

Five Easy Ways To Help Dogs & Cats

By Heather Moore

Senior Writer

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA)

If you share your life with a dog or cat, make a pact with your animal to spend some time each day giving him or her one-on-one tender loving care. Animals depend on us to take them for walks, change their litterboxes frequently, brush them, play with them, give them biscuits or catnip, and keep them safe. It doesn't matter if you have cats, dogs, both, or neither, please take some time to encourage everyone you know to treat animals with the kindness and respect they deserve. Below are five easy ways to make sure our furry friends are happy, healthy, and out of harm's way.

1. Spay & Neuter

A fertile dog can produce two litters in one year; each containing six to 10 puppies. In six years, a female dog and her offspring can theoretically produce 67,000 dogs. Likewise, a fertile cat can produce three litters in one year. Each litter can consist of four to six kittens. In just seven years, it is possible for one female cat and her offspring to produce approximately 420,000 cats.

Every newborn puppy or kitten means one home fewer for a dog or cat desperately waiting in a shelter or roaming the streets. Between six and eight million animals enter shelters across the United States each year. Of these, approximately three to four million are euthanized. Most are young, healthy, and friendly. Many—about 25 percent of dogs who enter shelters—are purebred.

The best way to end animal overpopulation is by adopting animals from shelters and rescue groups instead of buying them, and *always* having animals spayed or neutered. Spaying and neutering is also a great way to prevent certain health and behavioral problems in cats and dogs. Spaying reduces the stress and discomfort females endure during heat periods, eliminates the risk of uterine cancer, and greatly reduces the chance of mammary cancer. Neutering makes males much less likely to roam or fight, and helps prevent testicular cancer. To find out about low cost spay/neuter services near you, contact SPAY-USA at 800-248-7729.

2. Keep Your Companions Safe

Watch out for your four-legged friend like you'd watch out for your child. Both can get into danger if not kept safe! Never let your dog or cat roam unsupervised—he or she could get hit by a car, attacked by other animals, or stolen for research laboratories. In a world of intolerant neighbors, bored juveniles armed with baseball bats and firecrackers, traps, poisons, and toxic antifreeze spills; the safest place for your companion is inside with you.

Even cats can be taught to walk on a leash; just be sure to use a lightweight leash attached to a harness, not a collar. A nylon-web collar or harness is also best for dogs since choke, prong, and pinch collars can be painful and cause injuries. Make sure your animal friend *always* wears proper identification (a tattoo and/or a microchip and tags bearing your name, address, and phone number) in case he or she does become lost.

It's not safe to leave your dog inside a closed car, even on mildly warm days. On a 73°F day, the inside of a parked car can reach 100°F in 10 minutes and 120°F in 30 minutes. Animals can succumb to heatstroke in just 15 minutes. If you see a dog left alone in a car, please take down the car's color, model, make, and license plate number and have the owner paged inside the store, or call local humane authorities or police. Do whatever is necessary to get the animal out of the car—his or her life may depend on it.

3. Choose Humanely-Tested Dog and Cat Food

Some popular pet food manufacturers conduct cruel nutritional tests on dogs and cats. For example, in 2002 and early 2003, an investigator from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) went undercover in an Iams contract laboratory and saw shocking abuse. Dogs and cats were confined to dark, barren steel-and-cement cells in all temperature extremes. Horribly sick dogs and cats were routinely left to suffer with no veterinary care. A number of dogs were left on a cold, hard floor after having their vocal chords severed and part of their leg muscles hacked out.

Fortunately, more than thirty companies—many which offer vegetarian dog and cat food—such as Evolution Diet, Inc., Harbingers of a New Age, Natural Life Pet Products, Inc., Petguard, Veterinary Nutritional Formula, and Wysong Professional Diets, conduct humane home testing and/or laboratory analysis of foods. A complete list of forward-thinking companies that do not conduct cruel tests on animals in laboratories can be found on PETA's Web site IamsCruelty.com.

4. Don't Declaw

Declawing is more than a simple pedicure. It's a painful and permanently crippling procedure that involves the amputation of the last joint of each toe, including the bones.

After surgery, the nails may grow back inside the paw, causing pain but remaining invisible to observers. Declawing results in a gradual weakening of leg, shoulder, and back muscles, and because of impaired balance caused by the procedure, declawed cats have to relearn to walk, much as a person would after losing his or her toes.

Cats come with claws for a reason. Declawing robs them of a vital natural behavior and of their natural defense. It can even make routine behaviors like scratching in the litterbox uncomfortable. Declawed cats may be morose, reclusive, and withdrawn or irritable, aggressive, and unpredictable. The lack of claws, a cat's first line of defense, makes many cats feel so insecure that they tend to bite more often as a means of self-protection. Declawing is so inhumane that it's been banned or severely restricted in nearly two dozen countries.

Regular trimmings, scratching posts, and nail caps are effective ways to control scratching without causing your cat pain and trauma. Double-sided tape, such as Paws Off (available at PETACatalog.org), also discourages cats from clawing furniture and upholstery. Check out PETA president Ingrid Newkirk's book *250 Ways to Make Your Cat Adore You* for more information and other tips. It's available from the PETA Catalog or in most libraries and bookstores.

5. Be an "Angel for Animals"

Many dogs are forced to live outdoors without shelter in all weather conditions. In order to bring comfort to as many "backyard" dogs as possible, PETA builds and delivers hundreds of sturdy, straw-filled doghouses every year. The doghouses are often the only "home" these neglected dogs have ever had, and it's humbling to see how just four walls, a roof, and a fluffy bed of straw can make such a huge difference in their lives.

But PETA cannot do it alone. Visit HelpingAnimals.com to find out how you can become an "Angel for Animals" sponsor and help keep a needy dog warm. If a dog in your community is left outside all day, please do all you can to persuade his or her "caregiver" to bring the dog inside, or, at the very least, provide the dog with adequate shelter, food, water, and enrichment. If he or she refuses, contact your local humane society.

Please do whatever you can to make this world a kinder, gentler place for dogs and cats. Hold a fundraiser and/or collect donated food, bedding, toys, and treats for animals at your local shelter; volunteer to help walk dogs, clean cages, and play with the animals. The extra attention will brighten their lives and warm your soul.

Feel free to contact PETA at 757-622-7382 or info@PETA.org for more tips on helping animals and to join our campaigns.