

# HAPPY

VOLUME ONE 2015

# & Healthy

## YOUR VET VISIT

The first trip  
is often  
the most  
important!



### ANGELS WITH TAILS

Find out how a special therapy  
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### DENTAL CARE

### PARASITE PREVENTION

### SKIN ISSUES

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# Visit Your Vet

Help your pet  
achieve health  
and wellness.

**I**t is easy to fall in love with a new puppy or kitten. When we see that adorable face, or even when we find a perfect older pet to adopt, we often lose sight of the long-term commitment and care we're signing up for.

One of the most important steps to becoming a pet parent is finding a good veterinarian, who will be an invaluable resource throughout your pet's life.

It's hard to stress how important a first vet visit is, especially for a young pet or a recent rescue. Taking a

**The most important action new owners can take is to schedule a first vet visit.**



new dog or cat into the vet for the first time is something that should be on every owner's checklist.

"Whenever you adopt or buy a puppy from a breeder, you should immediately take the pet in to your veterinarian," says Karen "Doc" Halligan, D.V.M., chief veterinary officer for the Lucy Pet Foundation in Thousand Oaks, Calif. "Get the appointment and get them in."

Once pet parents have taken this all-important step, there are a few things they can do to prep for their visit.

### Questions and Expectations

"(New owners) should come armed with questions," Halligan says. "Take notes, listen to what the veterinarian says, and ask the right questions, so that you're educated about (your pet's) health."

Not only will their pet receive a full exam, but pet parents will be able to spend time with the veterinarian where they can find out more about their new pet's health.

"(Ask about) the life expectancy of the breed," Halligan adds. "Are there any characteristics of that particular dog or cat that predispose it to certain medical conditions? Pick the vet's brain, because they're the expert. The pet should get a weight and a temperature (reading), and a complete physical exam with the veterinarian. The vet should go over the vaccine schedule with you, and your (pet) should get a nail trim. (Be sure to) discuss diet, deworming protocol, and talk about training.

"Talk about when you should get your puppy or kitten spayed or neutered, if they aren't already," Halligan adds. "We do it at 8 weeks and 2 pounds."

Also, owners should have their pet microchipped as soon as possible, and be sure to purchase a collar with current ID tags, Halligan says.

"Even kittens should have that," she adds. "You can use a break-away collar (for puppies and kittens). Having a collar and a tag the minute you have the animal is the cheapest form of insurance you can have for your pet. I can't tell you the number of pets I've seen that don't have that. And it can cost the animal its life."

Start early, and your new pet is likely to live a healthy, fulfilling life.

### Ongoing Care

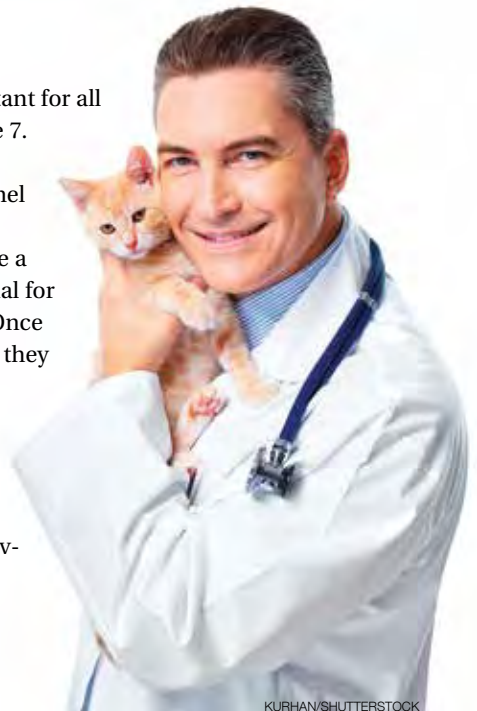
Annual visits are important for all pets, especially after age 7.

