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Think you can't teach old dogs new tricks? Think again.

Don't Believe These Animal Myths!

By Sarah Wilson and Brian Kilcommons

Published: August 20, 2006

Dogs have been our close companions for at least 12,000 years, cats for 8,000. They warm our feet, guard our homes and love us unconditionally. But, as with all long-term relationships, misunderstandings are bound to crop up. And the animals can't correct us! It's about time we debunked some of the most persistent beliefs that owners mistakenly hold about their pets.

Cats always land safely on their feet.

Cats are naturally flexible and have an amazing ability to right their bodies. But that doesn't necessarily protect them from harm. "Cats can break their front legs and jaw when they land on their feet," reports Dr. Ann Hohenhaus of New York's Animal Medical Center. Urban vets often see kitties who've fallen from high-rises. Oddly, they can survive falls of less than five stories and sometimes more than nine. The drops in between are most lethal.

Dogs and cats require annual revaccinations.

Although exact protocols are still debated, it is now known that certain vaccines, such as distemper and rabies, don't need to be given yearly after initial doses and boosters. Check with your vet—and don't just go for the shots. Pets age faster than we do. Regular visits allow for early detection of problems.

Pets can be spiteful.

Pets can become stressed when left alone and may seek comfort by finding a "scent picture" of you in your favorite chair or shoes—anything that smells like you. They also may express their stress by chewing or leaving a puddle. But that doesn't mean they did it with a "this will teach my human a lesson!" intent. It's unlikely that dogs and cats are even capable of such thought patterns.

Old dogs can't learn new tricks.

Tell that to Kaiser, a 10-year-old German shepherd who was recently adopted. His white muzzle and wobbly hind legs haven't stopped him from learning to sit, come or go to bed on command. Though his body may be slow, his mind is more than willing to learn anything that makes his new owner happy. Says Aimee Sadler, training and behavior coordinator at the Longmont (Colo.) Humane Society: "I am amazed by the progress older animals can make with the right person."

Neutering makes cats and dogs fat and lazy.

Not so. "It's not neutering but eating too much that makes animals overweight," says Dr. Thomas Carpenter, president-elect of the American Animal Hospital Association. Neutering your pets protects them from medical problems such as testicular and mammary cancers and uterine infections. And laziness? The dogs that routinely protect our borders are neutered. If you want to call them lazy, do it from a few feet back.

Dogs "know" when they've been bad.

You come home to find your trash can overturned, bits of tinfoil strewn across the kitchen. Your dog looks "guilty"—head low, tail tucked. What he is telling you is he knows when you're upset. It's not proof that he understood at the time that raiding was "wrong." Dogs live in the moment. Want to keep your dog out of your garbage? Put away the trash can. Prevention really works!

Low-shed breeds of dogs and cats are "safe" for people with allergies.

Not quite. For most people, it's the dander and saliva, not the fur, that trigger an allergic response. Some breeds of dog or cat may cause a bigger or smaller reaction in certain people, but no breed is universally "hypoallergenic." Pet lovers can minimize reactions by keeping animals out of their bedroom, regular grooming (by someone else), vacuuming with a hepa-filter and following their doctor's advice.

Cats can steal a baby's breath.

This old wives' tale goes back centuries and likely influenced an English court case from 1791, in which a cat was blamed for a baby's death. Some fear that a jealous or neglected cat could smother a newborn. Fact: There isn't one credible case on record. Superstitions connecting cats to witchcraft have given felines a bad rap they simply can't shed!

Some dogs have jaws that lock.

This myth probably got started because certain dogs—pit bulls, for example—will grab and hold on with their mouths. Because the dogs are slower to release, people may have assumed that the jaws are physically locked in place. Here's the truth: All dogs have the same facial musculature and structure; none has locking jaws. And all dogs can be taught to be gentle and to release everything from toys to trash on command.

Sarah Wilson and Brian Kilcommons are animal trainers and the authors of several best-selling books, including "Tails From the Barkside."

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*** WARNING: Cats CAN steal a baby's breath! ***

By JTShim on 8/20/2006 11:22:PM

According to the Michael S. Kearney, MB, MRCPATH, consultant pathologist, Lauritz B. Dahl, MD, consultant paediatrician, and Helge Stalsberg, MD professor of pathology, Department of Pathology and Paediatrics, University Hospital, Tromso, Norway, in "Can a cat smother and kill a baby?" British Medical Journal, Vol 285, 18 September 1982, p. 777--there are at least two (2) credible cases on record. While this is an infinitesimal number compared to the 100 billion people estimated to have been born since the beginning of earth's time, it certainly contradicts "there isn't one credible case on record." p. 12.

pet myths

By marlac110@yahoo.com on 8/20/2006 12:33:PM

This has to be the stupidest thing that has ever been in print! Have you never had a dog????? Believe me, there is a spite factor and if you do not think so, get a DOG! Preferably, a fox terrier. Okay, you leave the dog home alone and it ****es or ****s on only one side of the bed. Come On. It couldn't be the dog expressing distaste for one owner? Please do not write anymore articles unless you have researched the subject.

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