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### Best paw forward in '05

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Here we are again. A fresh new year filled with well-heeled promises to eat healthy, slim down and love thy neighbor - especially those less fortunate.

But while turning over a new leaf for the new year may not be on the agenda of our furry friends, there are myriad ways for animal lovers to better the lives of their four-legged companions. Consider the following 10 resolutions to keep your pet healthy and happy in '05:

- 1. Resist the temptation to overfeed. Obesity is the No. 1 disorder among dogs and cats, and can lead to heart disease, kidney and liver problems, as well as feline diabetes.

"There's significant evidence that pets can live longer if they're not fat," said Dr. John Broussard, who specializes in gastroenterology at the Animal Medical Center in Manhattan.

Still, he said, people tend to overfeed their pets - especially with treats - without considering "the fact that you're dealing with a 10-pound animal."

- 2. Get off the couch. Dogs can benefit from twice-daily long walks or runs, and running alongside can be good for both you and your pooch.

Seth Chodosh, founder of the Manhattan-based dog fitness service, Running Paws ([www.runningpaws.com](http://www.runningpaws.com)), said daily workouts have helped many of his canine clients overcome issues like separation anxiety, weight loss and social behavioral problems.

Indoor cats should get at least 15 minutes of exercise with low-cost activities such as chasing a laser light or jumping in and out of a cardboard box.

- 3. Learn how to read labels, and know what you are feeding your animal.

Dr. Robert Goldstein, a veterinarian who specializes in animal nutrition, suggests paying attention to the first ingredient listed on the label, which is the most prevalent. Whether you're feeding your animal a raw food diet or commercial product, choose wisely, he said, as all pet foods are not created equal.

- 4. Make an appointment for a yearly checkup and use that time to ask important questions. In addition to helping your pet stay healthy, preventive care, in the long run - can save you money.
- 5. Keep your home poison-safe. The more precautions listed on the side of the label of a household cleaner or pesticide, the more toxic it will be, said Dr. Sharon Gwaltney, medical director of ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center.

For an interactive tour to learn about common household toxins and guidelines to prevent accidental pet poisonings in the home, check out the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Web site at [www.aspca.org](http://www.aspca.org).

- 6. Identify your animal. Ed Boks, executive director of NYC Animal Care and Control said 100% of the animals that have tags or microchips are reunited with their families. Unfortunately, the majority of lost animals that come into the shelters without identification never leave.
- 7. Protect your animal from the elements. Salt and chemicals used to melt ice can burn your dog's paws. Try using Musher's Secret Wax or Safe Paws, which will safely melt snow and ice. Both can be found at local pet stores.
- 8. Spay/neuter your animals. Help the city reach its five-year goal of becoming a "no-kill" city. Most unwanted animals, Boks said, will likely end up in the already over-burdened shelters.
- 9. Train a nuisance barker. Last year, 9,040 noisy dog complaints were logged by the city's 311 hotline.

- 10. Help a shelter or rescue group. Volunteers are always needed to help with the animals in the shelter, or to foster pets who need a home environment.

Whatever goals you have set for the new year, don't forget to include the care of your pet, or any pet, and take delight in knowing you've made a difference for animals.