

Common Pet Myths

Myths abound in the dog and cat world. Most of these ideas have been around so long that their origin is not known. Some myths are behavioral “can’t teach an old dog new tricks”. Some could lead to dangerous experiments on the household pet “cats always land on their feet”. In this article we will try to be veterinary myth busters and find the truth in the urban myth.

1) *Cats purr when they are happy.* While this is true, cats can also purr for other reasons. Stress and pain can cause cats to purr. Some animal behavioralists believe that purring is a self-soothing behavior.

2) *Dogs wag their tails when they are happy.* Tail wagging can actually mean three very different things. If a dog is wagging its tail but carrying the tail high and stiff this is often a sign of agitation or aggression. A tail held low and wagged very quickly is a sign of nervousness or submission. A happy dog will have a relaxed wag with the tail in a natural, mid-level position.

3) *Dogs only see in black and white.* Dogs actually see some color, not just black and white. They can see shades of blue, purple, and grey but cannot tell the difference between red, orange, yellow, or green. Veterinary ophthalmologists believe that dogs most likely see similarly to a person with red-green color blindness. Dogs see much better in low light than people and can pick up even the slightest movement.

4) *Cats always land on their feet.* While most cats enjoy being very flexible and agile, this is not always enough to allow them to land on their feet or to prevent injury from a fall. Cats instinctively will twist mid-air to get their feet under them, but sometimes they are not in the air long enough to right themselves. Even if cats land on their feet, falling can lead to broken legs, head trauma, chest trauma, and internal bleeding. This is common enough that the term “high-rise syndrome” has been used since the 1970’s to describe the typical injuries seen when cats fall from heights.

5) *Dry food is good for pet’s teeth.* This is not necessarily true. Most kibble is small enough that animals swallow it whole or so brittle that it fractures completely when crunched. This does not do anything to remove plaque or tartar from teeth. While canned food and gravy may stick more to teeth and provide a place for plaque to grow, most dry kibble does not actually remove plaque or tartar. The Veterinary Oral Health Council has a list of products that have proven to retard the growth of plaque and tartar (please see www.vohc.com). Of course even with a dental diet and daily brushing yearly dental exams and cleaning under anesthesia are recommended. (Just like people who need professional cleaning every 6 months). Nutrition plays a role in maintenance of health in all body systems. There is actually a good deal of controversy in veterinary medicine about diet choices, especially for cats. The choice between feeding a dry diet versus a canned diet for any pet is one that you should consider discussing with your veterinarian.

6) *Cats need milk.* – Cats may like the taste of milk, but adult cats do not require milk in their diet. Kittens are like other mammals and survive on their mother’s milk until they are weaned. Adult cats, however, do not have much lactase (the enzyme needed to digest milk). Feeding an adult cat milk often leads to diarrhea.

7) *Dog’s saliva helps wounds heal.* – We often hear that dogs lick wounds to help them heal. This is a myth as saliva has no healing properties. It does, however, contain bacteria which can lead to infection and inflammation. Dogs that lick excessively can develop lick granulomas – a chronic inflammatory

condition that can be difficult to treat. An E-collar is often the best solution to prevent licking and allow a wound or incision to heal.

Jason Kutz, DVM
Elk Meadow Animal Hospital

Jason Kutz owns and operates Elk Meadow Animal Hospital with his wife and fellow veterinarian Cristie Kutz. Please visit www.elkmeadowvet.com or call 303-674-7400 to schedule an appointment. Elk Meadow Animal Hospital offers complete small animal veterinary care for your pets. We provide general surgery, dentistry, medical workups and treatment, preventative care, rehabilitation and water treadmill therapy. Conveniently located next to King Soopers.