firstline®

Strong veterinary teams, compassionate client and patient care



Help! I work with a "B" word How do I make a bully stop?

"My cat won't eat that!"

Find a solution to this client conundrum

Stop your nail trim nightmares

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Before you start a nonprofit

read tips from someone who's been there 14



Is your New Year a Blue Year

Fight burnout and compassion fatigue (and learn to tell the difference).





*Millward Brown Veterinary Tracker, 2014

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Mission

To inspire receptionists, credentialed technicians, practice managers and veterinary assistants to build strong relationships with coworkers, improve their communication skills and educate clients with confidence in order to enhance their contributions to a veterinary practice and maximize every patient's well-being.



January is National **Train Your Dog Month**

You can help reinforce good training by discussing training with your clients at every visit. Melissa Spooner, LVT, VTS (behavior), BS, KPA-CTP, shows a puppy's potentially puzzling experience trying to learn the "sit" command at dvm360.com/TeachSit.

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Help! I work with a "B" word

Got a question? We can help.

Maybe you're tired of babysitting your team members. Perhaps you're looking for strategies to beat a bully. Email your questions to firstline@ advanstar.com.

There's a bully who's really wrecking my life at my veterinary practice. How do I broach the "B" word to my boss—and when is it time to move on to another hospital? —Bullied

If someone's disrespecting you, if it happens again and again and if it's deliberate, you're totally being bullied. And you completely need to do something about it.

The bad news: You may need to change the way you think about your bully and decide you're not going to let him or her affect you. The next step: Confronting your bully and discussing how you need to work together more effectively.

If that doesn't work, it's time to talk to the boss. And this means you need to talk about another "B" word: the business. Specifically, you need to be able to explain how the bully's behavior affects the business.

How do you know it might be time to leave?

- > You've tried negotiating.
- > You can't sleep at night.
- > You can't think of anything else.
- > It affects your performance.
- > It affects the quality of your life.

These might be signs it's time to move on. Just remember, you're helping other team members you've worked with if you tell your boss you're leaving because of a bully. You might not be the first person to leave, but it may not be the right person who's leaving.

-Sheila Grosdidier RVT

Partner with VMC, Inc. in Evergreen, Colorado



See Sheila's full answer at dvm360. com/B-word or scan the OR code to watch now.



FRONT DESK DISTASTERS

Dazed and confused

Rhonda the receptionist dodges and weaves around a client's questions about the preanesthetic consent form and gives confusing information. Special Guest Star Mary Berg, BS, RVT, RLATG, VTS (dentistry), sets Rhonda straight.





Scan the QR code, above, or visit dvm360. com/dazed.

What did you make in **2015**

What you earn is important. Want to help us report the latest salary data for technicians, receptionists, veterinary assistants and practice managers? Check out our 2016 Firstline Career Path Study and help us help you. As a special thank-you for completing the study, we'll offer a downloadable collection of Readers' Top 10 favorite client education forms. Take the survey now at dvm360.com/salarysurvey.

Scan the OR code or visit dvm360. com/pickypalate.

"My cat won't eat that!"

When pet owners complain their cats just won't eat that food you recommended, what's the next step? Check out this team training tool to get to the root of the problem and serve up strategies for cat owners.



Low-stress tip: Try treats for nail trims

Puppy pedicures can be a precarious procedure. Here's help to take the scary out of nail trims.

When this precious pooch visited Cary Street Veterinary Hospital in Richmond, Virginia, the veterinary team reached into their toolbox of low-stress handling techniques to tackle (dum, dum, dum) the dreaded nail trim.

"Feeding treats while getting her nails trimmed kept this 13-week-old puppy still and happy for

this procedure," said Marian Paulachak, a veterinary assistant and social media manager.

To perform the technique, one team member distracted the eager pup with tasty treats while a second team member tackled the toenail trim.

Note: It can work on older pets, too! Here, two team members at Bigger Road Veterinary Center in Springboro, Ohio, treat a happy pooch while trimming nails. What used to be a scary procedure for this pet is now a tasty experience.





Need a urine sample? Urine luck!

We've collected nine of our favorite tips compiled from the pages of *Veterinary Medicine* to help you collect that free-catch urine sample from your veterinary patients. From ice cream sundae banana boats to repurposed IV lines, we've got you covered. Never struggle for that free-catch urine sample again!

Got a great urine catch tip? Email us at **firstline@advanstar. com**. We'll pay \$50 for every tip we publish.



Scan the QR code, above, or visit dvm360. com/urineluck.



