More About the ACVIM Foundation

The ACVIM Foundation is a non-profit organization created in 2000 to support and advance the work of specialists in the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine (ACVIM): Small and Large Animal Internists, Cardiologists, Neurologists, and Oncologists. Founded in 1973, the ACVIM sets international standards for veterinary internal medicine by overseeing board certification in the various fields of veterinary internal medicine and advancing research and education.

Because clinical studies in veterinary medicine are severely under-funded, ACVIM specialists have long depended on the generosity of private donors and industry sponsors to support their investigations. The ACVIM Foundation exists to bridge the gap between available funding and the vital work that needs to be done.

Your support helps fund our programs of investigation, education, advocacy, and service, which are leading us toward our ultimate goal: healthier and longer lives for animals.

The mission of the ACVIM Foundation is to advance animal health through discovery, education, and communication. We achieve this by funding humane studies that lead to new diagnostic, treatment, and prevention techniques; by supporting the education of new specialists; and by working to increase public awareness of advances available through veterinary specialty medicine.

As part of its mission to educate the pet-owning and animal-loving public, the ACVIM Foundation has created this brochure. Thanks to the individuals who volunteered their time and wisdom to make this possible.

For more information, visit: www.ACVIMFoundation.org or contact us at:

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**When should I seek a Specialist?**

- Your pet’s disease is uncommon, complicated, or undiagnosed after standard testing.
- You would like an informed, neutral second opinion of your pet’s condition.
- The outcomes of current treatments are not going well or as expected.
- Your pet requires a sophisticated procedure that is offered by a specialty hospital.
- Your pet can benefit from 24-hour monitoring provided by a referral hospital.

It is vital to get a referral from your family veterinarian whenever possible. This ensures proper transfer of medical information and will help your companion receive the best care. If you are searching for an ACVIM specialist, please visit www.ACVIMFoundation.org or call 800.245.9081.

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**How do I prepare for the veterinary visit?**

Before visiting any veterinarian, write down a summary of your pet’s problem(s):

- Provide a concise description of all the signs/symptoms you’ve noticed
- Mention everything you can think of even if it seems potentially irrelevant
- If you have prior medical records from other vets, forward them to the new veterinarian and allow sufficient time for medical review before your appointment
- It’s always a good idea to keep records of your pet’s health history

**How can I work with my vet to provide the best possible care?**

Establish a good working relationship with your family veterinarian while your pet is healthy. Regular wellness exams are essential—and regular visits lay the groundwork for teamwork when your companion may need care for illness or disease.

**Common indicators of potential health concerns include:**

- Decreased (or excessive) eating or drinking
- Lethargy, lack of energy, “out of sorts” attitude
- Increased scratching or grooming behaviors
- Difficulty urinating, incontinence, or accidents in the house
- Vomiting and/or loose bowels
- Shaking of the head
- Eye discharge
- Growths (abnormal lumps) anywhere on the body

Follow your intuition, trust your instincts, and communicate with your vet. No one knows your pet better than you.

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**What do I do if my pet has a disease or illness?**

Once your vet has established a diagnosis and treatment options, be sure to ask as many questions as you have. If you don’t understand the explanation, keep asking until you have a grasp of the situation. Some possible questions:

- Are there other treatment options?
- What is the prognosis for improvement or recovery?
- What is the cost of treatment?
- What are the possible side effects of the treatment?

After you get home from your visit, review it all in your mind and go over any written materials (such as handouts). If your pet has a serious illness, consider taking a friend or a tape recorder on your next visit (when you are stressed, it is difficult to remember all that the doctor said).

If you have more questions, write them down—then call your vet’s office again for more answers. Consider getting a second opinion. The Internet can be a good source of information if you choose the sites wisely. Above all, be an informed pet owner.

Be sure to document how your pet responds to the diagnosis and recommended treatment. Your advocacy will help determine further treatment options.

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**How do I find a good veterinarian?**

Your veterinarian is one of the most important people you will work with during your companion’s lifetime. Veterinary medicine, like any medicine, is a combination of knowledge and “bedside manner.” You naturally want a practitioner who is experienced and who can also communicate with you. Recommendations from breeders, friends, and relatives are a good starting point. Other sources include your state’s veterinary organization website and Internet search engines.

**What makes a good veterinarian-client relationship?**

First and foremost, the relationship you develop with your pet’s doctor must be one of trust and open communication. It’s important for your vet to be a proactive member of your pet’s healthcare team—and to be someone who will listen to your questions and concerns.