

Canada's Pet Wellness Report:

A snapshot of Canada's pet health and wellness from the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA,) in partnership with Hill's® Science Diet®.

Enhancing the quality and length of the lives of our cats and dogs through a deeper understanding of health and nutrition.

Partnering for Pet Health



CANADIAN VETERINARY
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE
DES MÉDECINS VÉTÉRINAIRES



CANADA'S PET WELLNESS REPORT is the product of a partnership between the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) and Hill's Pet Nutrition, makers of Science Diet® brand pet food.

The report provides a 360° snapshot of the current state of pet health in Canada, by exploring areas of overall cat and dog wellness and nutrition.

The subject of pet wellness has broad relevance to Canadians. It is estimated that there are approximately 7.9 million cats and 5.9 million dogs in Canada. Approximately 35% of Canadian households have a dog, while 38% have a cat (source: Ipsos Reid).

This report is based on findings from market research surveys of Canadian pet owners and veterinarians conducted for the CVMA and Hill's by Ipsos Reid.

Topline Findings:

Findings of Canada's Pet Wellness Report suggest significant opportunities to enhance the length and quality of the lives of pets in Canada, by improving pet owner understanding of pet nutrition and health.

More specifically, the report reveals that, while Canadians love their pets, they do not always make the best choices when it comes to nutrition, physical exercise and regular veterinary care.

Highlights of the research include:

- 51% of dog owners and 58% of cat owners in Canada claim their pet(s) have no health issues or seem to be in perfect health.
- According to veterinarians, overfeeding is the most common mistake pet owners make in feeding their dogs or cats.
- Weight control/management was cited most often by veterinarians as one of the most important things pet owners can do to increase the length of their pet's life, yet fewer than 2 in 10 pet owners feed their pet(s) the amount recommended on the pet food package.
- Pet owners are more likely to consider their pet's preference (taste) over their pet's health needs when choosing a pet food.
- On an average weekday, pet owners spend three times as much time watching TV and nearly twice as much time surfing the Internet as they do playing with/exercising their pets.
- Veterinarians say dental disease is the most commonly diagnosed health problem that pet owners are surprised to hear about.
- Cat owners (46%) are far less likely than dog owners (77%) to have taken their pet to the veterinarian within the last 12 months.

Report Scope

This report assesses pet health and nutrition in Canada, by exploring five key areas of pet wellness:

1. Food and Nutrition
2. Veterinary Care
3. Exercise
4. Life stage (age related) Needs
5. Overall Pet Health (status)

Methodology

Canada's Pet Wellness Report is based on:

- An Ipsos Reid poll conducted between April 18 and April 27, 2011, on behalf of the CVMA and Hill's Pet Nutrition. A sample of 1,043 pet owners from Ipsos' Canadian online panel was interviewed online. A survey with an unweighted probability sample of this size and a 100% response rate would have an estimated margin of error of +/- 3.0 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.
- A survey of practicing Canadian veterinarians was also conducted using a sample provided by the CVMA. A survey with an unweighted probability sample of this size and a 100% response rate would have an estimated margin of error of +/- 9.6 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.



Approximately
35% of Canadian households have a dog

Approximately
38% of Canadian households have a cat

SNAPSHOT BY RESEARCH AREA:

The following is a snapshot of findings for each key area of research explored by Canada's Pet Wellness Report.

Food and Nutrition

The research reveals that approximately 70% of veterinarians proactively discuss nutrition with dog and cat owners in their practice. The most common piece of advice veterinarians offer to both dog and cat owners during routine examinations surrounds feeding, weight loss and weight control.

This advice could flow from the fact that veterinarians say overfeeding is the most common mistake pet owners make in feeding their dogs or cats.

It isn't overly surprising then that veterinarians also say obesity is by far the most serious effect of improper feeding or poor nutrition they see in their practices. It's also the second most commonly diagnosed health problem that pet owners are surprised to hear about.

Veterinarians say overfeeding is the most common mistake pet owners make in feeding their dogs or cats.

The research suggests that pet owners (and their pets) could benefit from a better understanding of pet nutrition, from how they decide what food to buy to how they feed their pets. Supporting better nutritional choices could support overall pet wellness, considering veterinarians were most likely to cite weight control as one of the most important things pet owners can do to increase the length of their pets' lives.

