

Your Dog



The newsletter for caring dog owners

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On whether your dog should sleep with you or alone.

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BIGSTOCK

LIFESTYLE

In the Bed, Out of the Bed?

On whether your dog should sleep with you or alone.

■ “I was at a meeting recently speaking to almost 200 dog aficionados,” says Nicholas Dodman, BVMS, who heads the Behavior Clinic at the Tufts Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine. “The room was filled with professionals — trainers, groomers, veterinarians — and a fellow speaker asked of the audience, ‘How many of you have your dog in the bedroom?’

“Everybody’s hand went up. Then the question was put to them, ‘How many of you allow your dog on the bed with you?’

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Bringing Your Dog Into Someone Else's Life

Sharing the love benefits not only other people but also your pet.

■ It took almost a century for my father to live with a dog. Having resided practically his entire life in New York City apartment buildings that didn't allow pets, it just wasn't going to happen — until he showed up on Barney's doorstep one day. Celebrating his 89th birthday this month, Dad has moved into an assisted-living facility. And who should have been there to greet him but beagle-mix Barney.



RICHARD LINDNER

Ray Lindner and Barney

Barney greets lots of the residents, actually — and their children, grandchildren and, in my father's case, great-grandchildren. "We adopted him from a shelter a few years ago," says the volunteer coordinator for my father's residence, Alexandra Garcia. "We think he's about 11 now. An elderly couple had owned him, and when they passed, he was in the shelter for only one day when we took him. Actually, all the assisted living facilities [that are owned and operated by the company] are supposed to have a dog."

Why? "The residents love him," Ms. Garcia says. "They feed him treats, play with him. They enjoy him. He has a bed on every floor and does whatever he wants — sleep on the couch" or hang out with people.

I can't say my father has a particular hankering for Barney, but he does like to see him tooling about and

also enjoys giving him a good pet now and then. "Hey, Dog," Dad calls out (okay, so at 89 he can't remember everyone's name), and Barney, if he feels like it, strolls on over. Dad doesn't seem to mind when Barney declines the offer of a pet or stroke on the muzzle. It just makes him smile to see the house dog, as he is called by the staff, while he ambles on.

Barney is living proof that a dog doesn't have to be a perfectly

trained, purebred specimen to provide a therapeutic experience for people working to adjust to a challenging situation, for instance, the loss of a spouse of almost 60 years. In fact, lots of dogs would make good therapy dogs — dogs with three legs, dogs adopted from shelters, diva dogs, and all other kinds of dogs, as the story starting on page 3 proves. In fact, there's a very good chance that *your dog* would make a great therapy animal — and experience a much enriched life for him or herself in the process.

Barney sure doesn't mind the work — and the hours suit him just fine. ■

Happy tails to you,

Lawrence Lindner
Lawrence Lindner
Executive Editor

Would Your Dog Make a Good Therapist?

You'd be surprised how many dogs can learn to heal.

*The wheels on the bus go
Ruff Ruff Ruff...*

■ Debra Gibbs's shih tzu is "a little spoiled diva," by Gibb's own account. "Boo has always had a very good life," Ms. Gibbs says. Yet "you can tell she's growing" through her work as a therapy dog. She can even delight children with special needs and thereby help them adjust more easily by inserting "ruff ruff ruff" where "round round round" usually goes in the *Wheels on the Bus* song. Ms. Gibbs taught that to her.

"Boo gets that she's helping people," Ms. Gibbs says. Normally, "she doesn't like being kissed and hugged. But if she's working with someone who needs that, she's okay with it. She'll even sit in someone's lap for them. She's using her instinctive senses, and dogs are so much more sensitive to people's energy level and body language compared to other people. I strongly believe that dogs [who represent more than 90 percent of therapy animals] and other therapy animals [like miniature horses, teacup pigs, cats, rabbits, guinea pigs, birds, alpacas, and llamas] get a lot out of it — provided their handler, who is usually the owner, is there with them." In other words, providing therapy proves rewarding and enriching for dog owners as well as for the dogs themselves.

And there's so much dogs can do, depending on their temperaments. Energetic dogs who like to excitedly run up to people in greeting work well for college students who need stress relief during finals and can handle the physicality (and do at universities like Tufts). Dogs



Sometimes therapy dogs provide comfort to people who have health problems similar to theirs. Here, therapy dog Boo, born with a heart defect, cheers a girl with heart disease at a "Friends with Heart" event in Worcester, Massachusetts. Boo's owner/handler, Debra Gibbs, looks on.

with a gentler approach might do better in a nursing home or assisted living facility or with children who might be unnerved or led off task by a super-active dog.

For instance, says Ms. Gibbs, a veterinary technician (nurse) who heads Tufts Paws for People, a non-profit organization affiliated with the Cummings School whose purpose is to help train therapy dogs and make good fits between different dogs and different therapeutic settings, "we did a reading project in Grafton [Massachusetts].

"In one of the schools, we were working with kids for four weeks in an after-school reading program — checking their progress and enthusiasm for reading against that of kids who didn't have access to therapy animals. Their rate of speed in their reading, their confidence

levels, and their enthusiasm and willingness to read academic materials went up compared to the other group. The only difference between the two groups is that one read to animals." But the dogs involved had to be calm, steady, able to sit still, like the children. Their role was to simply be right there when the handler said, "Boo wants to know what the word 'conversation' means" in order to check the child's level of reading comprehension, or, if a student got stuck on a word, "Boo thinks the word might be..."

"That's a non-threatening approach" for a child who might otherwise be uncomfortable about taking the risk to learn something for which he doesn't have confidence," Ms. Gibbs says. "It's astonishingly effective. By bringing the dog into the therapeutic

equation, you increase the likelihood that the learning experience becomes pleasurable for the kids — and thus they're likely to practice more often and for longer periods of time, making the therapy all the more likely to get the person to their goal. I have experienced this a multitude of times," she adds. "It's very, very powerful."

