



Sarah Horn '07



5 TIPS FOR EVERY PET OWNER

1 Just because they can eat it doesn't mean they should. Many common household items can cause potentially life-threatening illness if ingested by pets. Grapes, chocolate, avocado, onions, garlic, and sugar-free gum (sweetened with xylitol) are all toxic when ingested by certain pets. For a more comprehensive list of common household toxins and what species they affect, or if you're concerned about something your pet has eaten, visit the ASPCA's Animal Poison Control website.

2 Dr. Google did not earn a medical degree. While we've all sought advice from the Internet in the throes of panic, it can often incite more fear than reassurance. If you're concerned about your pet, reach out to a veterinary professional. Contact your veterinarian's office during normal business hours and your local emergency veterinary hospital on nights, weekends, and holidays. It will save you time and prevent you from the stress of the unknown before you find yourself burrowed deep in an Internet rabbit hole.

3 Stranger danger can be real. Always ask before allowing your dog to approach another dog. Even though your canine may be dog-friendly, there are plenty of others that aren't. Unfortunately, we see this in practice all the time. Some dogs can be more reactive on a leash as well, so a leashed dog approached by another dog may react defensively. Besides the obvious snarling, growling, and lunging, more-subtle signs may indicate that a dog should not be approached—holding its ears back and flat against its head,

standing still and staring with wide “whale eyes,” and having raised hackles. Some owners tie a yellow ribbon on the leash if their dog does not do well when approached by other dogs. If you notice this, avoid interactions between your dog and theirs.

4 Prevention is the best medicine. Annual physical exams are extremely important, even if your pet isn't due for any lab work or vaccines.

While your pet may seem happy and healthy to you, a thorough examination allows a trained professional to look for any abnormalities that may not be apparent. If certain conditions are detected and managed early, such as heart disease, it can prolong your pet's life.

5 Consider protecting more than your pet's core. Core vaccines like those for rabies, canine parvovirus, and feline panleukopenia target illnesses that have a high morbidity and mortality rate, are widespread, and are easily prevented with vaccination. Some non-core vaccines, however, are just as important, depending on where you live and your pet's lifestyle. Vaccinations against Lyme disease, leptospirosis, and feline leukemia should be strongly considered for pets at risk in areas where these diseases are endemic. Vaccinating your dog for leptospirosis is also a way of protecting your family from this zoonotic disease, as an infected dog can transmit this disease to people.

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Kate Adams '89



ASSIST AGING PARENTS

FIRST OF ALL, THIS IS NOT EASY. Collaboration, stubbornness, compromise, and love will all come into play. My strongest advice is to be proactive—there are many more choices that way. Getting help in the home, modifying a home, finding alternative transportation—initial safeguards are much easier than dealing with a fall down the stairs or a car accident. Start conversations early, keep a sense of humor, and make it clear that independence is important, but so is safety.

THINGS TO DO AND TALK ABOUT:

- Power of attorney, health care proxy, and advanced directives (available on most state websites). I also recommend the “Five Wishes” document—a legal document that combines a living will and a health care proxy. I think it's best to use an elder law attorney, even for a few meetings, for documents and planning, because of their greater expertise in legal services for aging issues.
- Financial planning. Eight out of ten people will need long-term care. The average cost of home care is \$32 an hour. Average monthly costs are high—assisted living: \$5,400; memory care: \$6,800; nursing home: \$11,200.

- Long-term care insurance. Some policies cover home care, some do not. Some only cover nursing facilities. Some will pay family caregivers. Some have different daily limits for home care versus facility care. Most have a maximum daily amount and a maximum lifetime amount.
- If staying home is strongly desired, talk about a long-term plan. Living on one level? Yard maintenance? Trips to medical appointments? Ease of active lifestyle? (All research points to exercise as the best medicine for physical and cognitive health.)
- Consider hiring an aging life care expert for an assessment. A professional will look at the big picture: medical, social, financial, home safety, wellness, family dynamics, and formal and informal care providers.
- If independent or assisted living is part of the discussion, research, make visits, and get on waiting lists. Senior housing is in short supply. An aging life care expert can steer you in the right direction with that, too—they often know the pros and cons of most facilities in their region.
- Use these online resources: naela.org, aginglifecare.org, and the Area Agency on Aging for your county.

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