

Cold Weather and Your Pets

By Sherry Woodard

Here are a few things to consider when the season changes and the weather turns cold:

Think about the amount of exercise your pet gets in the winter months. If your pet is less active, he or she may need less food. But, if your dog plays out in the cold a lot, she may be burning more calories and need more food to produce more body heat. The same is true if your cat spends a lot of time out in his cattery in the cold. So, watch your pet's weight, and consult your veterinarian if you have questions.



If you have a dog and she spends time in a fenced yard, watch your fence line to make sure that the snow doesn't pile up so high that the dog can walk out of the yard.

Check the condition of your pet's coat. Mats sometimes appear in winter and interfere with the coat's ability to keep your pet warm.

Make sure that water is available both indoors and outdoors. If you live in a very cold climate, use plastic instead of metal bowls and buckets. Your pet's tongue may stick to metal, and he could injure himself trying to pull away.

Be on the lookout for antifreeze, which often leaks from cars into parking lots and puddles. Check the floor of your garage, too, for any telltale signs. Antifreeze is attractive to pets because it tastes sweet, but most brands are very poisonous and may be fatal. If your pet ingests even a small amount of antifreeze, contact your veterinarian immediately. Pet-safe antifreeze (which tastes bad) is now available, so consider buying it for your car in the future.

If you live in an area where there's snow, wipe your dog's feet after walking her. She may have picked up ice-melting chemicals, which can irritate and burn the dog's pads. Some of these products are poisonous if ingested by pets. You may want to try dog boots, which protect your dog's feet from sharp pieces of ice, as well as ice-melting products.

Use caution when you start your car in the cold winter months. If animals are left outside, they may climb under the car hood for protection from the cold. Before you climb into your car, slap the hood or open it for a quick look around.

If your dog stays outside in cold weather for more than potty breaks, he will need a warm, dry place away from the cold and wet. Provide him with a doghouse raised up off the ground at least a few inches, and equipped with a door flap to keep out drafts. Also, make sure the doghouse always has dry bedding. Please remember, though, that dogs are pack animals and you are their pack – they want to be with you, so don't leave them out in the cold too long!

Sherry Woodard is the dog training and care consultant at Best Friends. She develops resources and provides consulting services nationally to help achieve Best Friends' No More Homeless Pets mission.