Therapy dogs can be useful — and have their own lives made more interesting — in all kinds of settings. They can work with occupational and physical therapists to help people gain muscle strength and mobility (what can be more motivating than an eager dog egging you on); help people on the autism spectrum who have trouble transitioning from one activity to another; and even work alongside speech therapists. "If a dog is taught to respond to hand signals as well as to vocal cues," Ms. Gibbs says, "then the owner/handler can stand behind the person who's

practicing his speech — perhaps a stroke victim or a child with developmental delays. When the patient is trying to say 'Sit' or 'Down,' the owner can cue the dog by hand to do what the person is attempting to articulate. That's positive feedback for the individual that then makes them try even harder. It's sort of like using a reward, or lure, to help the person practice something that they are not finding especially enjoyable."

In one instance, a dog helped someone in an adolescent psychiatric unit leave his room. This particular individual wouldn't go through the door. "But we started bringing in a dog and saying, 'This room is kind of small,'" Ms. Gibbs relates. "Let's go to the other room. It's a little bigger and has nice windows that face outside, and you can visit with the dog." Through that first little push, he was able to take the steps to return to school. In fact, he actually was able to return

home. Of course, that wasn't just due to the dog. The child had lots of therapeutic interventions. But this particular one was very helpful because you're not saying, 'You have to get out of this room because it's good for you.' Instead, it's positive reinforcement."

Not all therapy dogs are involved in such complicated work. Many, in fact, simply relieve loneliness or cheer up people who aren't able to get out a lot or who once had a dog but no longer can. In fact, Ms. Gibbs's short answer to the question of what therapy dogs do is "make people smile." In other words, there are many scenarios in which your dog would very likely make a terrific therapy dog, adding a lot of interest to a life that otherwise might be spent largely waiting to go on the next walk.

But you can't just decide to take your dog to a nursing home or other public setting one day. There are steps involved.

Animal-Assisted Activities Versus Animal Assisted Therapy

Coming under the umbrella of "pet therapy," animal visitation can either be Animal-Assisted Activities (AAA) for general visitation by a therapy animal or Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT), during which animals and their owners/handlers work with a human health service provider or other professional as an adjunct to traditional therapies. AAA is a more spontaneous type of visit without an official plan for the get-together. A client may pet and coo over the dog. It's a kind of environmental enrichment for the one visited as well as for the dog (and you).

AAT may require a dog who's somewhat more trained, or trainable. In this type of visit, the therapy is planned out in advance, and the visit — and results — are documented by a professional. For instance, veterinary nurse Debra Gibbs's shih tzu, Boo, works with a physical therapist at a public school who's helping a young boy with mobility challenges. The boy doesn't have

the upper body strength to walk in a traditional walker, so he has to use his legs to propel himself along in a harness on wheels.

"He hates this particular part of his school day," Ms. Gibbs says, but he takes Boo for a walk with a leash attached to his walker (and a shorter leash held by Ms. Gibbs during the exercise) and points out various places in the school to her — the offices, the library, etc. "It changes the exercise from something he just has to get through to something that's more fun," Ms. Gibbs says. "He's generally able to go farther when working with the dog, and through the course of the year, his physical therapist has documented a great improvement — attributing a big piece of that to his being able to stroll along with Boo."

Not all dogs are able to be that cooperative. You'll want to decide whether AAA or AAT is right for your pet.

How your pet can earn a ‘therapy dog’ designation

There are a number of different national organizations and also state organizations that either register or certify a dog as a therapy animal once the pet and her owner go through required training and pass an exam. But Tufts Paws for People (www.vet.tufts.edu/paws) is a community partner of an international organization called Pet Partners (formerly known as the Delta Society).

Tufts likes this program, Ms. Gibbs says, because it “translates” across international borders. If you go through training in Massachusetts and need a refresher course after moving to California, Canada, Australia, or certain European countries, it’s going to be the same course. It also requires rigorous testing of the animal-human team, which needs to be repeated every two years. And it has excellent health and safety standards and is the only national organization that requires training for the person as well as the dog (or other animal).

Specifically, the owner (or handler, if the person making the visits with the dog will not be the owner) has to go through an 8-hour course. “After the owner completes the course,” Ms. Gibbs says, “and they feel ready, they come in for an evaluation.”

The testing takes about 40 minutes, with 22 different exercises that the dog and her owner have to do together. Some are for basic obedience — walking politely on a leash, walking politely through a crowd, “Sit,” “Down,” “Stay,” and so on. (“We alter the obedience exercises that have to be completed for different species,” Ms. Gibbs says, “because good luck getting a cat to sit.”)

The second half of the evaluation consists of mock scenarios “that occur very frequently when you and your dog are visiting various



Therapy dog Ilsa is clearly long over the fact that a traumatic accident when she was a puppy left her with three legs. So are the people she helps — including these Emerson College students who have been brought together with the seven-year-old golden retriever for stress relief.

facilities,” Ms. Gibbs relates. As an example, a tester will act over-excited to see the dog and pet the animal in a very clumsy manner, against rather than with the hair pattern. She or he will also act like a young child, with a high-pitched, loud voice, and touch the dog’s stomach, lips, and nose.

“What we’re looking for,” Ms. Gibbs says, “is a dog that is tolerant, along with a handler/owner who says, ‘Fluffy doesn’t like that, but what she does love is being scratched underneath the ear.’ We want to make sure the owner is supporting her pet.

“We also do an exercise during which a tester uses a walker and wears a baseball cap and floppy robe and approaches the dog with a loud, monotone voice. We’re looking to see that the dog doesn’t get put off. The robe has fringe at the hem, while the walker has tennis balls at the bottom. Can the animal deal with all that, and can the owner support the animal under the circumstances

in a way that’s consistent with being polite in public?”

“About 30 percent of dogs don’t pass the first time through,” Ms. Gibbs says. “We had a dog who couldn’t focus on anything but the tennis balls at the bottom of the walker. That’s okay. There’s no limit to how many times a dog/owner team can try.”

The only exclusionary rule is that the dog has to be at least one year of age to be eligible for testing. “A younger animal is more fragile physically and has less predictable behaviors,” Ms. Gibbs comments. But otherwise, the door is wide open. “We have dogs with amputations, dogs who are visually impaired, arthritic, older, and they all make wonderful therapy animals. They can even have a more powerful impact than a physically perfect dog.

“Some of the kids have physical disabilities,” Ms. Gibbs says. “Seeing a well adjusted dog with a physical challenge makes a difference for them. One

golden retriever in the program, Ilsa, has only three legs but she doesn't feel bad for herself. She's like, 'give me a treat. Throw the ball.' That delivers a powerful subliminal message to children with physical compromises."