Team Meeting in a Box

Day-to-day steps to help your practice

This free team training module, sponsored by Nationwide, brings you all the tools you need to hold an educational team meeting in your practice today.

our team knows all about the health of your patients, but what about the health of your practice? We're talking about clinic revenue, inventory, expenses and so on. The more your team learns about these numbers, the more they can help contribute to the practice's overall success.

Use this meeting to teach your team why running a practice isn't a cheap operation. Discuss the overhead costs and everyday solutions to help keep these costs down. For example, it sounds corny, but turning lights off when you leave an exam room really is an easy way to cut down on the electricity bill. (Your mother was right after all! You can thank her later.)

Tools include a financial worksheet that offers an overview of your clinic's expenses, wellness plan talking points, goal tracking to track your progress, an idea proposal plan to pitch your great ideas to the boss, a quick quiz to rate your



practice's management style and much more.

Only have a minute? We've got something for you, too! Our new Micro Meeting in a Box helps you tackle three common objections that keep cat owners from visiting your veterinary practice. Visit **dvm360.com/teammeeting** to unlock these free team meetings.

What's standard for medical standards?



he business of good medicine counts on guidelines for a vast array of conditions, issues and procedures. Standards make sense, but are practices readily adopting them? VHMA asked its members:

reported that their facility has written medical standards

in place. A surprising percentage indicated that the practice has no written standards.

Among practices with standards, about 50 percent identified more than a dozen procedures covered by guidelines, including:

- > history taking
- > pain management
- > vaccinations
- > exam frequency
- > what to include in the

physical exam

- > fecal exam recommendations
- > heartworm tests
- > flea and tick prevention
- > preanesthetic testing
- > surgical monitoring
- > patient body temperature monitoring
- > spaying or neutering

Our practice has adopted medical standards for:

Vaccination recommendations 86%

Preanesthetic testing 80%

Heartworm test

Our practice is less likely to adhere to medical standards for:

CBC/chemistry frequency 48% recommendations

48% Microchipping recommendations

42%

35%

Team: Are you in on medical standards?

When the team agrees and supports the medical standards the practice has adopted, this boosts the chance your team will implement and stick to the standards. Among survey respondents, 69 percent said the team agreed with the standards. Among team members who agree with the standards, 60 percent of respondents reported that these team members reinforce the standards consistently and 40 percent said the standards are enforced sometimes.

Most respondents—80 percent—say their standards are consistent with or exceed AAHA/AVMA standards. Less than 3 percent described their standards as falling below these guidelines.

Medical standards are powerful tools you can use to fine-tune practice performance—and more important, to protect the health and safety of patients and provide clients with critical information about caring responsibly for their pets. So take the time to adopt medical standards and watch how implementing standards improves your service and care.

What guidelines are missing in your practice:

Nutrition recommendations

36%

CBC/Chemistry frequency 36%

Other regular canine- or feline-

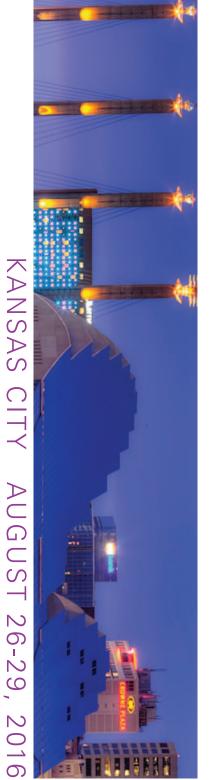
History taking



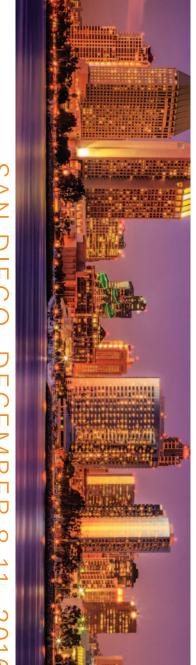
Christine Shupe, CAE, is the executive director of the Veterinary Hospital Managers Association. The association is dedicated to serving professionals in veterinary management through education, certification and networking.

42%





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PROFESSIONAL growth

Is your New Year a Blue Year

Use these five tips to overcome compassion fatigue and burnout (and learn to tell the difference).

By Jenna Stregowski, RVT

s caregivers, we sometimes put the needs of our patients and clients above our own. And this well-meaning behavior can lead to compassion fatigue and burnout.

How do you tell the difference?

