

A special thank you to all of our wonderful clients for making 2016 a memorable year here at L.A.H. We look forward to serving you in 2017 and beyond!

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## Google This!

### The Search for Accurate Information

When you're searching the web for medical information about your pet, make sure you're getting accurate medical information from reliable sources. Use these six tips for safer web surfing:

#### Make sure the advice comes from a veterinarian.

Writers can contribute fun and entertaining animal information, but for medical material, you want to be sure the author is a licensed practicing veterinarian.

#### Check more than one source.

When you read a piece of advice, even if it seems legitimate, find similar information from other veterinarians. You'll find the best and most valuable information on many veterinarians' websites. High-quality information often features citations of original studies or other articles.

#### Keep it classy.

Professionals don't disparage other people. If there's new and groundbreaking information, professionals will present the new facts in a way that doesn't make anyone seem wrong. Be skeptical of any advice that tells you your veterinarian is doing something to hurt your pet. (cont.)



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[www.lakewoodanimalhospital.org](http://www.lakewoodanimalhospital.org)  
for more about our practice!



## **Beware of catchy captions and information that feels like a tabloid headline.**

If the information seems incredible, listen to the alarm bells that sound in your mind.

## **Remember there are no checks and balances on the World Wide Web.**

Information on the Internet often isn't peer-reviewed or run through any approval process, but veterinarians are bound to uphold professional standards and have reputations at stake. They are less likely to jeopardize their medical licenses by spreading untrue rumors or recommending unneeded services.

## **Phone a friend -- as long as that friend is your own veterinarian.**

If you have a question about something that you read on the Internet, always ask your own veterinarian. Your veterinary team is happy to explain why we make the recommendations we make, and we're able to make suggestions specific to your pet.

(Source: Kathryn Primm, DVM)

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## **5 Cat Items to Toss Right Now**

### **1. Scratched up litter boxes**

Most litter boxes are made of plastic. One bad thing about plastic? It scratches. Your cat paws at the bottom of her box every time she uses it. The tiny scratches in the floor of the box may trap odor and germs.

The next time you clean her box, check it for micro-scratches too. If you find some, it may be time for a new litter box.

### **2. Plastic bowls**

Plastic is naturally greasy and easily scratched when it is a feeding dish also. Cats can suffer from feline acne, and it's possible that the greasiness of plastic bowls contributes to oil buildup and clogged pores on your cat's chin and face. Perhaps better not to chance it because it is difficult for your cat to sufficiently clean her chin anyway. Ditch the plastic bowls and use ceramic or stainless steel instead.

### **3. Toys in disrepair or covered in real fur**

Toys that are damaged can be dangerous if portions are swallowed. And tiny, fur-covered mice can be a major hazard for cats. Cats are motivated by their strong prey (cont.)



instincts to chase and hunt the toy, and it's not a large leap to eat the toy if it is covered in real rabbit or mouse fur. Many cats have ended up on a surgery table because of these "harmless" fake mice. Don't take a chance. If you have a tiny toy that is covered with real fur, throw it out!

#### 4. Dull nail trimmers

Cats' claws may be sharp, but they are fragile, too, especially if you try to trim them with dull nail trimmers. Unless the blade is sharp, it will crush and fracture the nail and this is not comfortable for your cat. Holding still for you to trim the nails is hard enough! Don't make it twice as difficult and uncomfortable. Keep your trimmer sharp by changing the blade or replacing the trimmer regularly.

#### 5. Expired or inappropriate medications

It might be tempting to save every medication you get for your cat, just in case you ever need it, but don't do it! Medications are prescribed for the specific cat and the specific problem at that time and might not be safe or effective for something else. Just because you are sure it is the same problem, it is much better to ask your veterinarian and be safe. Inappropriate medications are not worth the risk and expired medications can be downright toxic.

(Source: Kathryn Primm, DVM)



### 5 Dog Items to Toss Right Now

#### 1. Retractable leashes

Many accidents have been caused by retractable leashes, and they can be confusing to your dog because the place where you want him to walk is constantly changing. The leash portion can be very narrow and cause tangling and even injuries to people and pets.

#### 2. Plastic bowls

Plastic may be a wonder to the modern world, but it is difficult to get truly clean. Plastic is easily scratched, with tiny defects all over the surface. These can trap bacteria and oil, which can create issues on your dog's lips and face. They can also be chewed into pieces and swallowed. Don't take a chance. Switch the plastic for stainless steel.

#### 3. Smelly or outgrown collars

Our dogs wear collars all the time, close to their skin. These collars are

(cont.)

like a pet's underwear and should be kept clean and fresh. Collars can rub the skin and create infections and hot spots around the neck. Don't forget to wash or replace collars regularly.

#### 4. Dull nail trimmers

Many dogs don't enjoy having a pedicure -- and dull nail trimmers are probably one reason why! Nail trimmers have a cutting surface, and if it is not sharp, it will crush and split the nail instead of cutting it cleanly. Odds are this crushing effect is not particularly comfortable for your dog, either. Avoid lasting issues and keep your trimmers sharp and in good repair.

