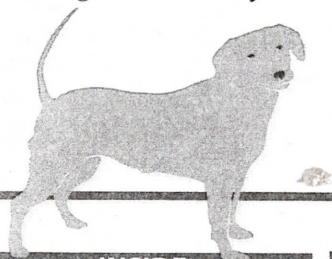




# DOG Watch

Expert information on medicine, behavior and health from a world leader in veterinary medicine



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## IN THE NEWS ...

### Why There's a Decline in Veterinary Visits

Dog and cat veterinary visits have been declining over the past several years, and a new study might explain why. According to the Bayer Veterinary Care Usage Study, the reasons include: the economic impact of the recession, fragmentation of veterinary services, consumers substituting internet research for office visits, cat resistance to vet visits, perception among pet owners that regular medical check-ups are unnecessary and the cost of care.

The study included individual interviews and focus groups with veterinarians, focus groups with pet owners and a nationally representative survey of 2,000 dog and cat owners to determine the factors contributing to the decline in veterinary visits.

"By far the most important finding is the misperception by many pet owners that regular medical checkups for pets are not necessary," said Ian Spinks, president and general manager of Bayer Animal Health North America. ❖

## Help Your Overweight Dog Slim Down

*A successful weight loss program will require both calorie reduction and regular exercise. Here's how to proceed safely.*

You adore your dog, of course. But if you are inclined to show your affection by letting her eat as much as she wants, you may actually be doing your beloved companion a grave disservice. Love should not mean allowing your beloved companion to become too fat for her own good.

Canine obesity is now the nation's number-one nutrition-related canine health problem, according to Francis Kallfelz, DVM, PhD, a board-certified member of the American College of Veterinary Nutrition and the emeritus James Law Professor of Medicine at Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine. Up to half of all dogs in the United States are overweight, he says, their body weight being



more than 15 percent higher than optimal.

### Widespread Problem.

What's more, estimates suggest that at least 25 percent of dogs are obese — meaning that their adult body weight exceeds by 30 percent or more the ideal weight for their age, size and breed. The implications of this trend are serious. According to

the American Veterinary Medical Association, obesity is the fourth leading cause of death among dogs in the U.S.

A number of behavioral changes can indicate that your dog is moving along the path toward obesity. You may notice, for example, that he isn't as active as he used to be; he may

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## Make Safe Dog and Cat Introductions

*It will take time, patience and commitment to doing it the right way. Our experts give you step-by-step instructions.*

Some folks are "dog people," while others have an affinity for cats. Despite the conventional wisdom that dogs and cats can't peacefully coexist, both species can inhabit the same space without the fur flying. However, introducing a cat into a dog-centric home requires planning, patience and commitment.

How long it takes to successfully integrate a new cat with a dog depends on the situation, says Katherine Houpt, VMD, PhD, board-certified by the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists and emeritus professor of animal behavior in Cornell University's College of Veterinary Medicine. "It can take anywhere from days to weeks, and it varies a lot with the dog's reaction," she says. "I think it's important

to increase exposure gradually when doing an introduction so you can monitor the reactions of both animals."

Throwing the two animals together and letting the dust settle is almost universally a bad idea. "The worst danger is the death of the new animal. Secondly, there's a danger of injury to the dog; thirdly, you can cause a fear reaction in either animal that may be difficult to overcome," says Dr. Houpt. The best way to facilitate an introduction is to follow a carefully orchestrated strategy — one that begins before the cat even sets foot into the house.

**Predatory Behavior.** If your dog has a his-

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## DOG AND CAT INTRODUCTIONS...

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tory of flying after squirrels or other small animals, it's safe to say that he has a fairly well-developed prey drive or has simply learned to enjoy the thrill of the chase. Either way, this poses a major challenge to your success in adding a cat to the household equation. When threatened by a larger predator, most cats react by fleeing. Unfortunately, this plays right into a primary canine instinct — to chase smaller creatures, either for amusement or to hunt. That's not to say that this drive can't be overcome; rather, you must take extra precautions when the two animals first meet and expect to spend a significant amount of time using positive reinforcement techniques to keep the dog's chasing behaviors in check.

If you don't know how your dog will act around a small animal, test it out, says Dr. Houpt. "You can simply take it to visit other animals — on leash — to see if your dog is really predatory."

