



Eight Ways to Face Financial Challenges When Caring for Your Pet

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Most of the time, our furry, faithful friends enrich our lives and make them less stressful. Ask just about anyone who loves a companion animal and they will agree. Unfortunately, dealing with the cost of veterinary care can be one of the few times that our pets create unwelcome and unexpected stress. As a loving pet parent, you naturally want the best for your friend, but managing in “the real world” can sometimes translate into too many dollar signs.

This is especially true when your pet is facing death due to illness, injury or advanced age. Shouldering the financial burden of end-of life care is one of the most common challenges for pet parents like you. The dilemma can make you feel caught in an emotional vice of shock, anger, fear, and guilt.

It may be surprising for you to learn that financial issues are also one of the most common stressors for veterinarians and their practice team members. After all, veterinarians are, in reality, small business owners. While they are dedicated to helping your pet in every way they can, they also have to have enough income to cover all of their expenses and pay their staff members. Since money issues pose a major dilemma for both of you, it can be a starting point for how you might find some solutions together.



My suggestion is to team with your veterinarian as if you are partners, working together to solve your pet’s health issues. It is far easier to find solutions when you focus on the commonalities between you, rather than your differences.

Here are some other strategies you can use to work through your financial constraints:

- 1) Ask your veterinarian to provide written estimates including any future expenses that may arise. If you have written information with detailed explanations, it can help you understand your choices better and help prevent miscommunication down the road. And, it goes without saying, that it is always a good idea to set money aside for your pet’s care from the day you bring your pet into your home so you can meet these expenses when they arise.
- 2) Explore pet health insurance. There are several good pet health insurance companies out there. Just as with human medical insurance, some policies are more affordable but may have higher deductibles or exclude certain procedures. If you have multiple pets, you may be eligible for more discounts. Make sure you understand what policies cover “routine” care such as well-pet examinations or even vaccinations. Be aware that many insurance companies will ask for your pet’s medical records before your policy can be approved. Most will not cover “pre-existing conditions.”



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- 3) Ask your veterinarian if there are possible variations to the treatment plan. There may be some parts of the treatment plan that are more “optional” than others. Ask questions and work together to see if you can make the treatment more affordable without risking your companion’s well-being. You can also ask for a tour of your veterinarian’s treatment and/or surgical areas, along with introductions to the team members who will be caring for your pet. It’s often easier to understand the cost of your pet’s care when you can see all equipment, supplies, procedures, and staff for yourself.
- 4) Explore alternative or flexible payment arrangements. Some veterinary care providers offer payment plans depending upon the circumstances (especially with long-term clients who they have known for years and have trusted relationships with).
- 5) Explore Care Credit®. Many veterinarians offer this option and allow you to structure your payment with another party. In most cases, Care Credit will not charge you interest, as long as you make payments on time.
- 6) Explore other ideas. Are there trusted family members or friends you could ask for help or could you get an advance on a paycheck from your employer?
- 7) Some veterinarians have client subsidy funds for very special situations. These are often created by clients as a way of honoring or memorializing a special companion. Employees of many veterinary hospitals also like to contribute to these funds so they can help people and pets who are in need of financial assistance. You can find listings for many of these funds at http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/resources/tips/trouble_affording_pet.html and <https://www.avma.org/public/YourVet/Pages/Financial-assistance-for-veterinary-care-costs.aspx>
- 8) If you truly can’t afford to treat your pet and need to explore the option of euthanasia, speak openly with your veterinarian and share your mutual feelings. You are probably both struggling with the same feelings of frustration, anger, grief, and guilt. Again, you are a team and it’s much easier to bear the brunt of these emotions if you feel supported and understood rather than isolated and alone. You may also ask your veterinarian about pet loss support services to help you through this difficult time.

Many, many pet parents are kind, caring people and, yet, have true financial limitations. Whatever you choose for your pet, remember that money is not a measure of how much you care. Please try to separate your feelings of love and dedication for your pet from your ability to pay for veterinary care. Remind yourself that you have provided the best care possible for your pet based on the best of your abilities.

For more information, visit the Veterinary Wisdom® Resource Center at www.veterinarywisdom.com