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Questions to Ask Your Vet

By Mona Miller, DVM



Dr. Mona Miller lives in Lafayette with her young son, two cats and Luka a new puppy. She has worked at Four Seasons Animal Hospital in Lafayette since moving here in 2001. She attended Cal as an undergrad, and received her DVM from U.C. Davis. She can be reached at Four Seasons, 938-7700, or by email to MonaSDVM@aol.com.

question can stand by itself, not necessarily paired with "what's the treatment?" question. Sometimes, the value of knowledge for its sake alone is important, and can provide an idea of what to expect as the disease progresses. My best example is with cancer. Diagnosing cancer doesn't necessarily mean you will choose to treat it, but you might want to know what to expect as the cancer progresses and to have an idea what timeframe of good quality lies ahead.

I believe that one key to a successful treatment plan for medical/surgical illness is communication between veterinarian and owner regarding value of diagnostic tests, treatment options, financial expenditure, time commitment and emotional energy involvement. Each situation is unique with its own set of limitations that affect success. In some cases, it is clear-cut - for example, it might not be in the budget to consider extensive treatment. In other cases, it might be the pet who limits treatment by not taking medication well. I would like to address some questions that I think vets and clients can ask each other in order to help with the decision-making process.

Questions to ask your vet:

"What are the costs involved?" What is affordable to one person may not be in the budget for another, and it is helpful for your vet to know if you have financial limitations. Not all diagnostic tests are expensive, nor are all treatment options. When I was training as a (younger) vet, I worked with a gentleman who had the \$50 plan and the \$500 plan to offer his clients; nowadays, those numbers might need to be adjusted for the 21st century, but the idea is the same.

"Is this easy to diagnose?" Some tests are fairly comprehensive and you will get a lot of information about what is normal or not in a short time frame. If all is normal, this might be a problem that is not easy to diagnose, but you will have discovered this in the initial blood/urine test results.

"Is this possibly easy to treat?" and "What will follow-up care entail?" These questions sometimes cannot be answered without at least starting the diagnostic process, so be patient with the process. Some diseases require treatment and a recheck and success is a cure. Others might require long-term medication, with regular rechecks and success is management.

"Is there another way to get medication into my pet?" Not all dogs and cats take pills easily and it can be frustrating to struggle with this at home. Often there are different forms that can be provided - injections, chewy flavored pill pockets to hide a pill in, flavored liquids or a skin ointment that allows absorption of the medication into the bloodstream.

Questions your vet might ask you:

"If there is something reasonable to do for your pet, would you want to do it?" What is reasonable for one person might not be for another, so the details that emerge when answering this question might help your veterinarian understand what limitations you face, and what your overall philosophy is.

"Do you want to know what is going on?" This

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[back](#)

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