"I think all animals should have a blood panel and X-rays at least once before age 7, just to have a baseline of what's normal for them," Halligan says. "Once they're over 7 years old, they should have bloodwork once a year, and urine analysis.

Additionally, consider other annual procedures to ensure longevity for pets.

"All pets should be dewormed at least once a year," Halligan says.

— Ethan Mizer 







# Brush Up On Dental Care

Establish a good oral health program for your dog.

**M**any pet owners underestimate the importance dental care plays in their pet's health. Setting up a dental health program for your pet can improve their health and quality of life. Help a dog or cat maintain a healthy mouth with the right diet, chew products and regular dental care both at home and at the vet's office.

## Be Smart

Preventive care becomes especially crucial when you consider how many of our four-legged companions must deal with dental problems.



KAMIL MACNIAK/SHUTTERSTOCK; TOP: JIRI FOLTYN/SHUTTERSTOCK

According to the American Veterinary Dental Society, by age 3, 80 percent of dogs and 70 percent of cats show evidence of oral disease. It's the most commonly seen problem in veterinary medicine.

Gingivitis is the first stage of periodontal disease. As bacteria collects in the mouth, it sticks to the tooth enamel and forms plaque, which hardens into tartar, or calculus. These deposits irritate the gum tissue, causing inflammation and bleeding. With proper treatment, gingivitis is reversible. However, if left untreated, the plaque that collects below the gumline progresses to periodontitis, which destroys the tissues and bone that support the teeth. The damage caused at this stage is irreversible.

## Keep it Clean

Like humans, dogs and cats need a good dental hygiene program that combines professional and home care. For the at-home portion, the first step is to begin with a clean, healthy mouth — whether you start when your pet is young or right after a professional dental cleaning. The American Animal Hospital Association recommends that small-breed dogs get their first oral exam and cleaning when they are 1 year old. For larger-breed dogs, the age to start is 2. Recommendations for cats are more varied: speak with your veterinarian about your cat's dental health.

Because plaque can harden into tartar in less than 24 hours, many veterinarians recommend brushing a dog's teeth daily. "The key to brushing is to make the experience reward-associated," says William Rosenblad, D.V.M., head of dentistry and oral medicine and surgery at Angell Animal Medical Center in Boston. "Brush your dog's teeth at the same time each day, and follow the brushing with a treat or any other positive reinforcement, such as a walk, playtime or grooming." Using veterinary toothpaste flavored with poultry, salmon or peanut butter can also make the task easier.

Ideally you should brush your cat's teeth every day, though it is notoriously difficult to do. Because it can be challenging to get cats to accept brushing, it is important to start as early as possible to accustom them to the process.

## Chew on This

Appropriate chew toys and edible treats can help maintain your dog's good oral health. Some dental chews are too hard, however, and can fracture teeth. Items that can cause problems include animal bones, hooves and antlers, unless the antlers are fresh and have velvet still on them, Rosenblad says.

Keeping dogs healthy and pain-free is the point. Preventive dental care not only has a positive impact



**Both dogs and cats require veterinary dental care, including annual exams.**


BYELIKOVA OKSANA/SHUTTERSTOCK; ABOVE: CYNOCUB/SHUTTERSTOCK

on your pooch's gums and pearly whites, but on his overall health as well.

## Professional Help

When it comes to dental care, most dogs and cats need professional veterinary intervention on occasion. A dental cleaning can be costly, but as with humans, oral health in pets is linked to overall health. The least expensive method of maintaining your pet's oral health is prevention.

Pets require regular oral exams under anesthesia. "The only way to properly clean a dog's teeth is to use anesthesia and do a thorough exam that includes X-rays," says Kevin Stepaniuk, D.V.M., FAVD, of St. Paul, Minn., diplomate of the American Veterinary Dental College and president of the AVDS.

Many pet owners incorrectly assume that an annual cleaning by a veterinarian is adequate to control periodontal disease. The speed at which the disease develops depends on many factors, including age, overall health, diet, breed and genetics. Some dogs need a professional cleaning every few years, while others will build up tartar in as little as six months. — *Meredith Wargo* 



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# Bugs Away!

