/cheatgrass/grass awn areas
  - See here for the dangers of this grass:  
<https://www.petmd.com/dog/conditions/traumatic/can-grass-kill-your-dog>
- Porcupines
- Poisonous snakes

I realize that working dogs -- and most of our breeds were originally developed to work -- may have risky jobs, so plan on keeping money in a savings account for them. Working cattle or retrieving birds (especially huge jumps into unfamiliar water) can both result in some expensive injuries.

### **7. Consider insurance**

Pet insurance is a life-saver for the catastrophic injuries or illness. Here's a comparison of different insurance companies: <https://www.caninejournal.com/pet-insurance-comparison/>

### **8. Make smart decisions about when to go to the vet clinic**

This site has a great symptom checker to see if you need to go to the vet right away or if it can wait: <https://symptom-webdvm.lifelearn.com/>

The really important stuff...

- Any injury that results in lots of blood loss
- Difficulty breathing
- Any injury that results in exposed bone or joints
- Dog fight injuries especially over the neck, chest, or abdomen
- Vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, and/or lack of appetite in a puppy
- Repeated attempts to vomit without success in any age dog
- Repeated vomiting and diarrhea in an adult dog
- Non weight bearing lameness
- Lethargy, depression, reluctance or inability to rise in any age dog especially if normal before
- Snake bites
- Porcupine quills (these are so much easier to remove when fresh)
- Straining to urinate or inability to urinate
- Any eye abnormalities: injuries, squinting, tearing, blood in the eye, sudden onset of cloudiness
- Seizures (currently occurring ones -- if it happened 12 hours ago and lasted for 30 seconds, that's not an emergency)
- Neurologic problems (if your dog suddenly cannot stand, cannot walk, acts drunk, or walks into stationary objects, all of those are an emergency)
- Whelping problems
  - More than 24 hours of stage 1 labor

- More than 30 minutes of active pushing with no puppy produced
- More than 4 hours between puppies

Some things aren't an emergency and can totally wait until the next day or until after the weekend (definitely don't go to the emergency clinic for these!)

- Your dog pooped out a worm
- Your dog has fleas
- Your dog developed an ear infection today
- Your dog had diarrhea... once.
- Your dog lost a tooth
- Your dog was sick/injured/vomited/etc 4 days ago and is much better today
- Your dog limped a couple times after playing
- Your dog has diarrhea/lameness/bad breath/weight loss/coughing for 2 months (if you've already waited 2 months, then it should be fine to wait another 48 hours)
- Your dog has a pencil-eraser-sized lump on his side/face/rump that wasn't there yesterday

And then some things are urgent (go tomorrow) but not an emergency (visit your regular vet, not the emergency clinic) -- this is not an all-inclusive list

- Growths in your dog's mouth (these are often bad -- schedule surgery ASAP if you find an oral mass)
- Growths on your dog's leg (these are so much easier to take off when small -- please visit us when we can still take the lump off and have enough skin to close the incision!)
- Growths next to your dog's anus
- Blood in urine
- Limping (as long as still weight bearing -- if they are packing the leg it's an emergency)
- Some lacerations (but there's a big difference between a 1" cut on the dog's side and all the skin missing on his leg -- ask your vet if the cut needs to be seen right away or if it can wait 24 hours)

## **9. Train your dog**

If you didn't train your puppy to accept restraint or have his nails trimmed or his teeth looked at, then when you want a nail trim it is going to be the nail trim (\$) and the sedation (\$\$), and then maybe reversal (\$\$) if you want to walk out the door in 30 minutes. Some clinics may insist on bloodwork (\$\$) before sedation too.

If you bought an aggressive dog, then it's going to need drugs before it gets to the clinic (\$) and when it gets here (\$\$) so we can examine it, and then the behaviorist you will be seeing is also expensive (\$\$\$). That is on top of whatever your dog needs to be treated for that brought him/her to the clinic in the first place.

If you never crate trained your dog, and he decides to bark non-stop and destroy his IV lines and pull out his catheters when he has to stay at the clinic to repair that cruciate tear, and then eat his blankets so that he needs foreign body removal surgery -- it is going to cost you significantly more money than if he was well behaved.

Please acquire stable, social dogs and then train them to accept being handled, restrained, and confined so that your veterinary visits cost less money.

**10. Don't wait too long to visit your veterinarian**

We can fix a lot of things... but not everything. If you leave your dog in labor for 3 days with a stuck puppy, we're probably not going to be able to fix her, or if we can it'll be really expensive. If you bring your dog in with a softball sized mass on its leg, we probably can't remove the mass without removing the leg, and amputation won't be cheap. If your dog started losing weight 3 months ago and is now emaciated, has a temperature of 92F, and can't stand, you won't like the estimate or the prognosis. If your dog got in a dog fight a week ago and now you bring him in with huge wounds full of maggots, that isn't going to be cheap either.

If your car is leaking oil or transmission fluid, you know to take it to the shop immediately so you don't have to replace the entire engine or transmission, right? It's the same concept with your pet. Make sure you bring them in early when something is truly wrong and it will be much less expensive!

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