

Are You Stressing Out Your Pet?

You might not realize it, but if Fluffy or Skippy are listless, disobedient and getting sick all the time, chances are that your pet doesn't have some mysterious disease – he or she may simply be stressed out.

"A lot of people think that stress is something that only affects humans, but it's a very real threat to the health and happiness of their pets, too," said **Dr. Paul McCutcheon**, a veterinarian with more than 45 years of experience and co-author of *The New Holistic Way for Dogs and Cats* from Random House (www.newholisticway.com).

McCutcheon believes that stress, combined with diet and other environmental concerns, can present serious – but unspecific – symptoms that can worry both the pet and the pet owner.

"The best way to support your pet's present and future wellness is through stress prevention. Tune into the kinds of stress that affect your pet and stress-proof the ways you look after their daily needs," he said. "For instance, boredom and loneliness are probably the most damaging stress factors in a

pet's life."

His tips for pet owners who want healthier, happier pets include:

Think Before You Adopt – It's critical to ask yourself serious questions about your lifestyle and future *before* you adopt a pet. In that sense, you can better choose an animal whose needs are similar to your own.

Establish Your Role – You need to see your role and your veterinarian's role in a different way. While you are in the best position to influence your dog or cat, your veterinarian can be a good coach who provides you with opinions and advice that help you make better choices regarding the care and feeding of your pet.

Watch Their Diet – Just as processed foods are being blamed for an increase in obesity for people, processed food is a danger for pets as well. Look into switching over to a new trend in pet food, raw foods. They can be found in pet specialty shops and grocery stores in the refrigerated section. They are also known as "fresh" foods for pets, so ask store managers about them.

"There is a direct relationship between the emotional health of a pet and that pet's physical health, just as there is in humans. When we're stressed out from work or family issues, our immune systems suffer," McCutcheon stated. "We lose sleep, and we are far more susceptible to the bug that's always going around. We're mammals, and so are dogs and cats. What makes us think they are any different?"

"The truth is, when we're stressed out, so are our pets. Just as pets can sense anger, fear or illness in us – which explains why pets try to comfort us when we're sick – they can also sense our stress," he added. "By addressing the stress in our own lives, we can help keep our pets stress-free and prevent many of the common illnesses that plague them, making them happy and healthy companions for a long time to come."

McCutcheon is the founder of Toronto's East York Animal Clinic, serving 5,000 patients. He hosted the popular Canadian television series *Perfect Pet People* and the radio show *People and Pets*.





Just like their human companions, pets can suffer from stress. According to veterinarian and author Dr. Paul McCutcheon, boredom and loneliness are probably the most damaging stress factors in a pet's life.