Keep pests away  
with these tips and  
treatment options.

**S**ummertime should mean relaxing days in the sun. That is, unless your dog or cat is plagued by parasites. If they're not controlled, fleas, ticks and heartworms can make your pet's life miserable — and even jeopardize it. The good news is that you can do a lot to thwart these nasty bugs.

### Tip 1: Inspect Regularly

Routinely check your dog's or cat's coat for fleas and ticks — even if you are using a preventive. Look for fleas at the base of the tail and on the underside of

your pet's belly.

If you see what looks like small specks of dirt, your pet might have fleas, even if you don't see any actual bugs. Place some of the dirt on a wet paper towel and see if it turns red. If it does, you are looking at flea excrement, known as “flea dirt.”

Keep an eye out for ticks on your pet, especially if he spends a lot of time outdoors. Look under and around his ears, beneath his collar, in his armpits, and on the insides of his thighs. If you find a tick on your pet, you can remove it yourself.

“The simplest way to remove ticks is to use either tweezers or a special tick-removal device,” says Heidi P. Watkins, D.V.M., a veterinarian with Airport Irvine Animal Hospital in Costa Mesa, Calif. “If using tweezers, gently grasp the tick's body as close to the site of entry as possible. Slowly pull straight out; do not twist. This method is reliable for removing the

head of the tick with the body.”

If the tick head isn't removed, it might cause irritation or infection. Once you have removed the tick, drop it in rubbing alcohol to kill it and prevent the spread of potentially harmful diseases.

### Tip 2: Start Early

Fleas and ticks enjoy warm, damp weather and begin looking for hosts as soon as temperatures begin to rise. Don't wait until these harmful parasites are in full swing before starting your prevention regimen.

“Flea-and-tick season starts fairly early in some places in the country,” says Jean Liljegren, D.V.M., of Florissant Animal Hospital in Florissant, Mo. For best protection, experts advise using flea-and-tick prevention year-round.

### Tip 3: Follow Directions

Many different types of flea-and-tick-control products are available, ranging from spot-on topical products — available over the counter and through veterinary hospitals — to powders, sprays, shampoos and dips. Pick a product that's appropriate for your lifestyle and your pet's situation.

Be aware that many products designed for dogs — especially spot-on products — are harmful or even fatal if used on cats. Read product labels, do your research and speak to your vet before beginning a new flea, tick or heartworm prevention and treatment regimen.

Spot-on products are among the most popular flea-



and-tick preventives available, and they generally do a good job of thwarting infestations. However, it's vital to use the product properly to harness its full effect.

"Spot-on flea-and-tick products should be applied per the manufacturer's recommendation," Watkins says. "In most cases, application in a single location between the shoulder blades is good. I recommend parting the hair to expose the skin and apply all of the product at that site."

Watkins advises dog owners not to bathe their pet for at least one day before and after applying spot-on products.

With other types of flea-and-tick products, such as powders and sprays, you must read the manufacturer's labels carefully before use. Specially formulated shampoos and dips are most appropriate for pets already suffering from a flea infestation. Treat dogs and cats with products immediately after bathing to help protect against re-infestation.

#### Tip 4: Treat Other Pets

Fleas can spread quickly from animal to animal, so treating other household pets is vital to controlling these pests.

Cats can be especially prone to harboring fleas and must be treated regularly to keep parasites at bay. In fact, the most-common type of flea that infests dogs is the cat flea. This insect preys on both cats and dogs equally.

Remember, if you have a cat, be careful when selecting flea-and-tick treatments; many products — particularly spot-on treatments — are different for each species. Read labels carefully. Never use a product labeled only for dogs on your cat.

#### Tip 5: Keep Weeds Down

The life cycle of fleas and ticks begins outdoors in warm weather. A vital part of controlling these pests is making your property inhospitable to them.