Compassion fatigue has been described by traumatologist Dr. Charles Figley as "a state experienced by those helping people or animals in distress; it is an extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped to the degree that it can create a secondary traumatic stress for the helper."

Burnout is the result of cumulative stress in the workplace. Ask yourself these questions:

> Am I working long hours without taking adequate breaks?

- > Am I pushing myself too hard at work?
- > Am I picking up the slack for absent or ineffective coworkers?
- > Do I feel exhausted, frustrated or even apathetic?

If your "yeses" outweigh your "nos," you may be experiencing burnout.

Burnout not only affects caregivers. It can affect anyone who works. But when caregivers experience burnout, they may become more vulnerable to compassion fatigue.

In veterinary medicine, we find ourselves going above and beyond to help both pets and people in distress. It's not just about euthanasia and major physical trauma either. We see day-to-day traumatic things like chronically ill animals, clients with major financial concerns and crowded lobbies

full of stressed out pets and people. Dealing with these "little" traumas over time can lead to compassion fatigue. Often, our minds deal with this by tuning it out, and we become apathetic.

What you can do

Get educated. Learn about compassion fatigue and burnout. Visit compassionfatigue.org to learn more about compassion fatigue and find tips to help you overcome this condition.

Talk to management. You are under no obligation to share personal issues with anyone at work. But it may be helpful to talk to your practice manager or supervisor, especially if you think your behavior has affected others or your work has visibly suffered.

The conversation might be as simple as saying "I believe I'm experiencing compassion fatigue or burnout. This may explain my behavior recently. I am working to make changes in my life to get better. Here's what I need." Go on to explain what you need from management—for example, schedule changes, shorter hours or maybe even just a second chance to prove yourself.

Of course, there's no guarantee that managers can accommodate your requests. But most managers will try to help. This may also prompt your manager to look at the practice as a whole and work to improve the culture, if needed. What your manager can't do, however, is to assist you with your personal compassion fatigue or burnout

issues. That is up to you—or, if you wish, a professional.

Seek professional help. There's no shame in seeking the help of a professional. Though some people can overcome compassion fatigue and burnout on their own, many find that professional help works best.

Some veterinary practices provide confidential assistance programs for employees—often through the payroll company. These programs usually allow access to short-term counseling services that can help you get on the right path.

If your workplace doesn't offer this type of program, or if you prefer not to go that route, you may also find counseling services through your health insurance provider. You might even ask family or close

THE SIGNS OF COMPASSION FATIGUE

- > Exhaustion (emotional, mental or physical)
- > Isolation from others (self-imposed)
- > Emotions "leaking out"
- > Blaming others and complaining
- > Difficulty focusing on tasks
- > Insomnia
- > Nightmares or flashbacks of traumatic events
- > Apathy; inability to find pleasure and purpose in activities that were once fun and meaningful to you
- > Denial about symptoms

Compassion fatigue may lead to clinical depression, substance abuse, chronic illnesses and reckless or compulsive behaviors, such as gambling, overeating, excessive spending and so on.

When compassion fatigue affects multiple team members in the veterinary practice, it will take a negative toll on workplace culture. It's important to recognize the symptoms of burnout or compassion fatigue as soon as possible so the healing can begin.

PROFESSIONAL growth

friends to recommend a good therapist.

Make yourself a **priority.** To avoid or overcome compassion fatigue and burnout, you must take good care of yourself. Here are some ways to practice self-care:

- > Eat a healthy diet, drink plenty of water and exercise regularly.
- > Try out new activities that promote self-care, like yoga and meditation.
- > Consider getting regular massages if they help you relax and feel nurtured.
 - > Spend time bonding

with loved ones, including your pets.

- > Find the right work-life balance for you.
- > At work, practice mindfulness by staying present in the moment and taking note of your body's reaction to emotional or stressful situations.
 - > Avoid negative self-talk.
- > Learn to become selfaware so you can recognize how your behavior affects others.
- > Try to lighten the mood and have some fun. For example, you might come to work with a joke of the day. Share it with cowork-

ers when they need it most. During downtimes or when you're cleaning, turn up the music and dance! Ask managers if you can celebrate team members' birthdays. Taking five minutes to surprise someone with a card, a cake and a song can go a long way.

> Thank coworkers for the work they do. Gratitude creates happiness.

Set boundaries. It's OK to say "no" sometimes, especially if you're the kind of person who always says "yes." When you're asked to do

something, consider how it will affect you personally. Ask yourself if it overwhelms you or adversely affects a valued aspect of your life. If so, you should say no.

