

Cold Weather Tips for Dogs
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As the thermometer drops below freezing you prepare appropriately for your daily walk. You layer clothing, put on a hat, gloves and scarf and are confident that you will stay warm. But how does your dog feel as you open the door and step outside into icy weather. Will that fur be enough protection to keep him warm and happy? Or are there things we should consider making the winter more fun and comfortable.

Insulation

Do you choose different coats based on the outdoor temperature? Think about the different fur coats on our various dogs. Thick coated dogs have better protection against the cold than short thin coated dogs. No matter how thick a coat they have, all dogs are susceptible to frostbite or hypothermia if exposed to extreme cold for too long. Different dogs have different tolerances to the cold. Some may be excited about playing in the snow while others will need encouragement to go out for even a few minutes. There is no explicit rule on how long a dog can stay out in the extreme cold. Generally, if you are ready to come inside so is he. Consider a sweater and booties for dogs with thinner coats or show cold intolerance. They will be more comfortable on those short winter walks.

Paw Care

We often forget that our dog's paws come in direct contact with the snow and ice. Observe your dog when he is outside to see if he is comfortable or trying to keep his paws off the frozen ground. Booties could be a good option for adding comfort when walking on ice and snow. Inspect your dog's paws when he comes inside. Remove any ice or snow that got trapped between his toes. If you walked on surfaces that were covered with salt or other chemicals be sure to wash his paws before he has a chance to lick them and ingest harmful substances.

Sleeping

Where does your dog sleep at night? Is it on a floor that gets cold at night? This can especially be uncomfortable for older dogs that are developing arthritis. A pillow or thick blanket can help provide comfort on those cold nights. Also pay attention to where your dog chooses to sleep. Some dogs curl up next to heat sources such as a radiator or floor vent. They may be at risk of overheating during the night. Help to encourage them to sleep in an area that is comfortable and warm and allows for regulating body temperature.

Bathing and Grooming

Bathing is important for your dog's overall health. However, bathing too much in the dry winter removes some of the essential oils that help to moisturize his skin. The frequency may need to decrease during the cold months of the year. Also grooming goals should be examined in the winter. While a short haircut may be comfortable in the summer, it reduces the insulation needed in the winter. There will be a balance between length to avoid matting and enough to keep good insulation.

Food intake

Your dog's food intake may need to be adjusted during the cold weather season. Dogs that spend a lot of time outdoors may need some extra calories due to the cold exposure. If you notice your dog getting thinner in the winter gradually add small amounts of food to the bowl. Monitor your dog's body condition and increase or decrease his food offering accordingly. Conversely, dogs that will not spend time outdoors in the cold may have lower activity and tend to put on weight. In this case you may slightly decrease his daily food amount and monitor body condition to decide if any further interventions are needed. Your veterinarian is an excellent resource for helping you understand what a healthy body condition looks like.

Resources

There are several resources available with more tips on winter care. Below are a couple to consider but more can be found through an internet search.

Cold Weather Safety Tips | ASPCA: <https://www.aspca.org/pet-care/general-pet-care/cold-weather-safety-tips>

Cold Weather Pet Safety - American Veterinary Medical Association: <https://www.avma.org/public/PetCare/Pages/Cold-weather-pet-safety.aspx>