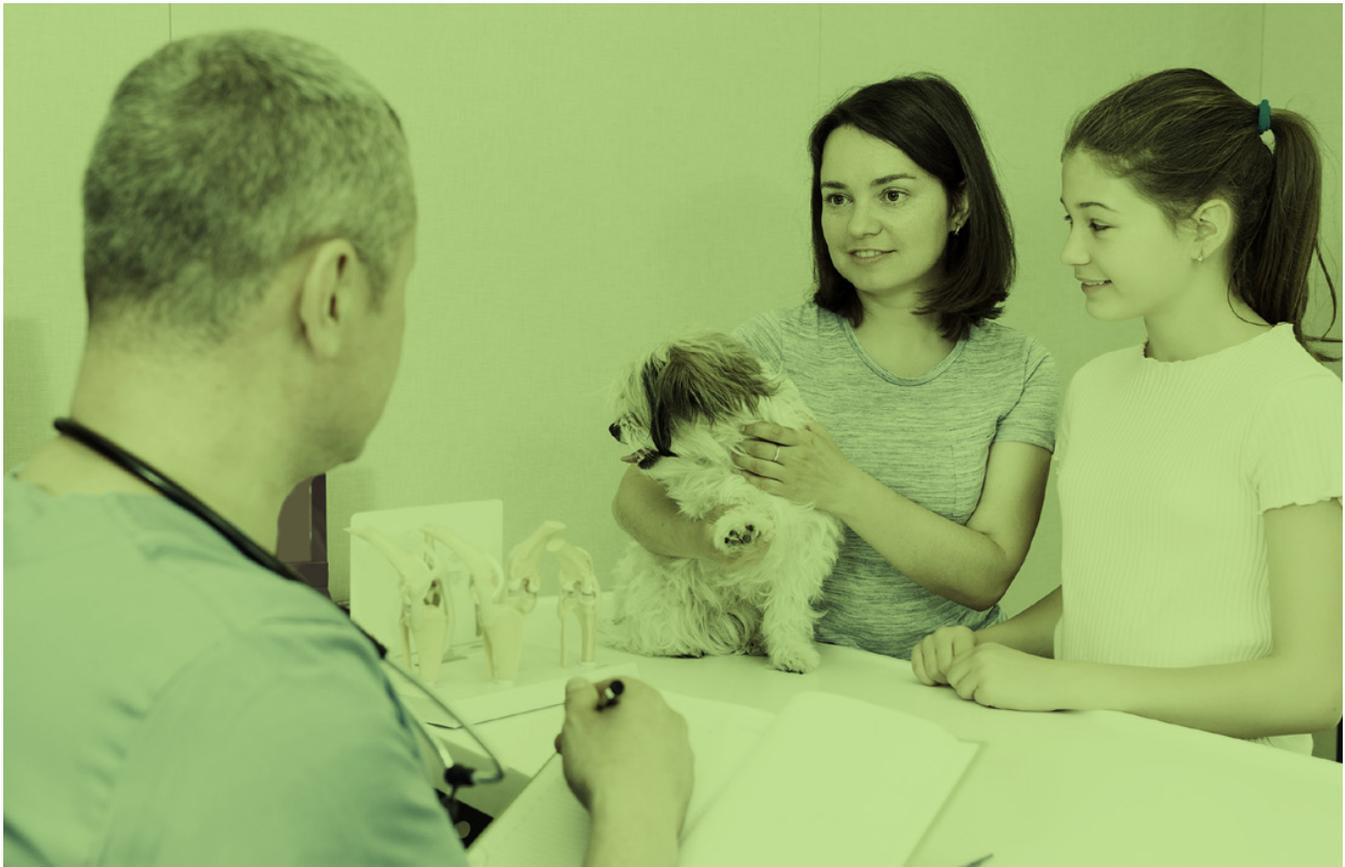


# 10 Recommendations Clients Want Veterinarians to Make

Article by Roxanne Hawn



Veterinary client compliance studies completed and published by the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) in 2003 and again in 2009 found significant recommendation gaps between veterinarians and clients. Even in scenarios where a veterinary medical recommendation was warranted, such as dental disease of grade 2 or higher, many clients were not receiving recommendations.

Here are 10 other recommendations your clients probably want you to make. Depending on your practice's mission, as well as your community's demographics, you may not need to be prepared to offer your expert opinions for all 10. Still, it may be worth discussing as a team which recommendations you want to make.

Once you've selected your highest-priority topics, then assign a team member to research possible recommendations—if you don't already know what you want to suggest.

## 1. Pet food

Consider assembling lists of at least five dog and cat foods you like for each life stage. There is a lot of hype and misinformation in pet food marketing. Clients can use your expert insights on how to recognize the science of good nutrition versus buzzwords that sound good but don't mean much.

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Clients also need your help knowing when pet food trends might be dangerous. For example, in mid-July 2018, the FDA announced that its "investigating the potential association between reports of canine dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM) in dogs and certain pet foods the animals consumed, containing peas, lentils, other legume seeds or potatoes as main ingredients."

