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Most cat parents are prepared to do whatever it takes to help their cat. Sadly, too many also rely on misconceptions and erroneous advice that can be misleading at best, and dangerous at worst. This worries me as a [veterinarian](#) and AJ as my wonderful technician. Speaking candidly, here are 10 things we do our best to tell every client, but many clients still may not understand.

1. Recognize pain and suffering

Most [cats](#) are extraordinarily stoic. It can be extremely difficult, but is very important to recognize when cats are suffering. If they are [limping](#), they hurt. If they are [vomiting](#), something is wrong. [If they skip several meals](#), there is a reason. If they have [difficulty breathing](#), they may be, in fact, suffocating, and it's terrifying for them. Seek help immediately. Procrastination is heartbreaking for us.

[\[Also see how to tell if your cat's secretly sick\]](#)

2. Denial about weight can be deadly

If you describe your cat with words such as "solid," "big boned" or "fluffy," chances are your cat is [overweight or obese](#). We know they love their treats, and that you love giving them, but too much weight is not healthy. Free feeding (i.e., not measuring the daily amount of food) is a recipe for chubbiness. [It takes years off of feline lives, it makes anesthesia riskier, and it makes](#)

[recovery from surgery more difficult](#). Love your cats in ways that makes them healthy and happy:

- Hugging
- Petting
- Snuggling
- Playing
- Catching
- Brushing
- Interacting

These alternatives are all calorie-free, but your cat craves them.

3. Know whom to trust

Speaking of [food](#), who do you think knows more about dog food? Your veterinarian, or the [18-year-old kid at the pet store](#) (or feed store)?

As they say, "You are what you eat," so choosing the correct pet food is a big deal. Please talk to your vet when picking food. Feeding the wrong food for your pet can lead to obesity, [bladder stones](#) and a poor [hair](#) coat. In addition, given the regular [pet food recalls](#), choosing a reputable brand is very important.

The composition of pet food should be based on scientific research, not slick marketing.

4. Never assume anything

We can't diagnose your cat's [lump or bump](#) over the phone. We can't tell if a mass is cancerous or not just by looking at it or feeling it. We may have an impression, but that's all we can do. And without the proper follow up, which may involve a biopsy or other microscopic review, we can't be sure.

We sometimes need to run lab work to find out what is going on with your cat. Yes, that fee is going to be in addition to the exam fee, but these tests are best for

the health of your cat. This is really no different than in human medicine.

5. Spay or neuter your cat

[Spaying](#) a female before the first heat cycle dramatically reduces the risk of breast cancer. Spaying also totally prevents [pyometra](#), a deadly uterine [infection](#). Neutering prevents testicular [cancer](#) and spraying. Beyond those medical reasons, spayed or neutered pets are less likely to run away and get hit by a car or get into a fight. They also have a lower incidence of [behavior](#) problems.

6. Follow discharge instructions

Discharge instructions are made to be followed. This is one of those times where you get to learn from someone else's challenges and that can save you and your cat from some serious trouble. We know that wearing a [plastic cone](#) for 2 weeks is no fun. We know that being stuck in a crate for 4 to 8 weeks is boring. If there were an easier way to do things, we would tell you! So please follow discharge instructions, all of them, all the time.

7. Get pet insurance

[Pet insurance](#) can make all of the difference in your cat's life. If you cannot afford thousands of dollars in [emergency](#) or medical care, please consider getting pet insurance. And do your homework, as there are some really bad companies and really good companies out there.

8. Know thy enemy

Anesthesia is not the enemy. [Surgery](#) is not the enemy. Your pet's condition is the enemy. We are here to help you choose the best weapon to fight the enemy.

9. Know that prevention is a critical part of pet medicine

Almost all cats should be on [heartworm](#), [flea](#), [tick](#) and [intestinal parasite](#) preventive [medication](#) year round, as prescribed by your vet. Almost all cats, with rare exceptions, should be up to date on all of the [vaccines recommended by your veterinarian](#). Vaccination against rabies is likely a legal requirement in your State. Other vaccines are recommended to prevent several deadly diseases.

Every year, countless cats die because they did not receive basic, effective, affordable preventive care.

10. Don't inadvertently starve your cat

When you realize it's time for your cat to lose weight, be sure to create a plan with your veterinarian. A lot of pet parents may not realize that when you put your overweight cat on a "light" [diet](#), it is next to impossible to make her lose weight effectively. So many make the mistake of unknowingly restricting cats too much by cutting the amount of food down significantly. This is very dangerous in cats as it can lead to deadly [liver](#) complications called hepatic lipidosis. We would rather have you trust us, and feed a diet that was made specifically for weight loss. It will have fewer calories, may have more fiber to fill the [stomach](#), and will have all of the nutrients and vitamins required. And it works consistently when the rules are followed. At the very least let's review the diet together.

Following these 10 requests will make you a wiser and better informed cat parent.

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian -- they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.