**How to keep your dog cool in the summer heat**

**By: Alyssa Musgrove**

Summer is in full swing, with temperatures well into the 90s most days. When the mercury rises, everyone needs to take precautions to stay hydrated and healthy. But it isn’t just humans who need to be careful in the heat. Our pets – especially dogs -- need to take care, too. Since it’s up to owners to help canines beat the heat, here are some tips to keep your dog safe and healthy this summer.

1. **If it’s too hot outside for you, then it’s way too hot for your dog.** When it’s heat wave-hot outside, the best place for your furry friend is exactly where you would want to be: at home in the air conditioning. For a dog, temperatures above 80 degrees Fahrenheit can be deadly. Jason Nicholas, veterinarian and chief medical officer at Preventive Vet, says once weather hits 80 degrees Fahrenheit, pet owners should start taking precautions. Nicholas says he’s seen far too many cases of dogs with heatstroke, a deadly, but completely preventable, condition.

While humans have the luxury of being covered in a [massive, perspiring organ](https://www.popsci.com/science/article/2011-01/fyi-how-much-can-human-body-sweat-it-runs-out) that cools us from head to toe, dogs' thick fur coats make it harder for them to get rid of heat. Instead of sweating, a dog lowers its body temperature through panting. These heavy, quick breaths expel heat and cause moisture to evaporate, which cools the blood in the mouth and tongue. However, certain conditions make this technique ineffective. In high humidity, evaporation happens more slowly. This means that even in a nice, shady refuge, no amount of panting will bring down a dog’s internal temperature.

Additionally, panting doesn't work as well for dogs with squashed noses, like pugs or Pekinese, who have a difficult time breathing as is and will struggle more in the heat. The same goes for elderly dogs or those with breathing conditions. Puppies are also at higher risk for heatstroke because they haven’t yet fully developed their ability to regulate their temperature.

**2. Never leave your dog in a hot car, not even for a moment.** Even with the car on and AC running, vets like Nicholas say it’s still not worth the risk. It doesn’t take long for temperatures in an enclosed car to reach deadly levels, and a dark dashboard or seat can spike up to a [sweltering 200 degrees Fahrenheit](https://www.popsci.com/keep-car-cool#page-4).

**3. Avoid walking at peak times.** Go for walks in the early mornings and evenings when the air is a little cooler. While you're out, keep walks short and bring water along to keep your dog hydrated.

**4. Choose the right muzzle.** If your dog needs to wear a muzzle on walks, make sure he is still able to pant. When a dog’s jaw is cinched together and he is unable to open his mouth on a hot day, he can’t release the heat. A basket muzzle or a rubberized muzzle can still allow the dog to pant but prevents him from biting.

**5. Don’t forget the paws.** With scorching sun comes scorching sidewalks. Nicholas says dog booties, preferably with rubber soles, can protect paws from burning. If your dog insists on going barefoot, avoid blacktop and cement, walk on grass and seek out shade when you can. Nicholas also says to avoid sunny beaches. We’ve all experienced the shock of stepping barefoot onto hot sand. Even a dog’s resilient paw pads are no match for that burn.

**6. Stay cool with a vest.** Consider investing in a cooling vest. These wet vests can be wrapped around your dog to help facilitate evaporation and keep him cool.

**7. Skip the haircut.** If you have a shaggy pet like a [Chow Chow](https://www.akc.org/dog-breeds/chow-chow/) or [sheepdog](https://www.akc.org/dog-breeds/old-english-sheepdog/), your first instinct might be to shave those oppressive locks for summer. But fur isn’t only for keeping animals warm in the winter. In fact, it serves the opposite purpose in warm months, both cooling and protecting skin. When summer arrives, dogs shed their winter undercoats but retain a top coat. This lighter layer of hair insulates heat, keeping it away from the body. Plus, when dogs sprint, the thin topcoat flaps up and down like a million little fans to air out the hot skin beneath. To help along this summer coat, Nicholas recommends brushing. "Brushing your dog helps get rid of the undercoat they’re losing," he says, "that will be trapping more heat than necessary.”

A dog's summer coat also protects against the sun's harmful UV radiation. “I don’t recommend shaving because it can increase risk for sunburn and skin cancer,” Nicholas says. If you've already shaved your dog, or you own a mutt with a bare butt like a [Chinese crested](https://www.akc.org/dog-breeds/chinese-crested/), you can still protect its skin with [Epi-Pet](http://www.epi-pet.com), an FDA-approved canine sunscreen. For light-skinned dogs, apply the same sun protection to exposed areas like noses, bare bellies, and tips of ears.

**8. Know the signs of heat stroke.** When the weather is particularly hot, it's important to keep an eye on your dog's behavior. Pay particular attention to the following symptoms of heat stroke in animals:

* excessive or exaggerated panting
* thick saliva
* dark red gums
* swollen tongue
* rapid heartbeat
* lethargy
* heavy drooling
* fever
* vomiting
* collapse
* seizures

If your dog is displaying any of these signs, take him immediately to the vet. Heat stroke kills quickly. Even waiting a few minutes could lead to permanent organ damage or death.

*Pathways to Healing specializes in holistic chiropractic care. Dr. Alyssa Musgrove draws on a variety of techniques, including chiropractic, kinesiology, nutrition, food allergy testing and lifestyle counseling to assist clients in achieving optimal health and wellness in one setting. In addition, the practice is committed to being a valuable source of information so that people can learn how to live a healthy lifestyle and prevent future illness. Pathways to Healing is located at 1022 Founders Row, Lake Oconee Village, Greensboro. The office can be reached at 706-454-2040.*