

Walker Veterinary Hospital

Melanie S. Walker, D.V.M.

38111 US 290

Waller, TX 77484

Telephone (936)931-2244



Protecting Your Pets During Winter

Aaah, winter. It brings to mind cozy scenes with toasty fires in the fireplace, or of people out and about in shorts and sandals, depending on our Texas weather! Because cold weather can sneak up on us, it is even more important to set winter pet plans in place before the “Old Northern” blows in.

If you have a pet it's important that you take some simple precautions to keep him safe during the cold times. Following are some simple tips to keep your pet safe, healthy and happy throughout the winter months.

- First, be careful with antifreeze. It is extremely poisonous and as little as a few teaspoons can kill a small dog or cat. Unfortunately, the chemical has a sweet taste that animals love, so it's crucial to keep it out of reach and to clean up even the smallest spills. Consider using a product that contains less toxic propylene glycol rather than ethylene glycol. When ingested, even a small amount of this substance can destroy your pet's kidneys. Early signs of antifreeze poisoning can include disorientation and stupor, followed by coma and death. See your veterinarian immediately if you think your pet has been exposed to antifreeze.
- During the colder months, outdoor cats can sometimes sleep under the hoods of cars and trucks. When the motor is started, the cat can be injured or killed by the fan belt. If your vehicle is parked outdoors and there are cats in your area, bang loudly on the car hood and honk the horn before starting the engine to give the cat a chance to escape.
- Never shave your dog down to the skin in winter, as a longer coat will provide more warmth. When you bathe your dog in colder months, be sure to completely dry him before taking him outside. If you own a short-haired breed, consider getting a coat or sweater with a high collar or turtleneck with coverage from the base of the tail to the belly.
- Never leave your dog or cat alone in the car during cold weather. A car can act as a refrigerator in the winter, holding in the cold.
- Do not use metal water dishes outside as your pet's tongue could stick to the frozen metal. Use a heavy plastic dish and check the water several times a day to be certain it is not frozen during weather advisory freeze warnings.

- It is important that your pet have plenty of fresh water, even in the winter time. With heaters and furnaces running, the air in your home can become very dry, and your pet can get just as dehydrated as during the hot summer months.
- Arthritis pain may be worse during cold and damp weather. Take special care to handle your pet gently, provide soft bedding, and administer any necessary medications. See your veterinarian if your pet's arthritis condition worsens during colder months.
- When temperatures drop, it is best to keep your pet indoors. If your pet **MUST** be outside during the colder months, make sure you provide a proper home. Dog houses should be made of wood (metal is a poor insulator) and be positioned in a sunny location if possible. The house should be elevated off the ground to prevent moisture accumulation. A flap over the door should be provided to keep out drafts. Be sure your pet knows how to use the flap. Using hay for bedding is a better option than rugs and blankets, which can get wet and freeze.
- Watch for strays! Consider helping unidentified pets until you can find their owner or get them to a shelter. If strays are skittish or unapproachable, provide them with food and water and call the local animal shelter or rescue organization for assistance in getting them out of the cold.

Animals aren't the only ones who get cold during the winter. By following these tips you can make sure you and your pet have a warm and happy winter season!