Is this right for your dog?

It's very important that your dog be a social animal, Ms. Gibbs says. "We certainly don't want to encourage people with very shy or fearful dogs to pursue this. We want the animal to enjoy what she's doing." On the flip side, "we don't want overly bouncy, jumpy animals if they're going to be working with elders or a fragile population," she makes clear.

That said, Ms. Gibbs explains that "there are plenty of people with animals that start out reserved or overly exuberant at first who make great therapy dogs. We have a huge number of animals adopted from shelters, older dogs, and no one knows what their background is," and they may not be up to the task at first, but with proper training they turn out to be terrific therapy animals.

"Training a dog is mostly about socializing it," Ms. Gibbs explains. "If they have good obedience skills and are very friendly but never go into unusual situations, you have to bring them where there are different people, different floor surfaces. I advise people to bring their dogs to Petco and PetSmart. Those stores have so many distractions — odors, noises, kids who come straight up to the dog and want to pet her, shiny linoleum. So we recommend those settings to all our potential handlers who want to ready their dog for the testing.

"Also," Ms. Gibbs says, "put a toddler's t-shirt on your dog and write 'Therapy Dog in Training' with a magic marker, along with 'Ask to pet me — I'm friendly.' That gets your dog used to allowing you to tell

people to come say hello to them."

During the warm weather, "you can also practice in parking lots next to playgrounds or parks where kids are playing T-ball and making lots of noise," Ms. Gibbs says. "You can also go to Loews or Home Depot or similar big box stores. You have to ask first, but many of those stores will let your dog in. Then your animal gets used to the odors — all that sawed wood — and to the noises in a cavernous, echoey space. That's important because conversations will sound different to a dog in a facility other than your living room. There'll be different flooring, too — either linoleum or poured concrete, like in the large home-reno stores. New floor surfaces can be very disconcerting for dogs, so stores are a good place to practice."

Then, when you feel your dog is ready, you can test together. You have

"On the west coast, pet therapy has become widely accepted as a primary therapy and is sometimes reimbursable by insurance. We would like to see that level of acceptance here on the east coast, too."

**—Debra Gibbs,
Program Coordinator
Tufts Paws for People**



The healing touch

BIGSTOCK

two years to test after you've taken the 8-hour course for yourself. Once you pass and provide proof of a professional health screening, Pet Partners sends you a two-year membership packet with a membership fee that averages around \$90. (Some people qualify for discounts.) Membership provides liability insurance — critical in case a mishap occurs in which equipment at a facility is damaged or someone is injured.

It's "a lot of fun to be involved in," Ms. Gibbs says. "Really cool stuff." And you'll be amazed at what your dog can do that you never thought possible. "The dogs even start to figure out when they're getting ready to go to 'work.'"

"Boo doesn't wear a collar in the house," Ms. Gibbs explains. "So when I bathe her and groom her thoroughly, then put the collar on, she knows she's going to visit with people. She knows" it's going to be different.

Dogs become so well attuned to the routine that "on the west coast," she says, "pet therapy" or "animal visitation," as it is also known, "has become widely accepted as a primary therapy and is sometimes reimbursable by insurance. We would like to see that level of acceptance here on the east coast, too.

"I don't think we've even really begun to tap into the possibilities of what you can do with animals," Ms. Gibbs opines. "It's endless." ■

“Only about a quarter of the hands went down, meaning three out of four people — a very large proportion — did allow their dog on the bed.”

Does Dr. Dodman, a world-renowned animal behaviorist himself, think allowing the dog in bed with you is acceptable practice?

“I can’t think why you *wouldn’t* allow the dog on the bed unless there was some compelling reason,” he says. A case in point: “I had a client with a pug cross who snored like a banshee,” he relates. “To get a decent night’s sleep, she had to keep it in another room, which she set up nicely for her dog.”

Another reason to keep the dog off the bed, Dr. Dodman says, is if the “pet is very uppity and engaging with you in conflict aggression.” Conflict aggression is what used to be known as “dominance.” Animal behaviorists now use the new term because it better describes the inner conflict a dog experiences when he doesn’t know who the leader is. He’s not being dominant as much as feeling anxious because it’s not clear who runs the show, so he tries to take over to right things — much like a toddler who experiences anxiety

without social structure and therefore acts out.

When it comes to dogs with conflict aggression who, for instance, may object to being petted or handled by their owners or who act inappropriately in guarding resources such as food or toys, it’s better to keep them off high places like beds, couches, and chairs. It’s a way of teaching them their place in the household.

Conflict aggression also affects some little dogs, who may need to be kept off the bed as well. “A Yorkshire terrier can’t jump onto the bed himself because he’s too small,” Dr. Dodman says. “So his owner lifts him up. But then, in the night, when the owner turns over, the Yorkie nips or bites, saying, in effect, ‘Lie still, you bugger.’” Such a dog, too, should be kept off high places.

An owner’s allergy to his own pet would be another reason to make sure the dog doesn’t come onto the bed. And some owners simply don’t want to share the space — or the dog’s odor. It’s certainly your call.

But anyone who does want to allow the dog into bed with them and doesn’t have extenuating circumstances should not feel they are doing

the wrong thing. “It’s a nice thing to all be one big family together,” Dr. Dodman says. “It’s good for bonding, and it’s good for cementing your relationship with your pet. A recent study even showed that a dog allowed in bed with his owner is no more likely to end up with separation anxiety than other dogs.” It’s sort of like raising a human youngster. The more attention you give a dog and the more you can meet his need to be part of the pack, especially when he’s young, the more independent he’ll be later on.

As for those who fear that ticks or other insects on their dogs will make their way onto their own skin, Dr. Dodman reminds owners that if they protect their dogs with the proper medications, fleas and ticks will keep away. “My dogs do sometimes come home from a romp in the woods with a tick on them,” he acknowledges. “We do a tick check. And I’m sure we don’t get every single one, but I don’t think I’ve ever had a tick make its way onto me from my dogs. With the medication — we use Frontline — sometimes a tick we’ll find is dead already. Sometimes it’s crawling weakly. But in any case it’s not a tick that can do harm.”