Top five most common mistakes pet owners make in feeding their dog(s) or cat(s) – according to veterinarians

1. Overfeeding/too much food
2. Feeding too many treats
3. Free choice (making food available at all times)
4. Poor quality food
5. Human food/table scraps

So, where could pet owners use some guidance when it comes to making healthier nutritional choices for their pets? Research findings suggest it should start with how pet owners decide what to feed their pets.

Purchasing Pet Food

- Pet owners admit that they are nearly twice as likely to buy a pet food based on what their pet likes to eat (60%) vs. what will actually meet their health needs (33%).
- Veterinarians (19%) say that pet owners are more likely to use price as the key factor in choosing a pet food, than the food's ability to meet their pet's health (14%) or life stage (age) needs (8%).

And when it comes to dishing out their pets' food, the study found that fewer than 2 in 10 (18%) pet owners feed their pet(s) the amount recommended

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on the pet food package. Pet owners (45%) also say that they are most likely to feed their pets by "making food available to their pet(s) at all times" (also known as free choice feeding).

Overall, the findings suggest an opportunity to educate pet owners about the possible impact of their pet nutrition decisions on the length and quality of their pets' lives.



Veterinary Care

The research shows that veterinarians and pet owners aren't necessarily on the same page with respect to how to best support pet health.

While the study explored a variety of topics that veterinarians and pet owners discuss during visits, it uncovered two key issues:

1. Pet owners may not realize the importance of regular/annual exams for their pets.
2. Pet owners may not understand or be listening to their veterinarians about the impact of pet dental health on the overall well-being of their pets.

Veterinarians (37%) are far more likely than pet owners (10%) to consider regular/annual exams or check-ups one of the most important things a pet owner can do to increase the length of a pet's life.

Veterinarians say dental care is the second most common type of advice they give to dog and cat owners during check-ups.

Despite the fact that veterinarians say dental care is the second most common type of advice they give to dog and cat owners during check-ups, the research suggests pet owners may not be getting the message about its importance.

Overall, the research suggests that pet owners may not fully understand the importance of proactive dental/oral health care in enhancing the length and quality of a pet's life.

Pet owners not getting the message about the importance of dental care

- Veterinarians consider clean teeth and fresh breath one of the best indicators of good overall pet health that pet owners can observe at home, yet dental disease is the most commonly diagnosed health problem that pet owners are surprised to hear about from their veterinarians.
- After weight control, veterinarians are most likely to cite dental care as one of the most important things a pet owner can do to increase the length of a pet's life, yet only 16% of pet owners say they're interested in learning more about this topic.
- Oral/ dental health is the second most important criteria veterinarians use to evaluate overall pet health, yet it doesn't even make the top ten list of signs pet owners use to determine the overall health of their pet.

Top five recommendations veterinarians make to pet owners during routine examinations

TO DOG OWNERS

1. Feeding guidelines/weight control
2. Oral health/dental care
3. Deworming
4. Parasite control
5. Vaccinations



TO CAT OWNERS

1. Feeding guidelines/weight control
2. Oral health/dental care
3. Nutrition
4. Vaccinations
5. Deworming



Exercise

Exercise is the area of the research that revealed the most obvious disconnect between what pet owners say and how they act.

When pet owners were asked what they believe is the most important thing they can do as a pet owner to enhance the quality and length of their pet's life, the top answer was exercise.

On an average weekday, pet owners spend three times as much time watching TV and nearly twice as much time surfing the Internet as they do playing with/exercising their pets.

In this regard, pet owner attitudes aren't too far removed from those of veterinarians who say regular exercise is the fourth most important thing a pet owner can do to increase the length of their pet's life.

The bigger issue seems to be with how pet owners act (or don't act) on this belief. On an average weekday, pet owners spend three times as much time watching TV (79 minutes) and nearly twice as much time surfing the Internet (48 minutes) as they do playing with/exercising their pets (25 minutes).