#### 5. Broken or chewed up toys

Toys should be in good repair and whole. It is so easy for your dog to swallow a piece of a broken or chewed toy. You might not even notice that it's missing until your dog starts to vomit and act sick. Toys are typically not digestible and they are not designed for actual ingestion. They can lodge in the GI tract and block it, becoming a life-threatening situation. Set a schedule for checking toys at least once a week or so, if your dog is home with them frequently. Discard any that cannot be repaired. It is not worth losing your dog to a foreign body obstruction.

You are your dog's guardian and it falls to you to keep him safe. These are easy hazards that you might not have thought of. If you think that your dog has eaten something foreign or has been injured, do not hesitate to call your veterinarian. And if you ever have questions about the products your pet uses, let your veterinary practice know. They are there to help!

(Source: Kathryn Primm, DVM)

### Jokin' Around

Q: What do you call a pile of kittens?

A: A meowntain!

Q: Why was the cat teasing his friend?

A: He was just kitten around.

Q: What do you get if you cross a dog and a calculator?

A: A friend you can count on!

Q: What happened to the dog that swallowed a firefly?

A: It barked with de-light!



## Why punishment fails; what works better

Punishing a dog often doesn't work or can even make a behavior problem worse. Three important rules must be met for punishment to be effective.

1. The punishment must occur every time the unwanted behavior occurs.
2. The punishment must be administered within a second or two of the inappropriate behavior.
3. The punishment must be aversive enough to stop the dog from repeating the unwanted behavior in the future but not be so aversive as to frighten the dog.

Meeting all three of these criteria can be difficult. That's why punishment often fails to solve behavior problems and should not be the first training method of choice. Positive reinforcement training, in which animals are rewarded for appropriate behaviors, is safer and more effective. As seen in the two examples below, punishment teaches an animal what you don't want it to do but fails to teach it what you expect of it.



Think some form of punishment is necessary when training your dog? The following examples will show you why it just doesn't work and can make matters even worse.

### Example A

**Problem behavior:** A dog gets on the furniture.

**Owner's response:** Every time the owner sees the dog on the furniture, she yells at it and threatens it with a rolled up newspaper. When she does this, the dog slinks off the furniture.

**Result:** The dog continues to get on the furniture, although it is less likely to do so in the owner's presence. Because the dog still gets on the furniture when the owner is away, it is being rewarded part of the time for the unwanted behavior, and the first rule above is not being met. So the punishment does not solve the problem. If the owner gets increasingly frustrated with the dog, she may increase the severity of the punishment, and depending on the dog's temperament, it may respond by becoming fearful of the owner and avoiding her. Some dogs might even begin growling and snapping when the owner approaches.

**Suggestion:** Success will be more likely if the owner blocks the dog's access to the furniture whenever she can't be around (e.g. confine the dog to a crate or a different room in the house). Or the owner can make the furniture less appealing by covering it with plastic. Commercially available devices for keeping animals off surfaces such as elastic mats, plastic mats with rigid points (or plastic carpet protector material laid upside down) can also be used. A comfortable bed should also be made available to the dog in the vicinity of the favored furniture, and the dog should be rewarded every time it is caught resting on the bed. (cont.)

## Example B

**Problem behavior:** A dog greets people by jumping on them.

**Owners' response:** Whenever the dog jumps on its owners, they knee it in the chest or kick it.

**Result:** The dog avoids the husband (the largest man in the household; he has kicked the dog hard enough that it is now afraid of him) but continues to jump on everyone else. Many dogs are highly motivated to greet people by getting close to their faces. In most cases, kneeling or kicking such a dog is less powerful than the dog's desire to greet people by jumping on them. In addition, since not all people the dog meets will knee it or kick it, the punishment doesn't meet the first rule. The third rule is also not met because the dog doesn't always perceive the kneeling as punishment and, in fact, is reinforced for jumping because it's getting attention.

**Suggestion:** Rather than trying to punish the dog for jumping, the owners should use positive reinforcement to teach the dog to sit to greet everyone. Sitting is an alternative behavior that can be rewarded with petting or a food treat.

## Appropriate behavior modification

These examples highlight the fact that when the punishment criteria are not met, behavior problems can worsen, and the bond between the pet and the owner can be damaged beyond repair. When punishment is used incorrectly, it will appear unpredictable and confusing, so many pets become anxious or fearful around the owner that administers the punishment. When punishment is used in an attempt to train an animal that is already afraid or anxious, its fear and anxiety are likely to worsen and may lead to aggression.

If your dog is exhibiting inappropriate behavior, **consult your veterinarian**. He or she will help you develop an appropriate behavior modification program that focuses on using positive reinforcement or will refer you to someone with extensive experience in developing such behavior modification programs.

(Source: Valarie V. Tynes, DVM, DACVB; Getty Images/RubberBall Productions)



*"I didn't get where I am by trying to please."*

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