Dr. Dodman finishes by talking about the soothing rhythm of life that occurs with his two dogs in the bed. “I usually go upstairs first,” he says — “early to bed, early to rise. My wife comes up later. Before she does, I hear the TV go off, the door sliding so she can take the dogs out, and then the door sliding again so they can all come back in. Then the two dogs make their way upstairs and flop at the bottom of the bed, near our feet, and curl up. Sometimes during the night they get up and walk around, but then they come back up again. I always think, ‘Good, we’re all together. We’re all in our pack.’ It’s nice to see them there in the morning, too.” ■

If You Change Your Mind

Some people let their dogs into bed with them when they’re still puppies but don’t want to go the dog’s whole life as bed partners. That’s okay. It doesn’t make you a bad owner. But if you’re going to get your dog out of your bed, do it cold turkey. If you try to accomplish it by degrees — one night in the bed, one night out of the bed — your dog will not get the message that the bed is off limits. He’ll just think you’re being weird and inconsistent — and will keep you awake in the knowledge that he knows he gets to come into the bed *sometimes*.

Do allow the dog to stay in the room with you, either on a doggie bed or in a crate with a soft cushion and the door unlocked. You don’t want to banish him; you just want your space back.

It should take about three nights for your dog to get the message that bedtime is different now. He may need reassurance from you in the night as you adjust him to the new routine.

A Vaccination Against Cancer?

New hope for 50 percent of dogs over age 10, and some younger dogs, too.

■ Listen up; this story concerns you and a pet you love because one out of two dogs older than 10 gets cancer — and many die from it. But there’s a promising outlook for canine cancer treatment in the form of vaccines.

The notion of a vaccine to protect against cancer isn’t new. There’s actually a vaccine that keeps *people* immune from cancer, and you’ve probably heard of it. It’s called the HPV vaccine, and it prevents many (but not all) types of cancer of the cervix, a malignancy that afflicts about 12,000 women each year and goes on to take the lives of 4,000 of them. The vaccine also protects against certain less common cancers, including cancer of the anus, vagina, vulva, and oropharynx (behind the mouth), not to mention non-cancerous genital warts. The “HPV” in the shot stands for human papillomavirus, and the vaccine that provides immunity against this cancer-inducing virus is recommended for pre-sexually active girls and also for young women — all ranging in age from 11 to 26.

For dogs, there are currently no vaccines that protect against the formation of cancer. But there is a *therapeutic* cancer vaccine — one that helps keep a cancer from spreading

once the disease has been diagnosed and the primary tumor has been treated through surgery or radiation. It’s approved for treating malignant melanoma, specifically, malignant melanoma that has struck in the oral



Bloodhound Foxy was given a prognosis of six to nine months when she was diagnosed with oral melanoma. But she has been on the therapeutic vaccine against the disease, and it’s now about a year and a half later.

cavity, although veterinarians may also use it off label for treating melanomas on other parts of a dog’s body.

Melanoma is a type of cancer that historically has been resistant to chemotherapy’s attempts to stop it from spreading, which is why it was important to come up with another way to contain the cancer. “Dogs almost always die when the disease metastasizes,” says Tufts Cummings School veterinary oncologist Kristine Burgess, DVM, MLA,

DACVIM. This type of cancer tends to affect older dogs that have dark pigmented skin. Think chow chows, dark cocker spaniels, and other black dogs. But a dog of any color and breed can get it.

The mechanism by which the vaccine works is “kind of cool,” Dr. Burgess says. “It contains human DNA that harbors the gene for making a protein called tyrosinase, which is involved in developing the pigment in skin. Dogs make tyrosinase, too, and it appears on their malignant melanoma cells. But it’s also on dogs’ normal skin cells, so their immune system might not spring into action against it because it isn’t easily recognized as a dangerous “invader” when attached to a cancerous tumor.

A dog’s immune system *will* recognize that human tyrosinase is foreign, however, so giving the dog a vaccination containing the DNA for the human form of the protein helps his immune system get into high gear. While combatting the material in the vaccine, it also combats the dog’s own cancer cells containing tyrosinase because the canine version of the protein is similar enough to the human version for the dog’s immune mechanism not to make the distinction.

Cancer Vaccines on the Horizon

Three other therapeutic cancer vaccines are under development for dogs. One is for canine lymphoma, a second for osteosarcoma, and yet another for hemangiosarcoma. All are among the most common types of cancer that befall dogs.

Lymphoma is cancer of the lymph nodes, little “nests” in the lymphatic system. The lymphatic system carries immune cells called lymphocytes throughout the body to fight off disease-causing organisms like viruses and bacteria, which is how the cancer spreads to various tissues in different organs. Lymph fluid carries cancerous cells along with the disease-fighting cells.

Dogs treated with chemotherapy live five to 10 months, on average, but the development of a therapeutic vaccine may increase survival time. Right now, says Tufts veterinary oncologist Kristine Burgess, DVM, researchers have “just completed a phase one trial to show the vaccine is well tolerated, with few to no side effects. In addition, a few dogs entered into the research did extremely well.” Their cancer didn’t spread.

The vaccine to fight osteosarcoma, or bone cancer, has also undergone a phase 1 trial, and the dogs in that research came through without side effects, too. The investigators, working out of the veterinary school at the University of Pennsylvania, will probably move soon to a gold standard placebo-controlled trial in which dogs with osteosarcoma are assigned to the actual vaccine or a placebo. The scientists are hopeful because preliminarily, a few of the dogs did exceedingly well.

Even if the vaccine turns out to work in a larger study, dogs with osteosarcoma will still need to undergo amputation of the limb with the bone cancer as well as chemotherapy. But they should enjoy a much longer survival time. Stay tuned.

Research is also beginning on a therapeutic vaccine against hemangiosarcoma, cancer of the cells that form blood vessels. Survival time after removal of the tumor is limited to about three or four months, in large part because the spread of hemangiosarcoma from the blood vessels to other tissues is virtually 100 percent. But if a vaccine proves helpful, survival time will of course increase.

The most common location for the start of hemangiosarcoma is the spleen. If researchers can create a safe, effective vaccine by using the cells of splenic tumors removed surgically (they are in the very early stages of their work here), it will have the potential to radically change the course of the disease.