Recovery from burnout and compassion fatigue will not last if you put yourself in the same situations that led to it in the first place. Living as your best self will enable you to be a compassionate and engaged caregiver.

Jenna Stregowski, RVT, has worked in veterinary medicine since 1997. She is a hospital manager in Atlanta, and the writer and editor of the website dogs.about.com.

I LOST IT WHEN MY OWN CAT DIED



When my cat Cleo died, the veterinary professional in me was continue going to work. Personally, I was a mess. Read my story of burnout and compassion fatigue at dvm360.com/ cleo





Facebook is your practice's frenemy

Learn how to harness Facebook's strengths and limit your vulnerabilities. *By Alex Espinosa*

acebook is not only one of my advertising methods, it's my primary—and most effective—one. I spend less than \$100 per month and reach an average of 30,000 current and potential clients with targeted messages. But if this sounds too easy to believe, that's because it is.

Facebook can be an incredibly useful tool, but practices should be aware of the opportunities it offers and the threats it poses. Here are the four tricks I use to tame what can be an unpredictable beast ...



Share success stories

Most people love happy endings and cute animal photos, so combining the two is always a hit. I manage an eight-doctor 24/7 emergency hospital,

so I have plenty of opportunities to post stories of dramatic, lifesaving cases my clients love. Every 10 days I'll choose the story of a patient who was hospitalized in my ICU and restored to health because of my veterinary team's heroics.

First, make sure that you have the client's permission to use their animal in your marketing materials. Then write a post about 250 words long that contains key words or phrases such as "severe," "administered" or "lifesaving procedure." I'll name the doctors and veterinary assistants involved and use pictures of the patient in the ICU and after recovery. If we took any radiographs, I use them. Assembled together as a collage, the post is a compelling reason for current and prospective clients to "like" or "share" it and promote my hospital.

Making the situation sound dramatic is a major

PRACTICE marketing



Here's my process for vetting cases that I promote on Facebook:

- 1. Ensure the case has dramatic aspects that would make it popular.
- 2. Get client permission.
- 3. Review the medical record and ensure nothing unusual was performed and everything was textbook. Since I have such a large doctor staff, I have several of them read the article for accuracy and screen for medical negligence.

part of the clients loving it, but a little light humor is also effective. For example, gently remind the patient not to repeat the mistake that led to the predicament.

Don't forget you're not submitting the post to a medical journal, and your target audience doesn't have a medical degree—you're lucky if they have a few seasons of "Grey's Anatomy" under their belts. Also, consider the average attention span of your crowd.



Promote monthly specials

I've had success offering free or discounted screenings during awareness months for dental health, senior wellness and heartworms. These could be discounted services, if

that's a strategy your practice uses. Or these could also be special freebies, such as handing out a refrigerator magnet that lists your hospital information and some common household pet toxins for Poison Prevention Week.



Boost posts

Every time you publish a post you have an option to "boost" its visibility. For as low as \$1, you can have Facebook promote your post in the news feeds of people who haven't previously liked your page. You can focus on users by location, sex, age range and interests. After boosting a post, you might see an increase in the number of people "liking" it and your page.

You could also have Face-

book boost your practice's page. This allows you to pick a target radius to advertise within and blanket your area with your name.



Prepare for the

Just remember, danger may lurk behind Facebook's flashy features. Facebook advertising's primary weakness is the ability of a person to focus the wrath of others to post negative reviews and comments on your Facebook page.

We've seen this in the national news with the case of the Texas DVM, an alleged feral cat and an arrow. But I've also seen this manifest itself locally with an unsatisfied client with Facebook-savvy friends. A client who was upset about a

How do I know it works?

I measure Facebook marketing success by running new client reports and comparing them to previous years. To measure success in specials I'm running, I create a special code in my practice management software and run a report to see how many times it's performed.

It's well-known correlation doesn't equal causation, so it can be difficult to say with certainty that my surge in new clients and success with specials is completely because of Facebook. But I can be confident because I suspended all my other advertising methods during my initial research period to get accurate results on Facebook's usefulness.



surgical case with unexpected complications used her angry accomplices to overwhelm the clinic's page with posts. The result: This brought the practice's average review down significantly and left a nasty string of comments on the page.

Protecting yourself from these issues can be timeconsuming. You should keep a constant eye on your Facebook page, because a tsunami of posts can flood your page at any moment. And it pays to be aware of any comments or reviews to nip problems in the bud before they gain momentum. Smartphones make it easier to monitor social media because you can receive notifications when something is posted on your clinic's page.

