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Pet Swimming

This is the time of year when many pets try to beat the heat by swimming in the many lakes and streams in Minnesota. Swimming can be a beneficial form of exercise, but caution needs to be taken to make sure your pet stays safe.

Swimming Safety

Not every pet can swim. Be sure to begin in shallow water and observe your pet the first time it goes for a swim. Even good swimmers can become exhausted, if swimming a long distance is required. Anytime your pet is in a deep, fast moving or large body of water a life jacket should be worn. Follow the same rules you use for yourself. If you should be wearing a life jacket, so should your pet. If your pet does not like water, do not force them to swim.

Home Medical Care

Swimming can be great exercise for pets. This form of exercise is easier on the joints of older pets. It can be a fun way to exercise, and swimming can also be part of a weight loss plan for overweight pets. If your pet has not been regularly exercised, start with short periods of exercise and gradually build up to longer time periods. Some older pets benefit from a pain medication plan when beginning a swimming exercise routine. It is best to consult with your veterinarian when starting any exercise or weight loss plan.

Some pets may be more prone to ear infections from excess moisture in the ear canal after swimming. For prevention, an ear cleaner with a drying solution can be used after a period of swimming. Some pets may also have sensitive skin or seasonal allergies. These pets will benefit from rinsing their haircoat off with clean tap water and bathing in a mild oatmeal shampoo to remove any irritants that they may have contacted while swimming.

When Not to Swim

You should not allow your pet to swim in an area that is not recommended for people. In addition, some blue-green algae can be a problem in shallow undisturbed water. Some algae can produce toxins and in high levels if ingested, contacted by the skin or inhaled can be toxic to the liver and have effects on the nervous system. Other illnesses caused by water can cause diarrhea and are caused by E. coli, Cryptosporidium and Giardia. If your pet is contacting water you should make sure they are up-to-date on their Leptospirosis vaccination as well. Leptospirosis is a bacteria that is found in standing water and can be transmitted to people and animals through infected urine. Leptospirosis most commonly causes kidney failure and liver disease. This vaccine needs to be boosted once per year to prevent this disease.

Disclaimer: This written content is meant to be educational and is not medical advice. Always consult a veterinarian about medical advice for your pet.