Time spent on an average weekday playing with/exercising pets:

Women	=	28 minutes
Men	=	19 minutes

Furthermore, veterinarians say they are seeing signs that pets may not be getting enough exercise:

- Veterinarians believe that the majority of dogs (55%) and cats (70%) they see do not receive an adequate amount of exercise to maintain good health.

Even on an average day on the weekend, when pet owners would likely have more disposable time on their hands, they still spend three times as much time watching TV (89 minutes) and more time surfing the internet (44 minutes) than playing with/exercising their pets (29 minutes).

Considering that overfeeding and obesity are key issues among Canadian pets, appropriate levels of exercise for cats and dogs should be a priority for pet owners and a subject they should consider raising with their veterinarians.

Life Stage Needs

Life stage (age)-related needs of pets appears to be another area of disconnect between what pet owners say and what they do.

Pet owners themselves say the specific life stage (age)-related needs of their pets is the #2 topic they're interested in learning more about, yet veterinarians themselves say only 7% of pet owners ever ask them about this topic.

Research suggests pet owners may not fully understand the importance of meeting the life stage-related needs of pets, especially with respect to their nutrition:

- While veterinarians rank life stage-based nutrition #5 on their list of the most important things pet owners can do to increase the length of a pet's life, this was not even mentioned by pet owners when asked the same question.
- Veterinarians say factors like price, value and advertising all carry more weight with pet owners than a pet's age/life stage needs, when it comes to choosing a pet food.

Veterinarians' top 5 most important things a pet owner can do to increase the length of their pet's life

1. Weight control/management
2. Dental care
3. Regular exams/checkups/ annual exams
4. Exercise/ regular exercise
5. **Proper food/appropriate food for life stage**





Overall Pet Health

According to the research about half (51%) of dog owners and 58% of cat owners claim their pets have no health issues or seem to be in perfect health.

The rest of pet owners claim their pets are experiencing a variety of health issues to some extent, with weight problems near or at the top of the list for cats and dogs.

One of the most compelling findings is that pet owners may not be recognizing the more obvious signs of health issues in their pets. For example:

- Veterinarians consider a pet's weight and clean teeth and fresh breath among the best indicators of good overall pet health that pet owners can observe at home.
- Obesity and dental disease are the two most commonly diagnosed health problems dog and cat owners are surprised to learn about during veterinary exams.

Overall, the research suggests there's room to help pet owners better understand how to recognize the visible signs of health issues, while encouraging them to visit their veterinarian to evaluate those they are unable to recognize.

This is even more important given that more than half of cat owners and nearly a quarter of dog owners have not been to the veterinarian in the previous 12 months.

Top five signs pet owners rely on to determine if their pet is in good overall pet health:

1. Pet eats well
2. Pet wants to play or exercise
3. Pet has normal stool
4. Pet has clean/healthy-looking eyes, ears, nose
5. Pet has a healthy coat/skin

Top five indicators of good overall pet health that a pet owner can observe at home (according to veterinarians)

1. Pet's weight (neither under nor over weight)
2. Pet wants to play or exercise
3. Pet has a healthy coat/skin
4. Pet has consistent overall behaviour/mood
5. Pet has clean teeth and fresh breath

CONCLUSION

Findings from Canada's Pet Wellness report show that managing obesity, nutrition, dental care and exercise are key to enhancing pet health across the country.

While pet owners have an understanding of potential health issues in their pets, what they believe is most important to pet health does not necessarily match what veterinarians believe or recommend.

The following could help bridge the gap between pet owner attitudes and habits and best practices recommended by veterinarians:

- Educate pet owners about pet food choices and encourage them to look beyond price/value, while discussing appropriate feeding practices to prevent the implications of obesity and weight issues.
- Educate pet owners about the role of proactive dental care in contributing to a longer and healthier life in pets by helping prevent a range of health

issues such as organ damage, strokes, osteoporosis and diabetes.

- Help pet owners understand the ideal amount of exercise for their pets and ways of incorporating more play/exercise with pets into their schedules.
- Help pet owners identify the visible signs of health issues and to understand why proactive veterinary visits are crucial to spotting health issues they cannot see.

For more information about Canada's Pet Wellness Report, please contact:

Sarah Bush, Harbinger Communications
 sbush@harbingerideas.com
 416-960-5100 x 224