The top two negative situations you may encounter on Facebook: a raid of negativity or one negative comment or review.

The quickest way to manage a raid is to "unpublish" your page. This will make your page invisible until you're confident the heat has died down. There are no long-term consequences, and most clients won't realize anything happened, because most of them discover your posts in their news feed.

To handle a negative review or comment, establish an Internet Relations Committee that consists of the hospital's highest managers, the doctor and staff involved with the complaint and whoever manages your Facebook page. Plan a meeting within 24 hours of the posting to discuss how to respond, but always lead with, "We are incredibly sorry for your negative experience." Depending on the legitimacy

of the complaint, you may choose to take a defensive stand. Or if you are truly at fault, I recommend writing in your reply that you'll be in contact to discuss the situation. This doesn't admit guilt, but it does convey to those reading the review that you're taking action to correct this client's concern.

I have yet to receive any negative comments or reviews on my Facebook page that have turned into something I can't handle. Often, we have been able to turn them into a learning experience for other clients reading my responses.

Committing to running a clinic Facebook page may seem daunting. The payoff: Better client engagement and more visits.

Alex Espinosa is the practice manager of Clarkesville Veterinary Hospital in Clarkesville, Georgia.

Get out of my dreams and into a

501(c)(3)!

Consider these five steps to launch the veterinary charity of your dreams—and tips to hurdle over the pitfalls—from someone who's done it. By Julie Carlson, CVT



Find someone you trust—a veterinarian, a clinic, maybe even the local Humane Society—and build a partnership. They can be a second set of hands and provide valuable resources.

Pitfall to avoid: Choose partners carefully. Make sure that your goals—and theirs—are very clearly defined. Discuss how you plan to achieve those goals and outline what role each of you will play.

Solicit sponsors and invite volunteers

You can write to pet food companies, veterinary schools and clinics, veteran's groups, charitable organizations like The United Way or Kiwanis, and veterinary bodies like NAVTA or your state organization. Some companies even pay their employees to work with nonprofits. Next, post about your organization in groups on Facebook. Find pages of other animal organizations and local charities and let them know what you're offering.

Pitfall to avoid: Be respectful when posting in others' Facebook groups. Contact an administrator and ask for permission.

2

Establish a home base

You don't necessarily need to have a storefront, but even if you're an organization that travels around distributing pet food, you'll need somewhere to store it. Contact local storage facilities and ask them to donate the use of an empty space to your group. It can be a tax write-off for them and gives you a central hub. If you're planning to provide free spay or neuter services, you'll need to connect with a clinic willing to help.

This is where step one really helps.

Pitfall to avoid: Be careful whom you trust. Donations can really add up, and I know of more than one group that's had a volunteer make off with them.

Get 501(c)(3) status

Being declared a 501(c)(3) nonprofit charitable organization by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) will allow people to give you donations in return for a tax write-off. This also means companies will be more likely to give you donations and services. The process can be daunting, but just take it one step at a time. Start by visiting irs.gov and downloading Publication 4220. This document will walk you through the steps required and offer answers to your questions. You can also ask for advice from members of other 501(c)(3) groups you know.

Pitfall to avoid: Don't skip steps during this process. Make sure you complete each document precisely and file them with the IRS correctly.

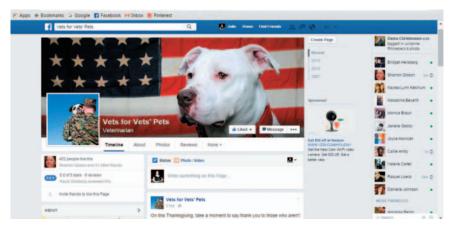


A central storage area like this one can help you safely store donations. Photos courtesy Julie Carlson, CVT



Technician students from Pima Medical Institute help distribute pet supplies at an event hosted by Vets for Vets' Pets.

SKILL builder



The Vets for Vets' Pets Facebook page is seeing increased traffic as a result of making connections with other community organizations

Reach the ones you hope to help

Getting the word out about the services you provide is harder than you'd think. When I started my group, Vets for Vets' Pets, a nonprofit organization providing supplies and medical care to the pets of homeless and at-risk veterans, I thought I'd open shop and people would start pouring in. But it takes a lot of time.

