

# Pet health in winter



Article by Dr Alice Marshall, Registered Veterinarian (NSW VSB)

As the weather turns cooler, our pets can feel stiff and uncomfortable, just like we do. However, a few simple measures can help make winter more comfortable for both you and your pet.

## Shelter

It may seem obvious, but winter is a good time to double-check that your pets can protect themselves from poor weather and high winds. Short and sparsely haired breeds such as whippets feel the cold more than other dogs. If your dog is usually outside, bring them indoors if possible. Placing their bed somewhere warm and dry, away from cold drafts and damp is ideal.

## Sore joints

Winter is often the time when owners first notice that their pets are aging. Pets might be stiffer in the morning, avoid stairs or be more reluctant to jump up. **Consider booking a winter health check** with your vet to investigate aches and pains properly. Arthritis is a painful condition that can affect the quality of life of both dogs and cats. Your vet can diagnose this disease and prescribe medications to help relieve stiffness or pain.

## Bedding and clothing

Another option is to purchase a jacket or clothing to keep your pet warm. If your dog dislikes wearing winter coats, focus on updating their bedding or layering with warm fleece blankets. Placing carpet squares or heavy blankets between your dog's bed and the floor can also help reduce heat loss.

## Senior pets

In winter, older dogs can have more trouble with temperature regulation than younger animals, and age-related conditions such as arthritis can flare up. A vet check at the onset of winter can help ensure you're keeping them as comfortable as possible. Medication can be prescribed (or, if indicated, doses increased) to help combat the soreness of arthritic joints. Your vet may also recommend a specialised diet to help your senior dog's joints.

## Battle of the bulge

We are often indoors more with our pets during winter, who look to us for food and treats. Unfortunately, overfeeding can cause obesity and other health issues.

Continued over page...

If you can, keep to a regular exercise schedule with your pet. Moderate exercise encourages healthy circulation and muscle tone, which in turn supports sore joints. However, as joints can be stiffer, especially in older animals, make sure you don't overdo it. **Consult your vet** if you're unsure how to balance your pet's food, energy, and exercise needs.

### Winter blues

Exercise helps weight control. It can also control boredom, provide stimulation, and strengthen our human-animal bond. Getting outside together can help both you and your pet. Time spent together outside can decrease cortisol levels (a stress hormone), lower blood pressure and combat loneliness. As pet owners, we are lucky. The relationship we share

with our companion animals is unique and can provide comfort in difficult times. So, next time the weather is chilly, consider a walk with your furry friend. Your mental health and theirs will benefit from it.

*This article is for general information only. We recommend that you speak to your veterinarian regarding specific advice and help for your pet.*



**1800 999 738**  
**vetschoice.net.au**