Incidentally, research is going on at the Dana Farber Cancer Institute in Boston to develop a therapeutic vaccine to combat melanoma in *people*. “It’s on the boards,” Dr. Burgess reports, “but it’s still in development. They’re testing for safety right now.”

The vaccine for humans is actually made from proteins found on melanoma tumors. Researchers kill the cells of the tumor itself, but certain proteins remain. Scientists are combining those proteins with chemicals that will activate the immune system, with the aim of giving the combination to the cancer patient in vaccine form. The goal is for the body to say, “Whoa, I know those proteins. I’ve seen them in my body. I need to destroy them.”

How well does the vaccine work?

“If you read some of the studies that have been conducted, it looks like the vaccine works amazingly well,” Dr. Burgess says. “But gold-standard studies in which dogs with the cancer are randomly assigned to receive either the vaccine or the placebo (and the researchers don’t know which dogs get which) have never been done.

“Some dogs definitely benefit from it,” she comments. “But there’s no way to know ahead of time or even during treatment how well it will work. If you come in and your dog has a smallish mass and the vet removes it surgically and gives the vaccine, would the dog have lived anyway? We don’t have those answers from clinical trials.”

Part of the reason the research is not definitive is that approval for the vaccine was sought through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, or USDA, rather than through the Food and Drug Administration, or FDA. For a drug to be approved by the USDA, Dr. Burgess explains, it simply has to be proven not to cause harm and to have a probability of combatting a disease. With the FDA, the drug must show unequivocally that it helps treat the disease.

“In the current scientific literature,” Dr. Burgess says, “the results are very impressive, with dogs living more than a year after vaccination instead of just a few months.” But because the research isn’t as well controlled as gold standard trials, the outcomes may have had to do with how advanced the dogs’ tumors were. “Perhaps only a very small subset of dogs in which the tumor is small, caught early, and removed in its entirety are the ones who benefit from the vaccine. We just don’t know.”

Down the line, Dr. Burgess says, “we’ll probably be looking at this

retrospectively. That is, we'll look in the rear-view mirror at cases around the country and take an aggregated view of which dogs responded to the vaccine and which didn't. That kind of scientific look-back gets muddy, with a lot of biases," but because the drug is already for sale, it's probably the best we'll ever get.

So what should dog owners do?

Even with all the unknowns, Dr. Burgess says, "if my dog had melanoma, would I give it the vaccine? Heck, yeah! Would I think it's going to be the panacea? No. But it's better than nothing — just an expensive

better than nothing. Currently, there's no good standard of care that can do the job."

Each injection costs \$550. And the dog needs to get four shots in the first six weeks, followed up by a shot every six months thereafter. Some insurance plans cover it under certain conditions, but if you don't have pet health insurance, there's no denying it — it's definitely going to be a costly decision.

Keep in mind that the vaccine is indicated for when the cancer hasn't spread. If the veterinary surgeon removes the tumor and a chest x-ray or other imaging shows the cancer has metastasized

to another part of the body, the vaccine may not be recommended. However, says Dr. Burgess, "if your dog comes in and I give him all four initial vaccine treatments and he comes in six months later and I take a chest x-ray and see that the cancer has traveled to his lungs, I'm still going to recommend another shot. With chemo, if there's spreading, you know the chemo isn't working. But with the vaccine, the immune system may just need to be 'reminded' not to slack off. Boosting the immune system is a way of tapping it on the shoulder so it will say, 'Oh, right. That's foreign. Need to attack it.'" ■

MONEY MATTERS

The Price of Love

Options for making veterinary care more affordable.

■ Did you hear about the dog who came to the Foster Hospital for Small Animals at Tufts with acute kidney failure and needed tens of thousands of dollars for treatment in order to stay alive? His owner raised the money through crowdfunding, where you publicize your cause or project through a program on the Internet and people send in small (and sometimes large) amounts of money to help you meet your goal. His pet would have definitely died otherwise, either from natural causes or euthanasia to end the suffering.

"I've had several owners do crowdfunding campaigns," says Tufts veterinarian Linda Ross, DVM, MS, DACVIM, an internal medicine specialist and member of *Your Dog's* editorial board. "Through Kickstarter or some other crowdfunding source, some of them have raised quite large amounts of money" to save their dog, which they otherwise wouldn't have been able to do.

Indeed, the crowdfunding industry has grown to more than \$5 billion



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Some people put aside a little money each month for a rainy day.

worldwide, with some funds that even specialize in helping animals.

Of course, you don't want to have to resort to crowdfunding, especially if time is of the essence in treating your dog with medical care. "That's why I encourage people to think ahead of time," Dr. Ross says. What's "ahead of time?"

In It for the Money?

It's sometimes said that veterinarians are "in it for the money," but the numbers tell a different story. There are 136 accredited medical schools in the United States but only 28 veterinary schools. That means, statistically speaking, that it's easier to get into medical school than veterinary school.

Furthermore, both physicians and veterinarians are in debt for an average of over \$100,000 when they graduate, but the average first-year salary for a medical doctor is \$160,000, according to at least one estimate, while the average first-year salary for a veterinarian is \$65,000.

What it boils down to is that "veterinarians don't choose their profession to become rich," says Tufts veterinary internist Linda Ross, DVM. "In fact, the high cost of veterinary school juxtaposed against salaries has become more and more of an issue for people who want to choose a veterinary career," she adds. The bottom line: people become veterinarians because they want to heal animals. It's a vocation for them rather than a means to an end.

"Before they even obtain a dog," the veterinarian advises. "People think of the cost of purchasing a dog," Dr. Ross says, "and maybe food costs. But I find it's unusual for people even to consider the cost of veterinary care beyond routine care such as wellness exams and yearly shots. They don't think of the fact that their dog could get bladder stones — or something else. But they need to address that in their minds. Pet ownership is not a right; it's a privilege. And once you bring a dog into your home, it becomes your responsibility." Yes, people want to give dogs good homes, and that's laudable, Dr. Ross says. But you have to be able to tend to the responsibility you take on.

She understands the emotions that play into dog adoption. "Somebody's dog had puppies, and they are so adorable — and your children have seen the puppies. It's hard to think about the costs ahead" in a situation like that.

