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## How to get the most from veterinary visits

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I have written a few articles this year about how to make veterinary visits better for our furry friends, and I'd like to dedicate an article to the human owners, or caregivers - how can you make your veterinary visit work for you?

My number one piece of advice is "Be Prepared"! Plan ahead for what your goals are for the veterinary visit - perhaps it's an annual wellness exam and you have no concerns, or perhaps you want a new lump checked out, or perhaps your dog is shaking his head and you think he might have an ear infection, or perhaps your cat is really sick. Whatever the reason, it is valuable for the veterinarian to have some background information, and to have the ability to make direct recommendations for diagnostic tests and treatment options. Information that is useful, especially with low-grade chronic issues, include the duration of the problem (how long has the lump been present?), whether it has changed (bigger?), and whether it's bothering the dog (is he scratching at it?).

Know your pet's medications and how much/how often you are giving these medications. Are they routine flea and tick chewable tablets? Are you giving a Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drug once or twice daily? Are you giving over-the-counter supplements? Quite often, doses noted originally in a medical record or on a prescription label are changed during follow-up phone conversations. What's on the label isn't always what is happening at home. Veterinarians need to know the specifics, in order to not prescribe

something else that might be contraindicated.

Arrive on time or a little early! Most general practice vets keep an appointment schedule, with office calls/exams limited to 15-30 minutes. If you are 5 minutes late to a 15-minute appointment, this will greatly impact the ability for both you and the vet to achieve all the desired goals during the remaining 10 minutes. If you are bringing a new patient to your vet, bring previous medical records with you, or better yet, send them ahead of time. If you get some vaccines elsewhere, bring those records with you too.

If there are a few items on your list of concerns to address, think ahead about what your priority items are (i.e., is the lump more concerning to you than your dog's vaccine for that appointment?). Time or health constraints might cause a shift in the priorities, but it's good for me to have a sense what is most important on that day for my client. Additionally, what is on my list to discuss might

also shift the priorities. For instance, a dog due for optional vaccines might not be feeling well on the appointment day, so we might end up discussing the recent vomit/diarrhea rather than administering a vaccine to a sick dog. Or perhaps we discuss flea and tick control options in detail, so that might override checking the non-growing lump that has been present for a few years. Everyone's goal (mine included) is to cover all items on a list, but sometimes we are just not able to do that.

It is most desirable for the primary adult/pet owner to be present for a veterinary exam. Since our pet patients are not able to tell us with words, a large part of the diagnostic process comes from owner verbalization, or what is called the "history" part of the exam. We might start diagnostics in a different direction with a 5-year-old vomiting Labrador who is known to eat socks, than with the same dog who has exposure to mushrooms growing in the yard. However, sometimes it isn't always possible for a pet owner to be physically present in the exam. A reasonable alternative is for the owner to be available by phone for the duration of the exam/consultation. If you are unable to be present (either physically or by phone, in real-time), then consider sending an individual who is authorized by you to make medical and financial decisions. I see a lot of patients who are presented by an owner's "agent" (relative, employee, nanny, pet sitter) - who have varying degrees of information and authorization. The most frustrating situation (for both owner and vet) occurs when the presenting individual has no information about the problem, and no authority to make financial decisions - and the owner is not reachable by phone. The most successful vet visit occurs when the person bringing in the pet has the ability to make medical and financial decisions for the welfare of the pet.

For other tips about making a veterinary visit successful, visit the American Veterinary Medical Association link:

<https://www.avma.org/public/YourVet/Pages/visits.aspx>

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