Start social media accounts in your group's name and talk about what you do. Ask your friends to share your page. Post frequently—at least once every 48 hours will help keep people involved. Have a booth at public functions, such as charity walks and pet festivals, and give out information about your group. Create partnerships with other service organizations and promote each other. Print business cards with the name of your group, what services you provide, your contact information and social media connections. Build a website you can update frequently with an event calendar and photos of recent

Pitfall to avoid: Be mindful of what you post on social media. When you get a large following it can be tempting to post about your kids' achievements or a Go Fund Me page you found, but people are following your group to hear about your services and events—not to be solicited for other things.

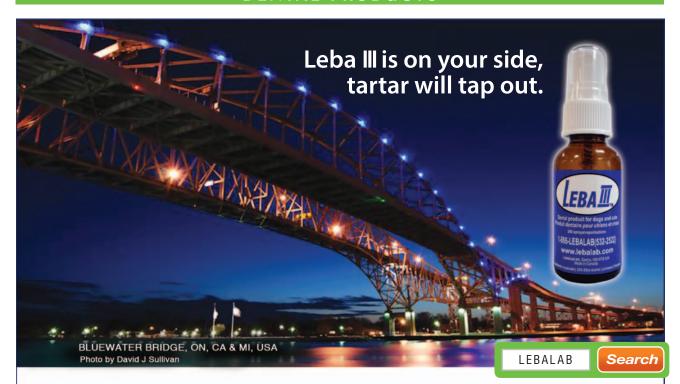
Starting your own charitable organization can be a daunting task, but by nurturing partnerships and making connections, you can create a program in your own community to bring together needy pets and their people with the services that will enrich their lives and strengthen their bond.



Julie Carlson is a freelance author and a credentialed veterinary technician. She is the winner of the 2015 Hero Veterinary Technician Award from the American Humane Association and the Founder of Vets for Vets' Pets, a nonprofit organization providing supplies and medical care to the pets of home-

less and at-risk veterans. Julie has five cats, two Chihuahuas and one fish and lives in Phoenix, Arizona.

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After



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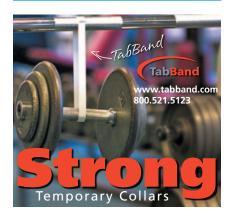


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Firstline (Print ISSN: 1095-0613, Digital ISSN: 2150-6574) is published monthly by UBM Life Sciences, 131 W. First St., Duluth, MN 55802-2066. Subscription rates: one year \$21.00, two years \$36.50 in the United States & Possessions; \$31.50 for one year, \$57.00 for two years in Carada and Mexico, all other countries. Periodicals Postage Paid at Duluth, MN and additional mailing offices. POSTIMASTER. Please send address changes to Firstline, P.O. Box 6086, Duluth, NN 55806-6086. Canadian G.S.T. number: R-14213133RT001. PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 40612608. Return Undeliverable Canadian Addresses to: IMEX Global Solutions, P.O. Box 25542, London, ON NC 682, CANADA. Printed in the U.S.A. © 2016 Advanstar Communication Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical including by photocopy, recording, or information storage and retrieval without permission in writing from the publisher Authorization to photocopy items for internal/educational or personal use, or the internal/educational or personal use of specific clients is granted by Advanstar Communication Inc. for libraries and other users registered with the Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Reservood 100. Danvers, MA 01923, 978-750-80400 ras 978-646-7500 or wish thirty-hywoxcopyright. Dune For uses beyond those listed above, please direct your written request the Permission Dept. Ear 440-756-55505 or mail: mannon@advanstars.com.
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Top 5 tips

for teething puppies

Teething is a tricky time for pet owners. You can help clients by serving up these simple suggestions to keep puppies properly occupied—and out of the shoe closet!

By Patricia March, RVT, VTS (Dentistry)

Offer frozen mini bagels, plain or fruit variety, not onion. Allowing them to chew, and eventually consume, the bagels helps to numb the gingiva, easing discomfort. The denseness of the bagel may actually help to remove loose baby teeth.





Cold carrots may help relieve discomfort—and they offer vitamins and minerals. Just don't offer more than one whole carrot a day, because of its high fiber content.

Try frozen fruit, such as strawberries or bits of banana. The "cold pack" may help relieve oral discomfort and the fruit is edible, although it might get a little messy.





Wet a dishrag or towel, twist it into a rope-like shape and freeze. The cold helps relieve oral discomfort, and the chewiness of the towel helps encourage proper biting behavior.

More tips

Find more teething dos and dont's at dvm360.com/ puppyteething.

Offer puppy-specific toys, such as a Chilly Bone or Kong. These can also be frozen.



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