But then when people are hit with a substantial veterinary bill, they can be very surprised. "Many people never see the true cost of their own medical care because it is covered

by insurance," Dr. Ross says. "They only have a co-pay or deductible. If they don't see or request an itemized bill, they don't realize how high the charges can go. That's all to the good. But unless people have health insurance for their dog, they have to pay the full costs for medical care out-of-pocket. And the costs for veterinary care are typically the same as costs for a person. A CBC [complete blood count] or MRI — the same type of lab, or the same machinery, is involved. A veterinary practice, just like a medical practice, has to be able to pay for that equipment and maintain it."

Add into the mix that hospitals for people get some public funding from state and/or local government to help cover costs while veterinary hospitals are essentially on their own, and it makes the situation all the more difficult. The same bills have to be paid, Dr. Ross points out — mortgage or rent, electricity, drugs, staff salaries.

Anticipating a 'rainy day'

There are a number of ways to prepare for the unexpected when it comes to paying for your dog's health or recovery from a medical emergency.

Wellness visits. Taking your dog for regular wellness visits and paying the couple of hundred dollars for the check-up and the annual shots can help insure that a costly emergency doesn't happen in the first place — or at least happens much later in the dog's life.

Health insurance. "We all have car insurance although we may never use it," Dr. Ross says. Yet a minuscule percentage of the more than 43 million American households with dogs have pet health insurance, even though the chances are virtually 100 percent that it would be used if bought. Dogs, like people, don't live their entire lives without ever getting sick. For that reason, people should seriously consider pet health insurance, which costs not thousands of dollars a year but hundreds. Purchasing health insurance for your dog is a particularly judicious choice in light of the fact that even finding out why a dog has been vomiting for a couple of days can run into the hundreds of dollars — and doesn't always yield a clear diagnosis. The dog might recover on her own, and then you're out that money with no possibility of recovering it.

Plans vary widely in terms of what they cover. Some pay for a good portion of routine care in addition to medical emergencies. They also vary in the degree to which they'll cover it (although most cover at least half, if not much, much more), so you need to look over the different plans carefully, just as you would for yourself or a human member of the family. Bear in mind that the older the dog when you start, the more costly the monthly insurance is going to tend to be. Companies will also look at your pet's pre-existing medical conditions and probably exclude them from coverage — another good reason to start your dog on pet health insurance

MONEY MATTERS

when she's young, before problems have manifested themselves.

With most plans, you are required to pay the entire bill to the veterinarian's office up front and also fill out the insurance paperwork (which isn't onerous, usually not amounting to more than a page). You then get reimbursed. In some cases, however, your veterinary hospital may be able to bill your insurer directly. If that's important to you because, say, your credit card limit won't allow you to cover a bill, see if you can find a plan that works that way.

One piece of good news when it comes to pet health insurance is that there's no "in network" and "out of network." You can take your dog to any veterinarian you wish.

For a good list of pet insurance providers to get you started, check out the website of the American Veterinary Medical Association (www.avma.org). Click on the orange "Public Resources" button at the top right of the home page, then click on "Pet Care," then on "Do you need pet insurance," which comes under the heading of "Keep them healthy." You can hyperlink to each of the insurance companies listed.

Under the mattress. Another reasonable way to prepare for an



Dr. Ross tends to one of her patients.

expensive medical emergency is to set aside a small amount of money each month, sort of like a Christmas Club account. This can work especially well if you bring home your dog while she is still a puppy. Thirty-five dollars every month over the course of, say, 10 years, will net your pet more than \$4,200. That's enough to cover a number of expensive-to-treat health complications — not as sure-fire a way of protecting your wallet

as health insurance, but it does buy you some wiggle room if you're sometimes stretched to the limit and simply can't put the usual amount in the till.

CareCredit.com. CareCredit is a credit card that can be used just for healthcare expenses — for your pet or for people. The company offers no-interest plans for bills that are paid in full within 18 months,

ANDREW CUNNINGHAM

You Get What You Pay For

Some people engage in comparison shopping for medical care for their dogs, the way you might compare prices for a retail item like an article of clothing. There are even listserves supplying information on which veterinarians in an area are least expensive.

Be very cautious about choosing veterinary care this way. As Tufts veterinarian Linda Ross, DVM, says, "in a lot of cases, you get what you pay for." She gives the example of someone pricing a surgery at three different veterinary practices and getting three different amounts. The cheapest one may seem like the obvious choice but, she says, "the thing to know — and this

may not always be easy to discern — is that the three practices may be providing three different levels of care. One practice may include preoperative care, better anesthesia equipment, more intensive monitoring, and more intensive pain management afterward. The lowest-price practice may not do all the preoperative lab tests, and so on.

"That may be fine for a dog who's healthy, but perhaps not for one who has various health challenges. The owner needs to be aware that he might not be comparing apples to apples and has to do more than look at the bottom line when engaging in cost comparisons."

sometimes 24 months depending on the promotional plan, buying critical time for people who need to spread out their payments. They also offer loans for people who need more than 18 months to pay off a veterinary bill — but at a somewhat lower interest rate than traditional credit cards.

Angel Funds. The Humane Society of the United States lists organizations that provide financial assistance to pet owners in need, including state-by-state lists, in addition to organizations that provide assistance specifically for certain diseases, such as cancer. Go to www.humanesociety.org, and type “angel funds” in the search bar at the top. It will take you to a hyperlink called “Are you having trouble affording your pet?”

A candid conversation with your vet. As we said earlier, most veterinarians require payment at the time of the visit. They are not banks or lending institutions. Still, Dr. Ross emphasizes that “we don’t want to euthanize an animal because of the cost of treatment. If an owner’s having trouble because of the price, we’d prefer that they’d talk to us to see if there’s a less expensive way to help the dog. We’d rather know ahead of time if there’s a problem with finances and work with the client. Many times we can come up with an acceptable plan. There may be some risk in it, as opposed to a plan where money isn’t an object, but it can still save a dog. It doesn’t necessarily have to be all or nothing — but without a candid conversation we don’t have any opportunity to work out a less expensive treatment option.”

