



Important Questions to Ask Your Vet—And How to Ask Them

You're listening to your veterinarian provide a rather long-winded dissertation (using words learned only in veterinary school) about the canine love of your life. You were worried to begin with; now, as your vet is describing the five-syllable diagnosis and various treatment options, your concern is escalating into full-blown anxiety. You're actually not hearing much at all because all of your brainpower is hard at work keeping the tears at bay.

When your vet comes up for air and asks if you have any questions, you don a fake half-smile and shake your head to say, "No," when what's screaming inside your head is, "Questions! I don't know enough to have a clue as to what questions I should ask!" Your vet may think that she's just provided you with a whole bunch of useful information, but all you heard is that the wiggling and wagging center of your universe is sick. It's tough to ask meaningful questions when you've just been handed news that leaves you emotionally "unglued."

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SECRET FOR SUCCESS

Bring Along a “Hired Gun”

When your dog has a significant health problem and you have scheduled a visit to the vet, consider bringing along an extra set of eyes and ears (those of the human variety work best); someone you trust to give you objective feedback rather than someone interested in persuading you to do what they think is best.

Just like static on the radio, “emotional static” can significantly interfere with your ability to truly hear what your veterinarian is saying, or to make significant decisions when the news is complicated and worrisome. Your “hired gun” should be a good listener, ideally have some medical savvy, and should be capable of remaining emotionally grounded with respect to your dog. His or her job is to pick up on all the details you may miss, ask questions, and debrief you after the visit—not to make decisions on your behalf.

Even if you are able to quell your emotions, coming up with significant questions isn’t necessarily easy. After all, how can someone with no medical training know what to ask, especially when it is unclear just what information you truly need? Yet, here I am telling you that such questions are *essential*. This is the reason why: the recipe for successful medical decision-making calls for a pinch of gut instinct combined with a whole lot of clarity about the potential risks and benefits of the available options. Getting the answers you need from your vet is clearly the best way to understand your dog’s specific condition and to make the right choice for him. In your role as “canine medical advocate extraordinaire,” I have no doubt that you will choose clarity over guesswork any day of the week.

I’m going to make it easy for you! This chapter is filled with questions to ask your veterinarian on the general topics most likely to affect the majority of dogs. In addition, I’ve provided a comprehen-

sive list of disease-specific questions in the Appendix, p. 283. I've included the questions I believe are essential for getting the information you need to make good choices about your dog's medical care. And, I encourage you to add your own, based on your dog's circumstances or special needs.



65% of dog owners include their pups in Halloween festivities.

So, when exactly are you supposed to ask your veterinarian these important questions? When you've just received your pup's diagnosis, I'm afraid you cannot expect your vet to sit patiently by while you pull out this book! Here's my recommendation: whether you use my suggestions (from both this chapter and the Appendix, p. 283) or come up with your own, vets recognize that clients need time to process new information and put together their list of questions before making significant decisions. You may feel completely comfortable making some decisions during your first office visit, so ask your veterinarian to get started on the choices about which you are certain. Vets anticipate the need for more discussion later, either in person, over the telephone, or via email.

General Recommendations



- ❶ Prepare a *written* list of your questions. You may normally have a crackerjack memory, but it's very easy to become forgetful or distracted under the influence of considerable emotional energy and anxiety.
- ❷ Do your best to listen to your veterinarian's explanation *first*. If she is a thorough and effective communicator, she may answer most, if not all of your questions before you've even had the chance to