

## Should You “Winterize” Your Pet?

The arrival of autumn signals many changes in the household — switching from salads to soups, pulling sweaters out of storage, changing furnace filters. With pets, however, you may need to think as much about what you *don't* change as what you *do*.

**Don't fall off the exercise wagon.** With days getting shorter — and cooler — it can be tempting to skip your early morning or evening walk. But with more than half of all pets in the U.S. being overweight or obese, exercise is vital. A daily walk can rev the metabolism of both two- and four-legged walkers for hours.

**Do ensure your pet is outfitted for cooler weather.** Small, light-bodied dogs; those with very short hair; and older dogs with weakened immune systems are likely to need sweaters when venturing outside. And once truly cold and snowy weather sets in, dogs may require protective footwear to keep their paw pads from freezing.

**Don't assume that cooler weather eliminates the threat of diseases like heartworm,** which are spread by infected mosquitoes. Mosquitoes have been known to survive well into the winter months, thanks to indoor havens and protected microclimates existing within larger, cooler climate zones. For this reason, the American Heartworm Society recommends year-round heartworm protection for both dogs and cats.

**Do ensure your senior pet has a warm, draft-free place to sleep.** Many older dogs and cats suffer from arthritis. Just as sore joints in people tend to feel worse in cold weather, the same is true for pets. A warm, cozy bed can make nights — and mornings — more comfortable.

**Do be sensitive to your pets' feelings** if fall brings changes to your household. Just like people, pets can get depressed. If you're missing a son or daughter who has moved away to start college or a job, chances are your family pet is also feeling the loss. Spending time with your pet and giving him an extra measure of cuddling and affection will help both of you feel better.