If your dog has caught and killed cats or other animals in the past, you're beyond red flags: Do not try to convince yourself that you can successfully eradicate or contain this type of behavior. "I've seen cases where dogs have broken into homes through screened porches to kill cats," cautions Dr. Houpt. It's better to resign yourself to life without cats or other small animals in the household.

**Create Positive Associations.** The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) recommends a very slow introduction that uses food and smell to get the animals used to each other. First, they suggest, confine the cat in a room with her litter box, food, water and a bed — but with no possible contact with the dog. Feed your cat on one side of the door and your dog on the other. Doing this will create pleasant associations with the presence of the other animal. (Depending on how eager your dog is to meet the newcomer, you might consider keeping her on a leash or crated for this process.) In addition, you can rub the cat with a cloth and leave it for the dog to examine, and do the same for the cat.

When your cat is comfortable in her new room and is using the litter box, says the HSUS, switch things up by confining your dog in the room and allowing the cat to roam the house. This gives the dog the opportunity to explore the cat's do-

main and scent in more detail, while the cat can begin to get comfortable in her new surroundings.

### Take Care With the First Meetings.

When you feel the dog and cat are ready to come face-to-face, says Dr. Houpt, start with the cat in a carrier and the dog leashed or restrained so she can't charge the container. Assess your dog's reaction. If she seems mildly curious or friendly and the cat doesn't seem panicked, you can allow the dog to investigate the carrier and the cat. You can reinforce the experience for both animals by feeding them treats (you may need to recruit a partner so you can each focus on one animal.) Keep the meeting short and repeat this step several times over several days until both animals are tolerating each other's presence and seem relaxed.

Next, set up a barrier the animals can see through, such as a baby gate, and let the cat free on one side with the dog on the other. "If the dog is going up to the barrier and doesn't seem too interested, that's a good sign," says Dr. Houpt. "Danger signs are intense interest, staring and attempts to get at the cat through the barrier. If you have a dog that just lies staring at the cat, that's probably not a friendly interest. That's a predatory behavior and that dog may try to kill the cat."

Again, reinforce calm behavior for both animals with treats. Practice putting your dog in a down/stay while the cat roams around and reward him for staying in this position quietly.

### Preparing for Free Interaction.

When you feel that both animals are sufficiently used to each other, it's time to try a face-to-face meeting. Keep your dog on a leash, put her into a down/stay, and allow the cat to approach on her own terms. This is a great time to give your dog high-value treats for staying in position. If she leaves her down/stay, lure her back into position or, if she shows signs of getting too excited, calmly remove her from the room. If the cat runs away or shows aggressive behavior toward the dog, return to the previous step.

If your dog shows signs of chasing, don't punish her; simply encourage her back into a down/stay, redirect her attention, calmly leave the room with her, or remove the cat from the situation. If you respond with a correction or a punishment to the dog's actions toward the cat, she will begin to associate the cat

— rather than her own reactions to the cat — with the negative consequence. This can create an association that will be very difficult to remove and can lead to increased aggression in the future. It's also important that you freely reward "appropriate" behaviors from your dog, including sitting, lying down or just plain ignoring the cat.

Make no mistake: This is the hard part. "We have had people who've done months and months of obedience work with the dog in the presence of the cat," says Dr. Houpt. "Every time the dog made a move toward the cat, the owner used a Gentle Leader head harness to have him sit. If the owner is committed, that can work, but it takes a long time." ❖

## IMPORTANT PRECAUTIONS

*Supervise: Even if things seem to be going well, don't assume that you can casually leave the two animals alone together. It's safest to keep them separated when you are not at home, at least until you are completely sure the cat will be safe.*

*Provide an Escape Hatch: Make sure that the cat has a place, preferably a high one, to which he can retreat. A high bookshelf or a kitty condo are good options..*

*Separate the Food: Keep cat food out of the dog's reach (to prevent unwanted snacking) and make sure the cat doesn't approach the dog at mealtime (to prevent a dangerous food-guarding reaction).*

*Avoid the Chase: Never encourage chasing, even if it seems to be done in fun. You never know when the game will get serious and one or both animals might be injured.*

*Know When to Say When: In some cases, it just doesn't work out, and it's better to find a new home for the cat than to face tragedy. "If after 10 days neither the dog nor the cat is relaxed, and the dog is making repeated attempts at the cat despite your efforts to keep him under verbal control, it's time to make a change," says Dr. Houpt.*