Start by keeping tall grass and weeds to a minimum. Grass and weeds are perfect hiding places for fleas and ticks.

#### Tip 6: Wash Bedding, Vacuum Often

In addition to treating your pets, prevent fleas from getting a foothold inside your house by washing your pet's bedding on a regular basis. If you've had flea problems, wash bedding at least once a week in hot water to kill any fleas hiding there. If your pet hasn't had a flea problem, keep it that way by washing bedding at least once a month during flea season — any time the outdoor temperature is above freezing.

Fleas love carpet. If you have wall-to-wall carpet, vacuum at least once a week — more often if fleas are a problem. Throw away the vacuum bag after every cleaning session; you don't want the fleas to climb out of the vacuum and back into your carpet.

#### Tip 7: Prevent Heartworms

Spread by mosquitoes, and most prevalent in warm weather, heartworms are nasty parasitic roundworms that can seriously harm or even kill your pet if he is not protected.


Four to six months after a mosquito transmits heartworm larvae into the dog's bloodstream, they become adult worms that usually end up in the heart.

"Treatment in dogs is possible, but still risky," Liljegren says. "You usually won't see symptoms — often coughing and weight loss — until the worms have been in the dog's heart causing damage for one to two years."

For this reason, Liljegren stresses prevention. "There are several different products available for dogs, which are monthly chewable tablets," she says.

Annual testing is an important part of heartworm control, even for dogs that are on monthly preventives. "Preventive medications only kill immature heartworms, called microfilaria," Watkins says. "If a microfilaria has made it to the adult stage, in spite of preventive medications, it will continue to flourish and cause damage."

Heartworm infection is atypical in cats and affects their systems differently. Because of this and the difficulty in detecting the infection in cats, prevention is key because there is no approved treatment if your cat is infected. Testing and prevention are the best route for cat owners.

You can prevent infection and safeguard your environment by removing standing water and other places where mosquitoes might breed. — *Audrey Pavia* 



**Before applying flea and tick treatments to pets, read labels carefully and make sure to use products as directed.**



# Skin Problems Solved!

Act now to keep your pet's coat and skin healthy.



MICHAELJUNG/SHUTTERSTOCK



If you own a dog or cat, chances are you will encounter skin issues at some point. Read on for our guide to four common skin problems, and find out what you can do to help your pet.

## 1 Mange

**Looks like:** Hair loss; red, crusty skin, mostly around the face and tips of the ears. Itching depends on what kind of mite is to blame.

**What's going on:** Mange results from a mite infestation of the skin. Though it is much less common, it is possible for mange to be diagnosed in cats as well.

**How to help:** The treatment for mange, regardless of the culprit, typically involves giving the dog an oral miticide such as ivermectin. Tell your veterinarian if your dog is part Collie, Shetland Sheepdog, Old English Sheepdog or any other herding breed, as these dogs can have a bad reaction to ivermectin (when used as treatment for mange), says MeiMei Welker, D.V.M., of Dove Lewis Emergency Animal Hospital, a nonprofit clinic in Portland, Ore. Mange is uncommon in cats: consult your veterinarian about treatment options if your cat is diagnosed with mange.

## 2 Skin Infection

**Looks like:** Red, raised, itchy skin with thinning hair; possible pustules (pimples). "As the infection progresses, the skin may become moist, and with yeast infections will develop a specific 'yeasty' odor," Welker says.

**What's going on:** Regardless of whether bacteria or yeast are to blame, the most common cause of skin infections is allergies, Welker says. Other less common causes include superficial abrasions, wounds, excessive skin folds and chronic moisture, such as from urine leakage or excessive tearing.

**How to help:** Veterinarians treat mild infections with medicated shampoos; antibiotics address more serious cases. In especially itchy patients, an antihistamine may help. "If the underlying cause is related to allergies, then addressing this problem is the key to long-term resolution," Welker says.

