

KEEPING YOUR PETS HEALTHY WHEN YOU HAVE CANCER

The emotional support that pets provide can be vital to those impacted by cancer, but it is important to keep your pet's health and safety in mind. Your treatments may have an impact on them physically. Healthy pets can help you focus on your treatment and own well-being.

MAINTAINING A ROUTINE

The bond you share with your pet may include the regular maintenance of their health. The day-to-day events of feeding, going for walks and play create a pattern of intimate care. A cancer diagnosis can be disruptive in ways you may not have imagined. To help maintain your pet's daily routine, it may help to have others take over some of these duties for the time being. For information on how a pet impacts your own health, please see our companion fact sheet "Keeping Yourself Healthy as a Pet Owner During Treatment."

Start with healthy pets. Cancer treatment can require much of your time and attention. Ensuring your pet's fitness can reduce your list of worries. If your diagnosis allows for it, try to get to the veterinarian as soon as possible for check-ups. This is also a chance to ask for specific advice about your particular pet type or breed. Prepare yourself with your pet's medications and other necessities now, instead of when you are in the middle of treatment and caring for your own health.

Enlisting the support of others. A personal support network can help you in many ways throughout a diagnosis. Consider asking a friend or loved one to take over the duties of feeding, exercise or grooming, which enable you to enjoy your pet while allowing you to attend to your own health. A neighbor or dependable child can pick up a feeding or walk here or there. Consider using delivery services for pet food and other supplies. Even small amounts of help can go a long way.



Handling highly active pets. While going through treatment, you may find your pet's energy is greater than your own. Try to find ways to get them exercise without impacting your own health. An enclosed dog park or a dog-walking service can be enormously helpful. Your veterinarian might be able to recommend further strategies. Some owners use a lavender or other essential oil on their dogs for a calming effect, using a few drops on the collar or by spraying onto a washcloth for the dog to sniff. Be careful not to use these on cats, as they may be harmful, and use them on dogs only situationally, as they are not a substitute for actual exercise.

Maintaining a new 'normal'. While many pets thrive in an environment where expectations and routine are set, pets are resilient and often understand that new things are happening for a reason. That said, try to avoid large changes, such as adding a new pet to your household. Young animals might require more attention than you can spare and a new responsibility may be more difficult than anticipated. Visiting a dog park or kennel, pet store or other environment where you can spend time briefly with a furry companion can give a boost without long-term commitment.

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YOUR PET'S WELL-BEING

The impact of your diagnosis goes beyond changes to routine. It is important to keep in mind how your medication and treatment might harm your pet.

Handling medication at home. Keep your medications safely away from any pet. Prescriptions designed to help humans can be hazardous to animals, harming or killing them. A locked medicine cabinet or other container will keep your pets out. Close your toilet lids whenever not in use, as your waste may contain traces of your prescription medications. Should you be using a medicinal cream, do not let your pet brush or lick the area where it is applied. Upon any ingestion, call your veterinarian right away and contact your own doctor to see if the medicine needs to be replaced.

Returning from treatment visits. Be aware of germs and other toxic materials that you may bring home with you from clinical settings. Your shoes may be tracking in staph or other infections. Use a disinfectant spray on your shoes and leave them at the door. Change out of your clothes and wash your face and hands thoroughly before attending to your pets or entering areas that they commonly use.

The radioactive dyes used on a PET scan can also be harmful to animals and so it is best to stay away from them for six hours after a session. To be safe, avoid your pets for several hours after a CT scan as well, to let your system flush out what is dangerous to them. Let your health care team know your concerns, including radiologists and other related experts. As always, your doctors and nurses can always provide their best advice.



CancerCare® Can Help

Founded in 1944, CancerCare is the leading national organization providing free support services and information to help people manage the emotional, practical and financial challenges of cancer. Our comprehensive services include case management, counseling and support groups over the phone, online and in-person, educational workshops, publications and financial and co-payment assistance. All CancerCare services are provided by master's-prepared oncology social workers and world-leading cancer experts.

To learn more, visit www.cancercare.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

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