

Keeping Dogs Cooler During Hotter Weather

It's that time of year when the mercury creeps up toward triple digits. Our canine best friends need our help to keep cool and summertime safe. First, look at Fido's food. Being genetically similar to wolves; a healthy canine diet is a hydrating canine diet. Dry food alone can dehydrate dogs and can increase risk for heat-related stresses; like a car low on radiator fluid is prone to overheating. Moist format foods, including home-made, raw, canned, and (reconstituted) dehydrated/freeze-dried can better help maintain a pup's hydration.

Another heat consideration is a dog's body weight. The extra insulation from unnecessary body fat will not keep Fido cool in summer, but will interfere with breathing (i.e., panting to cool himself), and contribute to other serious health consequences. Another potential overheating contributor is a dog's permanent fur coat. Consistent brushing and de-shedding removes excess coat and together with regular baths can keep the skin/coat healthier, and your dog potentially cooler. If considering shaving your dog, consult with a breed specialist or your vet as some breeds actually stay cooler with a full coat.

Next, look at your dog's overall health. Are they conditioned well enough for summer activities? If your dog is brachycephalic (short-nosed) use caution; these breeds have a lower exercise/heat tolerance. Nowadays, much puppy paraphernalia can help keep Fido comfortably cool and safe. Sunscreen for noses and light-skinned dogs can extend the quantity of time outdoors. Booties, visors, sunglasses, cool-collars and evaporative-cooling coats can all add to the summertime fun.

To escape the hottest temperatures, restrict activities to early morning or late evening. Shade is a must, along with frequent dog-wetting opportunities. Many dogs enjoy a hose-down or a dip in a kiddie pool. It is not recommended to leave dogs unattended near a pool or body of water, regardless of how skilled they might be at swimming. And each time you venture out into the heat; bring water enough for both of you. Frequent, small drinks can help keep you both hydrated. Also, try drinking prior to your adventure; dogs enjoy chilled chicken broth or goat's milk. Once outside, avoid hot surfaces, like concrete and asphalt, which can seriously burn doggie feet. When traveling, it is not recommended to transport loose dogs in the open-air back of a truck, (it's illegal in some states), or leave a dog in a car at any time while warm outside.

Learn the symptoms of heat stroke and work to prevent it. Heavy panting, drooling, weakness, vomiting, diarrhea and seizures can indicate a potentially dangerous problem from over-heating. By knowing your dog's normal body temperature (~100-102), you take quick action if it deviates a bit above normal. Offering chilled treats, like doggie frozen yogurt and cool water can reduce their temperature internally, while wetting their fur with colder water, or applying ice packs to the groin, or rubbing alcohol to the paw pads can help cool them externally. Always be ready to rush them to the vet if their temperature is way up or if they get worse.

In sum, when you educate yourself about the potential dangers of heat, take the necessary heat-related precautions and apply pet-parenting common sense, you can more safely enjoy a plethora of outdoor summer exploits with your favorite canine companions. What are we waiting for...let's get out there!