## 3 Hot Spots

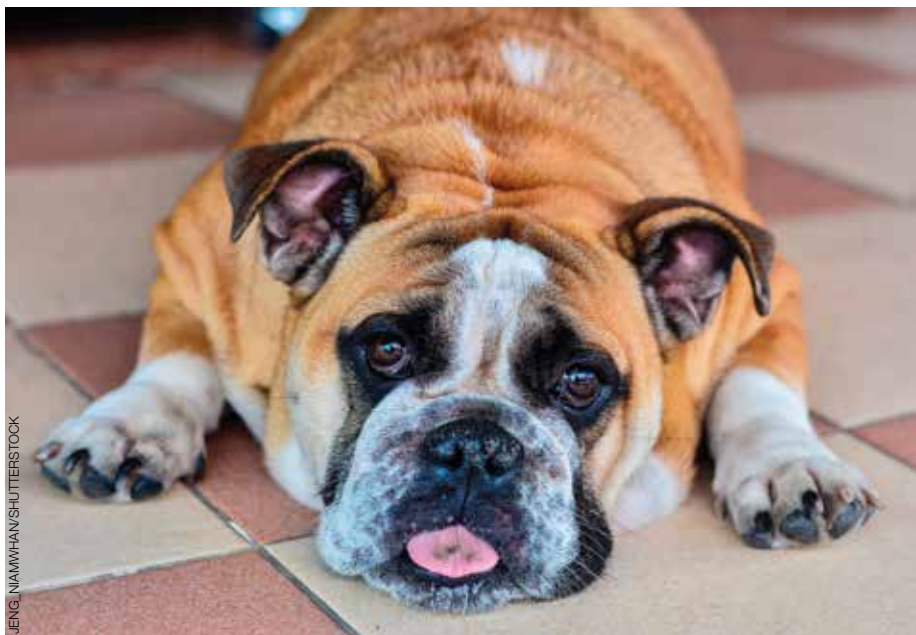
**Looks like:** Warm, red, possibly oozing patches of skin; hair loss.

**What's going on:** A hot spot occurs when a pet licks, bites or scratches at his skin, essentially removing the skin's top layers. "Most hot spots are found in the back half of the dog — these are almost always caused by an allergy to flea saliva, i.e. the dog is being bitten by fleas," says dermatologist Stephen D. White, D.V.M., ACVD, a faculty member at the University of California, Davis, School of Veterinary Medicine.

In rare cases, hot spots are caused by other allergens, such as food, pollen, mold or house mites. Hot spots can also occur around the face or neck, particularly in dog breeds with extensive jowls, such as Newfoundlands and Saint Bernards, but also in Labrador Retrievers and Golden Retrievers, White says. These types of hot spots are usually caused by a bacterial infection.

**How to help:** For severe hot spots, your veterinarian may give your pet corticosteroids to control the itch response as well as a medicated cleansing solution. If the hot spot is around your pet's face or jowls, your vet may opt for antibiotics.

Cats are not as prone to hot spots as dogs, and may not react the same way to treatment. Consult your veterinarian for proper care of hot spots in cats.



## 4 Allergic Reaction

**Looks like:** Seasonal itch, primarily on the feet and face; red, scaly, possibly hairless skin.

**What's going on:** Like people, dogs and cats can inherit or develop sensitivities to various inhaled or absorbed substances, from foods and medications to shampoos.

**How to help:** Some of the same medications that help people suffering from allergies, including antihistamines, anti-inflammatory medications, and medicated shampoos, may help. Your veterinarian can also do some blood or skin-scratch testing to determine what's triggering your pet's allergies, Welker says.

If your vet comes up empty, and the allergic reaction is new, try a simple process of elimination. Have you introduced any new foods (wheat, soy and dairy are common triggers), medication or routines?

With prevention and treatment, you and your veterinarian can keep your dog or cat free from skin problems. — Maureen Kochan

**Skin issues are some of the most common complaints vets hear from pet parents.**

# Some Angels Have Wings, Others Have Tails

How Canine Companions for Independence and CareCredit changed one boy's life.

