



STARTING OFF ON THE RIGHT PAW – DVGRR TIPS FOR ADOPTERS

Protect Your New Family Member – Consider PET INSURANCE

The cost of anticipated veterinary care is a major consideration in adopting a pet. Even if your new dog or cat is perfectly healthy at the time of adoption, routine health care costs such as annual exams, heartworm testing, vaccinations, blood work for older pets, and so on will be your responsibility going forward. That's a given.

But what if your pet develops an acute illness, has an unexpected injury, or needs expensive treatment for a long term condition like arthritis, diabetes, or heart disease? What if your Golden is diagnosed with cancer a few years down the road? (Cancer sadly affects an [estimated 60%](#) of Golden Retrievers.) Will you be financially prepared to secure the best possible medical care for your beloved pet?

Advances in veterinary medicine over the past few decades comprise the proverbial “double-edged sword.” On the one hand, it is wonderful to have so many options, diagnostic tools, and previously unavailable treatments that can extend and enhance the lives of our dogs. On the downside, the cost of those amazing, life-saving options can be astronomical – often heartbreakingly out of reach for many dedicated but budget-strapped owners. The increased use of veterinary specialists, while again a boon from the treatment side, is a significant factor in the rising cost of keeping our pets healthy.

When you truly love and care for your pet, you don't want to have to think with your checkbook when making decisions about needed care and treatment. Yet the reality is that very few of us have unlimited resources available to call on when our pets get seriously ill.

Pet insurance, which has seen a resurgence of interest and availability in recent years, can be a critical back up for those unexpected or unplanned emergency situations. Purchasing a policy provides peace of mind that you'll be able to better manage a canine or feline health care crisis should one occur.

Many owners dismiss the idea of pet insurance, uneasy with the need to pay monthly premiums for something they hope they'll never need. It's true of course, that should your pet stay relatively healthy, you'll have paid out more in premiums than you received back in reimbursement. But, the very nature of insurance is one of risk management, not investment. You wouldn't buy homeowners, car, or human health insurance in the hopes that enough things will go wrong so you can get your money back – you buy it so you'll be protected in the event of a catastrophe. The same is true for pet insurance.

Here are a few key points to keep in mind, should you decide to look into insurance for your four-legged family member(s):

- ❖ Pet insurance is based on a reimbursement model. You pay the veterinarian directly, then submit a claim to the insurance company. So, you do need to “front” the money first, then get reimbursed.
- ❖ Typically, you can use any veterinarian you choose; the vet does not need to belong to a special group or approved list.
- ❖ The amount of reimbursement varies from company to company, as does the method used for calculating it. Careful research is important to find the best plan for your situation.
- ❖ The average premium cost runs about \$30-40 per month. Your actual cost will depend on such factors as the age of your pet, your geographic location, and the amount of coverage you select.
- ❖ Many companies offer a wide menu of coverage options, based on how high a deductible you choose, lifetime limits, per incident limits, co-pays, etc. It’s important to weigh the pros and cons of each in making a decision.
- ❖ Nearly all companies exclude coverage for pre-existing conditions. That means it is best to purchase a policy while your pet is still healthy, or only has a few minor problems. Being young helps too. Generally, the younger the pet, the lower the monthly premium.
- ❖ Most companies also offer the option of purchasing “wellness coverage,” which includes reimbursement for routine annual checkups, vaccinations, spay/neuter surgery, heartworm testing etc. This may be a good option if you have a puppy or young dog that will need a lot of initial health care in the first year, but may not save you much for more mature pets. Look at the list of covered wellness services carefully to decide if selecting this option makes sense for your pet.

If it all sounds a bit daunting, take heart – there are many excellent resources available to help you compare companies and policies. We have copies available of *Your Guide to Understanding Pet Health Insurance* by Dr. Doug Kenney, or you can download this booklet online yourself at Dr. Kenney’s site (see below). It may take some time and patience to educate yourself and then choose an appropriate policy, but you’ll be very grateful you did should your pet *need* that insurance at some point in the future.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Your Pet Insurance Guide (<http://www.petinsuranceguideus.com/>) – a comprehensive website and blog published by Dr. Doug Kenney, a leading advocate of pet insurance.

Pet MD Pet Insurance Center (<http://www.petmd.com/centers/insurance>) – great site for learning and understanding the basics of pet insurance.

Pet Insurance Review (<http://www.petinsurancereview.com/index.asp>) – excellent resource for comparing companies and reading reviews from other pet owners. Also includes good basic info on insurance in general.

Dogtime Pet Insurance Center (<http://dogtime.com/pet-insurance/center/home>) – Good articles and a comparison chart of companies