

## Common Pet Myths and Legends

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Although pet owners are becoming more and more educated about their pets' health care, many still believe some of the common myths that veterinarians have been trying to debunk for years.

Following are some of those myths and facts:

**MYTH: If cats or dogs drink milk, they can get worms.**

FACT: Cats and dogs do not get worms from drinking milk any more than you do! But they often will get diarrhea if they drink milk because many of them lose lactase, an enzyme essential to the digestion of milk, around the age of six to eight weeks. Young animals often are infested with worms because of direct contamination by their mother during pregnancy or thorough maternal milk. This is why it's important to treat both future mothers and their litters for worms.

**MYTH: Mix-breeding a female dog will alter or terminate her ability to give birth to purebred babies in subsequent litters.**

FACT: Only the litter born from the mix-breeding will not be purebred. Every time a purebred animal is bred with a purebred mate of the same breed, the litter is purebred.

**MYTH: Dogs that scoot their anal areas on the ground have worms.**

FACT: While dogs infected with tapeworms may scoot on the ground, most such pets have overly full or inflamed anal sacs. Anal sacs are structures located near the dog's anus that produce a foul scent. Sometimes the ducts of these sacs close up causing a buildup of material that causes itching and burning. In an attempt to relieve this discomfort, the dog scoots its anal area along the ground.

**MYTH: My dog can not be in pain because he doesn't cry or whimper.**

FACT: Dogs feel pain just like you and I do. A large number of dogs are quite stoical about their pain because in the wild if a dog cried in pain, he would be shunned by the pack or killed for his weakness. This behaviour is so ingrained in our pets that we sometimes forgot how painful some of these conditions can be. Human beings who suffer from arthritis or have surgery take pain medication and have physiotherapy to help them recover. Our pets need the same consideration.

**MYTH: Before being spayed, dogs and cats should have a litter or at least one heat cycle.**

FACT: Pets do not need to experience a heat cycle before being spayed. In fact, one of the major medical benefits of spaying may be lost. Research has shown the pets spayed prior to their first heat cycle have significant protection against the formation of breast tumors. Therefore, wanting to spay your pet until after she has undergone one or more heats may be a poor decision and may result in unwanted pregnancy.

**MYTH: If a medication is all natural or homeopathic, it must be safe enough for my pet.**

FACT: With the growing trend of people to turn to less traditional types of treatment for both themselves and their pets, it becomes important to realize that natural treatments should be treated identical to traditional-type prescriptions. Herbal and natural remedies have the same concerns that regular medications have; they can become toxic if given at incorrect doses, given to a particular species which cannot tolerate the medication, or given along with another medication with which it may cause reactions. Pet owners should always check with their

veterinarian before adding **any** type of medication to their pet's regular diet, even if the product claims to be safe and non-toxic.

And finally, my personal favourite...

**MYTH: It must be true, I found in on the Internet!"**

FACT: The availability of information on the Internet has brought about countless advantages for the general public. With a few keystrokes, a veterinarian can look through online databases for further information about a patient's disease; many veterinary schools and associations offer access (some free, some via subscriptions) to journal articles and other reliable sources. Trustworthy information can be gathered that can aid in making diagnostic recommendations and decisions about even the rarest of diseases.

Now consider the average pet owner attempting to gather information on the diagnosis given to them about their beloved pet. A pet owner may research "heartworm disease" and find a hundred sites mentioning it; however, people describing their own experiences or beliefs with the disease may have written many of them--without any medical or scientific basis. How can someone determine if the material contained in the site is accurate? On a website written privately, there is no guarantee. On a website supported by a "reliable" source--a college library, a well-known company (i.e., Hill's Pet Nutrition), or a well-known association (i.e., Ontario Veterinary Medical Association)--it is likely that information obtained can be trusted. If as a pet owner you choose to use the internet to investigate information for your pet, search carefully and be sure to check with your veterinarian before making any changes to your pet's diet or treatment plan.