

Walking in a Winter Wonderland

By Laura Tyler

The extreme cold spell we recently had really brought home the fact that it takes good clothing to handle being outdoors in below zero weather. I'm really happy that more and more information is becoming available about what life is like for the pets in our care during the winter months too. So, here's my take on a couple of situations that we, as pet owners, are faced with throughout the winter months.

Frostbite can happen to dogs and cats too. Bring them inside at night or provide a heated well insulated house and bed outside. Fresh water is a must too.

When you breathe extremely cold air it's doing damage to your sinus's and to your throat and lungs. Your pets don't have magical powers to withstand the elements either.

Single coated or short coated dogs are wearing the equivalent of a three season jacket. We're smack in the middle of that fourth season. She/he needs extra protection. "My dog doesn't like to wear a coat!" I hear this often. Yes, it's best to start getting them used to it when they are young. You can transition an adult dog to wearing a coat by starting with a harness. Once they are comfortable with the harness put his coat on with the harness over the top of it. Then take him out for a walk right away. The distraction of the outdoors will lessen the focus on the jacket. A pocket full of treats dispensed randomly on the walk will ease the change as well.

Boots or booties are another essential part of a winter wardrobe for a walking buddy. I have one of those dogs that is hard to fit so boots in her size are hard to come by. She doesn't last more than a few minutes in below zero weather without falling over and starting to shake. For her, limiting time outdoors is best. Boot training works well if you use the same protocol as we did with introducing the coat. Depending on the dog you might start with just one bootie. Get the yummy treats out and feed every step while walking around the room. Then add the next one then the next. Take your time and help your dog do something fun while getting used to the "new shoes".

If you are ski-joring with your dog be sure to check places where his harness might rub. Carry enough water for both of you. Eating snow alone may not be enough.

Winter air dehydrates us more because winter air turns into that beautiful hoar frost we see on the trees in the morning. The humidity becomes frozen. We need to drink extra water in the winter. Our pets need fresh water everyday too. And a little extra soft food in their diet is helpful as well. Remember that dehydration can cause serious physical problems. This is another good reason to bring your pets inside at night.

If your dog exercises with you outdoors on a regular basis check his paws often. The cold winter conditions can cause cracks in their paws and can become infected. There are some products that can help prevent this so do your homework or ask your Veterinarian for help.

I love those spring and fall days when I can leave the windows down in my car and my dog is comfortable and happy with fresh water, a place to rest and fresh air circulating. We all know the ramifications of leaving a dog in a hot car but winter weather has serious challenges too. If you leave the windows rolled up completely then over time you have a dog who is suffocating re-breathing his own air. Carbon monoxide builds up quickly in an enclosed running vehicle. If you have two or more dogs, especially large dogs, then you might return to a very serious or deadly situation. It's kind of a catch 22. Roll up the windows to keep the heat in but the air quickly goes bad and the car can heat up really fast on a sunny day. Open a window with the wind blowing and the vehicles drops to refrigerator temperature very quickly. Take extra precautions to keep your family dog safe.

This article suggestion came from one of our readers! Thank you! Your feedback and suggestions are appreciated! *Laura Tyler is a certified professional dog trainer with 25+ years of experience and has earned associate certification through the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants. She owns Total Teamwork Training LLC here in Northwest Colorado. www.totalteamworktraining.com*