## 2. Nutritional supplements

If you make recommendations for nutritional supplements, either as a broad wellness topic or in certain clinical situations, be specific:

- Active ingredients
- Brand names
- Dosages and frequencies (based on the case and the pet's size)

Don't just say, "I recommend fish oil for Fido." Instead say, "I recommend you add [dose] of Brand A fish oil to all of Fido's meals. With Brand A, that's [# of capsules] twice a day with meals for a dog Fido's size."

## 3. Even more specialists

You already refer cases to cardiologists, oncologists, ophthalmologists, neurologists and others as cases dictate. Clients, however, may also be interested in recommendations to rehabilitation or physical-therapy-like services or to providers of chiropractic, acupuncture, and other modalities. In addition, be sure your clients know which ERs or urgent care facilities you recommend.

## 4. Pet training strategies and tools

It's important that practice teams understand the latest science of pet training. A lot of lingo gets tossed around to

mask or spin certain training theories and methods to make them sound better. Take the time to sort through all of that and provide clients a curated list of recommended training books, resources and tools.

As an example, I decided recently to try a belted leash so that my hands are free on hikes with my dogs. I did ask on social media which ones my friends use, but I ultimately went with one recommended by the late Dr. Sophia Yin in her book *Perfect Puppy in 7 Days*. A friend recommended the same one, but it was a good reminder to stick with recommendations from trusted veterinary experts.

## 5. Pet trainers and training services

While clients certainly can do a lot of DIY pet training at home, training classes run by professional trainers can be a key part of wellness and retention—at any stage in a pet's life.

Compile a list of trainers of whose methods you approve for everything from puppy training on through competitive dog sports. Particularly for board-and-train options, be sure you know how the dogs are trained and kept during their stays.

A couple of organizations also now award "titles" for dogs doing tricks. Even if the pet (or the client) isn't particularly athletic, there are fun options to take dog training beyond things like sit, down and stay.

Also, there is a growing trend for so-called "adventure cats" who walk on leash, do tricks, go hiking and boating and many other activities. People like to joke about cats being homebody hermits, but the potential to give cats a much broader experience—with proper training for safety and fun—is bigger than many people think.

## 6. Groomers or DIY grooming

People want to know their pets will be well cared for and handled properly during grooming so, especially for breeds that require regular grooming care by a professional, be sure to have at least five grooming recommendations you can make confidently.

Other pets, though, just need a quick bath and brush, so scope out the DIY options in your community, or be ready with instructions on how best to bathe pets at home as needed.

Keep a list of shampoos, brushes and other grooming tools you recommend as well.

There is even a whole movement in dog training circles to teach “cooperative care,” meaning that dogs are specifically trained to tolerate (and even enjoy) grooming and even some types of veterinary care. For pets who really struggle with being handled, a specific recommendation for teaching cooperative care may be a good idea.

## 7. Daycares, boarding kennels and pet sitters

Know which kennels, sitters and walkers do a good job. Ask clients who they use to start building a list. You’ll still want to send a team member out to tour kennels in person and to invite individual providers to meet with you at the practice so that you can screen them for being a good match for you and your clients.

## 8. Pet exercise

With the increase in numbers of pets who are overweight and obese, making recommendations for pet exercise is more important than ever. The length, type and intensity of exercise will depend on the pet’s age and other factors.

Specific recommendations matter at both ends of the age spectrum. Some active clients may be eager to take young dogs on longer walks, runs or hikes than are best for a growing puppy.

## 9. Pet toys and enrichment products

Pet toys and enrichment products have exploded in growth in recent years. From activity feeders and interactive toys to all manner of fetch and tug options, there are so many

ways to make pets’ lives more fun and stimulating. It might be worth a trip to one of the huge annual pet expos every few years to see what’s new.

## 10. Pet tech products

Pet tech is another growing field. With apps and smartphone integrations and activity monitors and remote play and video options, people can go wild using tech to engage with and care for their pets.

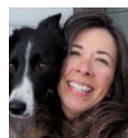
Some of the products may seem frivolous, but others may have lifesaving uses. Even if you aren’t particularly into tech yourself, think about which specific kinds of tech may be useful for specific pets.

As I’m writing this article, a border collie is missing in the huge wildland park near my rural home. She broke loose from her leash more than two weeks ago. I cannot help but think how much it would help if she had a GPS monitor on her collar so that we could track her movement and increase chances of her being at the right place at the right time for recovery.

## Your expert opinions matter

Yes, the primary role of veterinary teams is to recommend and provide medical services to pets. Fundamentally, though, veterinary teams are knowledge professionals who bring expertise and technical talents to the job of caring for pets.

Clients appreciate and value your input on all manner of pet-care topics. The demand for your input comes from both younger and newer pet owners as well as others who like to stay on the leading edge of pet care. Meet those needs, and you can encourage client loyalty and compliance on many fronts.



Roxanne Hawn is a professional writer and award-winning blogger based in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. A former writer/editor for the American Animal Hospital Association and the American Humane Association, she has written about veterinary medicine and pet topics for nearly 20 years. Her work has also appeared in The New York Times, Reader’s Digest, Natural Home, [Bankrate.com](http://Bankrate.com), WebMD, The Bark, Modern Dog, and many high-profile outlets. Her first book is called *Heart Dog: Surviving the Loss of Your Canine Soul Mate*.