

SPRING FEVER

5 steps to getting you and your pet ready for summer

by Anna Mouton

Spring is in the air – time to panic! After months of parking on the couch in a tracksuit, soon we'll be heading outdoors. And we'll have to face the world in shorts. Or even worse, swimwear.

The end of winter signals makeovers for many of us: goodbye potato chips in front of the TV and hello to smoothies at the gym. We might even invest in some new clothes and accessories. After all, who doesn't want to look good on the beach? But what about our pets?

Here at MARKtoe! we believe that our furry friends deserve the best. And that includes going into summer with bright eyes and a bushy tail. We've put together a five-step plan for lifting your pet out of hibernation in preparation for a new season of fun.

1. NO MORE BAD HAIR DAYS

Dogs and cats grow extra fur during winter. This is especially true for breeds that come from cold climates – think sheepdogs, huskies, chow chows, Maine coons and Norwegian forest cats. When spring arrives, our hirsute housemates begin to shed. It's their version of getting a summer wardrobe. Besides leaving hair everywhere, they can also suffer from matting, smelliness and skin problems. The thicker their coats, the greater the risk.

“You can help your pet look and feel better by frequent brushing.”

You can help your pet look and feel better by frequent brushing. If she isn't used to brushing, start slowly with sessions of two to three minutes. Keep a couple of treats on hand to reward cooperation. Be patient. Badly matted coats are best clipped by a professional, so kick off spring by taking your pal to the parlour for a beauty treatment. That will make future brushing much easier on both of you.

Giving them a regular bath can also help your dog get through the spring moult. Some pet shampoos are specifically designed to ease shedding. Speak to your veterinarian or dog groomer for advice.

2. PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE

Pets and people aren't the only ones excited about the warmer weather. Fleas and ticks love summer too. And they have a head start thanks to climate change and milder winters that allow them to remain active for longer periods. You can expect large numbers of fleas and ticks to embark on your furry friends in spring. If you've let external parasite control slip a little over winter, this is the time to pick it up again.



Daro dog tick & flea powder, Daro dog tick & flea dip, Daro dog tick & flea shampoo

 Available at selected Agrimark stores.

Fortunately, combatting fleas and ticks has never been easier. You can now buy products that will protect your pet for up to twelve weeks. Remember to treat sleeping areas and bedding while you're at it. And don't just focus on the external – take a moment to think about the inner pet. Yes, we're talking about worms. Cats and dogs should be dewormed every quarter, so see it as internal spring-cleaning and dose them straightaway.

Longer days and better weather mean you'll be getting out for some fresh air more often, but that can also mean more contact with other animals and germs. When was the last time your pal was vaccinated? Can't remember? Then this is an ideal time to visit your veterinarian – you can pick up parasite treatments while you're at it.

3. EAT YOUR HEART OUT

No doubt you've heard about the obesity epidemic and how we're all getting heavier. But it might be news to you that our pets are also becoming stouter. Like humans, obese pets suffer more from joint disease and diabetes. They also have shorter lives.

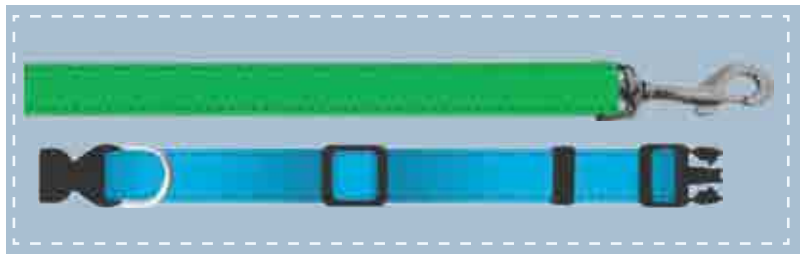


Karoo dry dogfood (Adult), Daro plastic dog bowl

 Available at selected Agrimark stores.

Why are our furry friends getting fat? Well, because they have the same lifestyles we do: lots of calories and not much action. Many people also overestimate how much their pets should eat. And pets are experts at manipulating us to score a tasty morsel. When Spot turns up her nose at pellets, we immediately worry that she's going to starve, so we tempt her with a tastier meal. That's like handing someone a pizza when they don't look interested in their vegetables.

There's nothing wrong with giving your pal the occasional treat, just as it's fine for you to have the odd slice of cheesecake. But the foundation of a cat or dog's diet should be a balanced petfood meal, whether canned or pelleted. Follow the manufacturer's guidelines on appropriate portion size. And if your pet is a touch tubby, a weight-loss program is in order.



Dog lead (Neon), Dog collar (Neon)

Available at selected Agrimark stores.

4. BUILDING THOSE BEACH BODS

Most of us change our shape a little over winter. Let's be honest, who wants to go walking or running after a day's work when it's cold and probably dark and maybe even raining? With the coming of spring, it's time to shake off the cobwebs and hit the pavements again. Or, if you're lucky, the mountains and the beach.

Walking is a great way to exercise: it's low-impact, you can do it anywhere and it's free! Best of all, you can share the experience with

your canine companion. Keep in mind that not everyone likes dogs (weird as this may sound). Not even all dogs like dogs. So be responsible and keep your pal on a leash unless you are certain that you are in safe, dog-friendly territory. And please pick up after your dog – nothing ruins anyone's day like stepping in doggie-doo.

Going out to get exercise might not be an option, particularly if you have a cat. Another way to activate your furry friends is with a game. Try putting a few snacks in a treat ball. If you haven't come across these ingenious toys, a treat ball is a ball with a hole in it. Put the treats in the ball and they'll drop out as your pet rolls it along. It's a great way to get Fluffy off the couch and moving those muscles.

5. SOME BLING FOR SPRING

So now your best friend has a shiny coat, a clean bill of health and a trim figure. You're all set for summer, right? Wait a minute – what does his bed look like? Are all his blankets full of holes? And how about his bowls, his collar and his toys?

We're all used to spring-cleaning our homes, but do we remember to clean our pet's accommodation? Now's the season to air out kennels and machine-wash bedding. If your dog's bed can't be washed, it might be time to think of a more hygienic alternative because you really should be doing this regularly. A clean pet is a healthy pet and nobody will be clean if they sleep in a dirty bed.

The same goes for food and water containers. If your pet's bowls are worn or cracked, they become a breeding ground for germs. Invest in stainless steel replacements. They'll outlast your pet and quite likely you as well. While you're shopping, how about spoiling your pal with a catnip toy or a ball? If they had a credit card, they'd do the same for you.

So there you have it: everything you need to get your dog or cat up to speed for spring. And all that brushing, washing and walking will go a long way toward helping you regain your summer shape. Who needs a Fitbit when they have Fido pulling at the lead or begging for a run?



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