**L**ike many children with autism spectrum disorder, Isaac often lives in his own world. Autism impacts his communication and socialization abilities. The 7-year-old doesn't speak and rarely makes eye contact with others. In fact, he prefers to be alone. At times it's a struggle to have any kind of social interaction with Isaac.

His mother, Dawn, wanted to help her son transition to a more typical world of child development and provide Isaac greater opportunities for socialization. She learned about Canine Companions for Independence from Isaac's doctors and thought this could be the answer for her son. Maybe it could lead to something else, something more personal.

"I was looking for something that could possibly give Isaac his first true friend," she says.

## An Arduous Process

Based in California, Canine Companions is recognized around the world as a provider of highly trained assistance dogs. The organization is renowned for the quality-of-life-enhancing matches it makes between

these dogs and people with disabilities. The dogs become members of the family and enrich their lives, by giving the person with the disability increased independence and loving companionship.

Dawn wanted this for her son.

She began Canine Companions' very thorough application process. She provided Isaac's medical history, a list of the daily challenges he faces at school and home, and outlined the family dynamics. She even sent pictures of the home and backyard to show the environment where a dog could be placed. The family was interviewed and put on a waiting list.

The case coordinators at Canine Companions reminded Dawn at each step the process was thorough and detailed. They had to find an assistance dog with the training to match Isaac's specific companionship needs. They assured her, however, that the long wait would ultimately pay off in the end.

## The Call

At times the wait was trying, but Dawn and her family remained focused on the possibilities for Isaac. After six months, the phone call finally came: Isaac had been accepted into Canine Companions' program and the family was invited to take part in a training class.

The two-week training provides an in-depth tutorial into everything the dogs have learned from professional trainers. The intense curriculum includes daily tests and one-on-one time with assistance dogs.

"I was so nervous during training, but after going through it, I realized their goal is to send every person home with a dog, and get the dog they think is right for them," Dawn says.



COURTESY CARECREDIT; LEFT: SHUTTERSTOCK/VERMOLAEV ALEXANDER







Thanks to retriever mix Kaylor, "I see the world opening up for [Isaac]," his mother, Dawn, said.

After several days of working with a number of dogs, it was time to be matched with the dog the trainers had chosen for them. Isaac and Dawn joined 15 other families in a large community room and sat on blankets laid out on the floor. That's when Isaac and Dawn met Kaylor, a Golden Retriever-Labrador mix.

"I'm sitting on the blanket with Isaac next to me, and the first dog that came to our blanket was this 65-pound dog that thought he was a lap dog," Dawn says. "He crawled right into my lap, puts his head on my shoulder and nibbled on my ear. It's like the dog actually picked us."

## Positive Impact

A change in Isaac's demeanor was noticeable almost immediately. Trips to the doctor's office or grocery store, always a challenge before, have become easier as Kaylor leads the way. But the real change was at school.

Before there was great apprehension in communicating: now, there's more confidence. Isaac uses an iPad to communicate with others, including Kaylor. In class or at recess, Isaac can give the dog a command via his iPad to sit and or shake hands with classmates. The teachers and students are very accepting of Kaylor and, as a result, more open to Isaac, paving the way for greater socialization.

"Isaac is communicating with others much more than he ever did before and is beginning to develop


the social skills he needs in life, and it's all because of Kaylor," Dawn says. "I see the world opening up for him."

Over the past two years, CareCredit has awarded \$50,000 in grants to Canine Companions as part of CareCredit's Caring Communities Program, which supports organizations doing important, life-changing work aligned with the professions the company serves. In fact, it was CareCredit's grant that brought Isaac and Kaylor together.

"People like my son are reaping the benefits of Canine Companions because of the generosity of companies like CareCredit," Dawn says.

While the addition of Kaylor has greatly enriched the lives of Isaac and his family, Dawn admits there is one small drawback to their new four-legged family member.

