

Dogs, Cats Can Help Owners Keep Resolutions

Experts offer tips for pet owners on starting the new year off right.

Posted: December 30, 2008, 5 a.m. EST

Pet owners who are planning to make New Year's resolutions might want to enlist the help of their dog or cat to help stick to those goals.

Lorraine Corriveau, a wellness veterinarian at Purdue University's School of Veterinary Medicine, says that as people draw up a list of resolutions for 2009, it's a good idea to keep pets in mind as well. One way to do so is by making time to exercise and play with them more often.

According to the American Kennel Club, resolutions are things that can be shared with a pet. For example, to follow a healthy diet, pets and their owners are advised to stop eating too many calories.

In addition, the AKC recommends that pet owners set regular meal times, cut back on meal portions, and keep track of the amount of calories consumed by pets and pet owners.

Resolving to help others by volunteering can also be done with the help of a dog or cat. Corriveau says pet owners can donate time, effort, or resources to a local animal welfare organization.

To start the new year off right, Corriveau offered the following tips:

- * Spay or neuter your pets, adding more years to their lives and improving their behavior.
- * Provide them age-appropriate health care.
- * Give them a diet suited to their age and medical condition. Pets kept at their ideal body weight live longer. Look for foods designed for different stages of life and medical conditions.
- * Give them medicines regularly to prevent heartworm and fleas.
- * Groom them at home, especially minor grooming procedures, because it causes less stress.
- * Ask your veterinarian or seek expert advice on behavior problems. A basic training class might be useful, especially for a new puppy.
- * Socialize dogs with other animals and people by enrolling them in a dog park, agility/training class, or socialization class.
- * If your pet is especially social, patient, and people-oriented, consider certifying it as a therapy animal. Studies show that pets increase a person's life span, help speed recovery in cases of young and old patients, and are a good moral booster to people in various psychiatric and medical programs.