Crowdfunding. Crowdfunding isn’t for everybody. It takes considerable effort to set up a crowdfunding campaign that will attract people’s

attention. And it tends to be small amounts of money — \$5 or \$10 — from many, many people that gets you to your goal. In other words, it may not happen overnight, which you need to consider if time is a critical factor. Then, too, it has to be a situation that really resonates with people. It’s generally not enough just to have a pet that you love but limited finances. But if you have a beloved dog you will not be able to save without outside help, crowdfunding is worth checking into. There are now a number of sites to choose from.

Euthanasia. Euthanasia is never a happy solution under any circumstances. “But it isn’t necessarily the wrong decision,” Dr. Ross says. “Owners should understand that it’s okay to select euthanasia as a method of treatment. For example,” she points out, “let’s say we have a dog with hemangiosarcoma — a type of cancer with a poor prognosis. And maybe the pet has this particular cancer in her spleen and removing her spleen could extend her life two to three months. But the tradeoff is that it’s going to cost the owner several thousand dollars. It’s not the wrong decision to say, ‘No, I can’t do that.’ It’s okay to put the animal down.

“The more difficult decision,” Dr. Ross

says, “is for something that is fixable. A dog gets hit by a car and has a badly fractured leg that is going to cost thousands of dollars to fix. And she will be fine once the treatment is all over and go on to live a healthy lifespan. But if you don’t have the money to treat the leg, euthanasia is a reasonable option rather than letting the animal remain in pain and having the leg heal in a way that will cause her discomfort and mobility problems for the rest of her life.”

What dog owners should realize is that as long as you love your pet from the moment you bring her into your life and take good, loving care of her until the moment you must say good-bye, you have done right by your dog. Yes, it’s better to understand the cost of caring for a dog up front, but without you, she wouldn’t have had every single happy day she lived. ■

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Light Up Your Dog's Life, Literally

The latest in light-up gear and toys.

■ Whether it's unconventional work hours, insomnia, a love of the nightlife, or simply that before-bedtime piddle that brings you outdoors with your dog in the dark, a growing assortment of glowing accouterments will brighten your late-hours time together. Here's a sampling in the categories of leashes, collars, and toys.

LEASHES. A host of energy-efficient, LED-lit and reflective leashes will light your path, or at least make you and your dog visible to passing motorists.

We the Planet LED Dog Leash offers neon green lights that provide steady, flash, or strobe lighting for up to 90 hours per each replaceable battery. The lights are only on the top half of the leash, which is a plus for dog owners whose dogs show their enthusiasm on walks by biting on the part of the leash close to their muzzle. Priced at \$11.99.

Dog-E-Glow Lighted LED Dog Leash comes in a variety of patterns, from American flags to skulls and even camo that, when lit by the LED lights, come to life in vivid color. The weather-resistant leash measures six feet and comes with four 2032 3V lithium coin cell batteries. The replaceable batteries last 150 hours and provide up to 100,000 hours of flashing or steady light. Available for \$25.99 — \$54.96 if you buy the matching collar.

Roadrunner Running Dog Leash Hands Free allows for hands-free walks, jogs, or hikes with your dog tethered securely by his leash to your waist strap. The adjustable strap and leash allow your dog to move off by a

bit more than four feet. (It may not be ideal for dogs who are forceful pullers.) Comes in orange, blue, pink, red and black, with a LED light you attach for nighttime walking (the white light turns the color of the leash as it bleeds through the fabric) at a cost of \$25.00.



A leash that lights up can make nighttime walking a lot easier — and safer.

PawPrince Double Dog Leash with Safety LED Light offers tangle-free walking of two dogs at once with an adjustable, nylon webbed leash, making it possible to manage any two dogs, no matter how disparate in size. An Ebook Guide explains how to use the leash, which comes with a 100 percent guarantee in case it breaks or doesn't meet your approval. The lights, located on the single 12-inch handle — provide visibility and safety, and the apparatus is water resistant and will shine steadily or flash for up to 80 hours. Costs \$35.47.

Paracord Paws Adjusting Multi-function Glow-in-The-Dark Walking Leash provides a low-tech alternative to LED leashes, glowing with a reflective strip that may not illuminate your

path as you go, but which will make your dog and you visible to passing motorists. The washable leash comes in a variety of colors and patterns, from blue-coffee camo to green-purple to green-coyote brown, at \$34.99.

L.L. Bean's Reflective Pet Leash comes in lime green with a reflective silver strip that can be personalized with laser print of up to 35 characters — enough for your dog's name and probably your phone number. The 6-foot leash sells for \$24.95 — the same cost as that of the matching reflective collar.

Flexi 16-Foot Neon Reflect Retractable Belt Dog Leash comes in a variety of colors in a reflecting fabric from neon yellow to purple. The retractable leash also comes with a matching collar. Note that retractable leashes are not without risk, which is likely why Flexi recommends that anyone using the leash first read the “Special Precautions and Directions” pamphlet. To find out more, consumers can call the customer care number provided or visit the company's web site at Flexilead.com. The 16-foot leash comes in small (for dogs up to 26 pounds); medium (for dogs up to 44 pounds); and large, (for dogs up to 110 pounds). Costs \$13.70 to \$19.83, depending on size.

Protocol Retractable Leash for Dogs comes with water bowl, treat compartment, baggie dispenser, LED light, and clock to take care of everything you might need for nighttime jaunts while camping in an unfamiliar area; or simply if you know you'll be out for a long walk and want your dog to be able to have some provisions. Three AAA

batteries are needed for the flashlight feature and one LR41 battery for the clock, which includes a date and time feature. Costs \$24.99.

COLLARS. Like leashes, collars come in reflective and also in more visible, more high-tech LED options. Of course, there are reflective nametags and LED clip-ons for collars that can help make your dog more visible at night, but these products offer all-in-one convenience.

WalGap LED High Visibility Flashing Lights Nylon Dog Collar and Leash Set comes in blue, green, orange, red, yellow, and pink — each color lit from LED lights within the fabric that shine steadily or flash quickly or slowly for 60 to 100 hours of brightness. Fits small to extra-large dogs for \$10.99.

GoDoggie-GLOW USB Rechargeable LED Dog Safety Collar lets you recharge the collar's lights through your laptop, tablet, or smart TV with the USB cable included. No batteries needed. The weatherproof collar comes in small, medium, and large sizes and in six colors: blue, green, yellow, orange, red, and pink dotted by sequenced LED lights that shine through the colored fabric. Lights can flash or hold steady. From \$15.99 to \$17.99, depending on collar size.