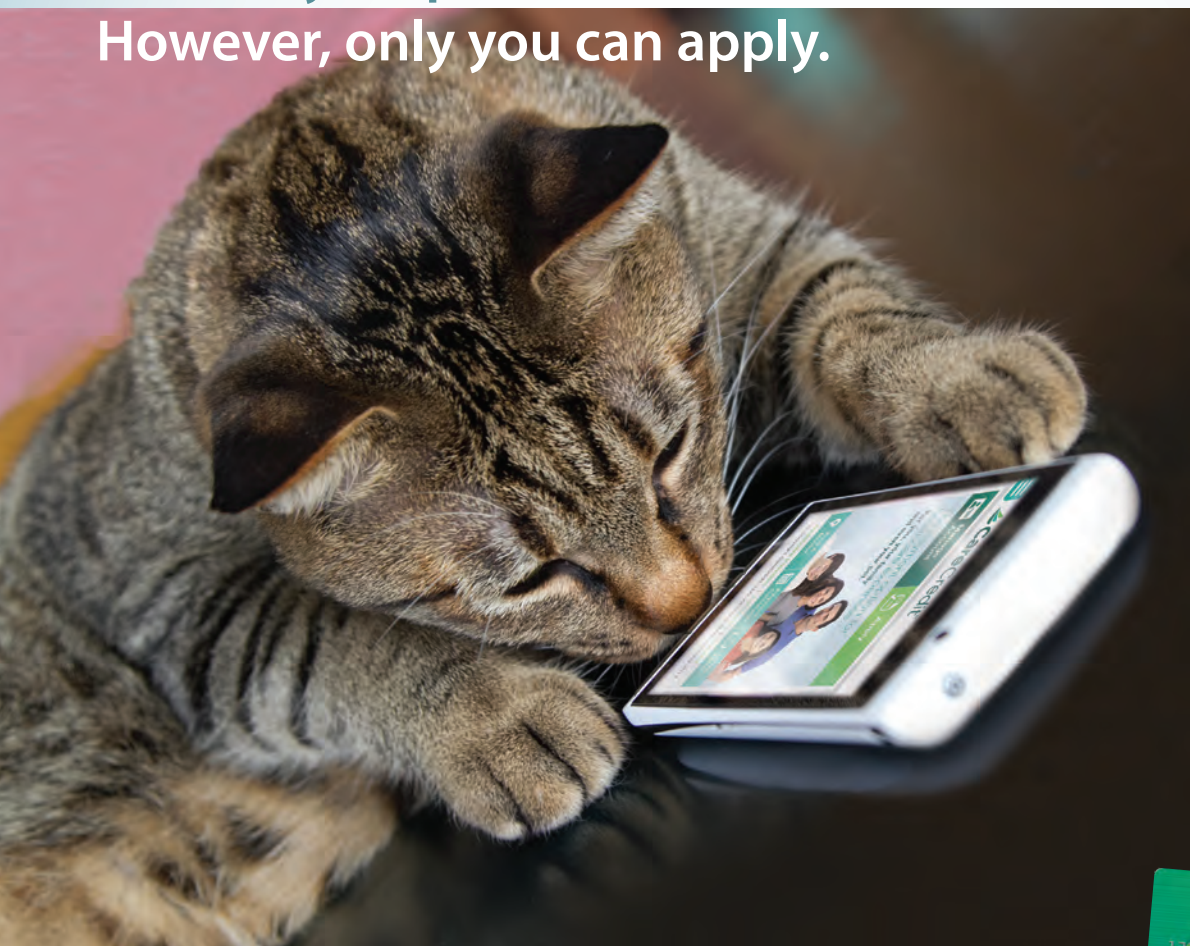
"Dog hair. Dog hair everywhere. So we've bought stock in lint rollers," she says with a laugh.

For more information about Canine Companions for Independence, visit [www.cci.org](http://www.cci.org) or their Facebook page. 



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