PETBABA Pet Dog LED Lights Flash Night Safety Nylon Collar is a basic adjustable collar that comes in small, medium, and large sizes that flash or hold a steady light that shines for up to 80 hours through blue, green, yellow, red, orange, white, or pink nylon. Nicely priced at just \$4.99 for all sizes.

KingMas Nylon Multicolour LED Dog Pet Flashing Light Up Safety Collar is a simply designed adjustable collar with a black-on-white cartoon that, when lit by glowing or flashing colored lights, shines in blue, green, orange, yellow, red, or pink in sizes from small to extra large. Visibility range is 656 feet. The battery-operated device can flash or glow steadily and costs \$5.40 for all sizes.

GoTags Reflective Waterproof Dog Collar is a 100 percent waterproof collar that comes in hunter orange, blue, and hot pink with your pet's name and phone number engraved by laser in print large enough to be visible without the reader having to get too close to your dog. The collars, which range in size from 20 to 26 inches, need only a rinse or wipe to stay clean. Priced at \$21.95.

TOYS. Balls, Frisbees, and an assortment of other LED and glow-in-the-dark toys can make nighttime

games and retrieval of toys a fun experience in the backyard.

Grriggles FUNdamentals Pop Pals Lighted Dog Ball has a nubby rubber exterior, lights up in pink or green when shaken or tossed, and squeaks when squeezed. Available for about \$10.00.

Nite Ize MeteorLight K-9 LED Disc-O Dog Ball provides shifting colors with an on/off switch. The tennis ball-size toy works in most ball launcher gadgets that will throw the ball repeatedly for your dog. The Disc-O Dog Ball is also water resistant — and floats. Costs about \$5.00.

Petmate Chuckit! Firefly LED Ball helps you throw the ball farther and also retrieve it without the ick factor of your dog's slobber. Just scoop up the ball with the curved cup of the Chuckit, lift, and throw. Shifting bright colors allow your dog to spot the ball even when it's still and makes it easier for you to retrieve if your pet gets distracted or bored. The package comes with two balls and two replacement batteries. Available on Amazon.com for \$12.09.

Nite Ize Flashlight Dog Discuit Disc is a lightweight (4.5-ounce) color-shifting LED Frisbee-like disc, powered by two replaceable lithium batteries. Available for \$12.90.

Planet Dog Orbee-Tuff Whistle Ball Dog Toy is a racket ball-sized, glow-in-the-dark toy that whistles when thrown, making it particularly well suited for dogs with compromised vision who can also benefit from its minty scent while working to locate it. Available at \$9.34. ■

Tufts University does not endorse any of the products mentioned here. This article is to help readers better understand the types of options available in the marketplace.

Steady, Please

While many collars and leashes have lights that flash, flashing lights can irritate some dogs and can sometimes trigger epileptic attacks in people. That's why the *Glowdoggie Leuchtie LED Safety Collar*, used by search-and-rescue K-9 units in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland, doesn't even have a flashing capability, as do many of the products listed here. The waterproof collar has also been used for the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race in Alaska, and it will soon be used by the Jefferson County Search Dog Association in Kentucky. It operates on two AAA batteries, has a LED life of about 17 years, and comes with customer support and a two-year warranty. Sizes range from 14 to 23 inches, and color choices include red, green, and blue, for \$52.99.

Please send questions, including your city, to yourdog@tufts.edu, or write *Your Dog* Editorial Office, PO Box 5656, Norwalk, CT 06856-5656. Because of the volume of mail, we regret we can't answer all queries. Answers usually will be devoted to problems of widest interest. If your dog has a pressing health problem, please seek immediate veterinary care.

Dear Doctor

The dog jumps on guests

Q *Our three-year-old golden retriever is lively and often hard to control despite the fact that she has been through two obedience classes. Our main problem is that she jumps on people. Every single time we have company, she jumps on them, and this is very problematic. What can we do?*

Jerry Lang
Commack, New York

Dear Mr. Lang,

A First, take a deep breath. This is going to take patience — a good three weeks of it. If your dog were on the small side, we would say to ignore the behavior rather than yell and push her off, which only makes it more interesting to the pet. It becomes a game when you pay attention in that way — jump/push, jump/push. But completely ignoring the behavior — over and over again — teaches the dog that it will not elicit a reaction, and she will finally give up. The hard part is that at first, the behavior gets worse. The dog will try even harder when her usual efforts fail. But if you really stick to your guns and never react (even if you react only sometimes the dog knows

it's still worth a try), then the unwanted jumping extinguishes itself. The dog realizes, what's the use?

The whole strategy works better if you say "Off" once — and only once — when the dog first starts jumping. (Say it more than once and then the dog is training you to keep repeating a word to no avail.) Then turn to stone: arms folded, hands turned to the side, and eyes averted.

The problem with this approach for a large dog like a golden is that the jumping can go on for a few minutes. That could make for some very unhappy, scratched-up houseguests instructed by you to stand there like a statue.

That's why for bigger dogs you need to use a head halter, which will put pressure around the muzzle and the nape of the neck when you tug it. When the dog jumps, you apply gentle, sustained pressure to the lead with a soft tug and presto, the dog will have no choice but to abort her unwanted behavior. Just the right pressure points become activated to curtail her activity.

The dog will not feel gagged at the throat because a head halter does not impart pressure there. It's attached under the jaw so will never

cause a choking sensation. There's no yanking, either. Gentle upward tension on the lead is all it takes with a head halter. (Yanking with a choke collar, on the other hand, is a negative tactic that will only erode trust between you and your pet.)

When the dog complies by not jumping (even though she has no choice), you can praise her warmly and even offer a treat. Over time she may very well get the idea that not jumping results in getting better attention than jumping does, and she will work to please you simply for the reward of your approval (and perhaps a tender morsel of something super tasty here and there).

A final note: if your dog is generally compliant, you might want to try counter-conditioning before going to the head halter. You literally counter the unwanted behavior with a behavior that she can't do at the same time. For instance, condition your pet to sit for a treat as soon as anyone enters. It's impossible to jump on someone and sit for a longed-for treat at the same time. Of course, this can only work if the dog has enough presence of mind to listen to your verbal cue when company comes in. ■



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