**Introduction:**

Hello! This is Dr Brenninkmeyer. Congratulations on your new guide dog and welcome to this talk on veterinary care. I hope to spend the next few minutes going over some things you may encounter related to your dog’s health.

The first thing I want to cover is how to find a vet in your area. If you have not had a guide or pets in the past, I recommend checking with other graduates close by or using the graduate list serve. It is helpful, but not essential to have a veterinarian familiar with working dogs. If there are no other guide dog users in your community, you may want to consult friends or neighbors for recommendations. Having a veterinarian who listens to your concerns, has an upstanding reputation for good medical care, and has a good rapport with you and your dog is of utmost importance.

Aside from finding a vet for routine care, we encourage you to have an emergency plan for afterhours urgent care needs. Please ask if your veterinarian provides emergency services, and if not, where they refer emergencies locally. You should have the number readily available as well as a plan for transport should an emergency arise.

Different vets have quite different fee structures, and you may want to ask if they offer discounts to working guides. We find that discounts vary, but it is certainly worthwhile to inquire.

**What is normal?**

We encourage you to spend the next few months becoming acquainted with and learning what is normal for your dog. This will help you to readily recognize what is abnormal if your dog shows signs of illness or changes in health status. For example, we recommend that you regularly groom and massage your dog to feel for any lumps or bumps. You can place your hands on your dog’s chest and get a general idea of their normal rate of breathing and approximate heart rate at rest. This regular massage and interaction can also help you detect changes in weight before it becomes problematic.

Your guide dog has a small microchip the size of a grain of rice under their skin between the shoulder blades.  All dogs born after January of 2017 have a Home Again internationally recognizable microchip. This microchip is a permanent way to identify your dog.  Veterinary hospitals and shelters are equipped with scanners that “read” the unique number that each chip has.  The person with the scanner can call a 24-hour toll-free number, and Guiding Eyes is contacted by the company. We will in turn try to reach you to reunite you with your dog. It is important that you keep your contact information up to date with us so that we can reach you. If you would like to change the contact information after a transfer of title, you will need to call the Guiding Eyes Client Experience Team as a change can only be made by Guiding Eyes. You are welcome to leave the chip registered with GEB, as we have staff on call who will do everything, we can be sure your guide is cared for until you can be contacted.

**Wellness Care**

We recommend that you have an annual exam with your veterinarian. Dogs graduating from Guiding Eyes are current on all their vaccines and will leave with a certificate stating the most recent vaccine dates and when the next are due. DHPP (Distemper, Hepatitis, Parvo, Parainfluenza) and Rabies should be given every three years unless local law dictates otherwise. Vaccines given yearly to be effective include Lyme (spread by ticks), Leptospirosis (spread by consumption of affected water), Bordetella (kennel cough), and Influenza (canine flu).

As part of your guide’s annual physical, your vet may take a small blood sample to check for heartworm disease. Heartworm disease is spread by mosquitoes and can be fatal, but it is easily prevented by faithful administration of a monthly oral heartworm preventative. Another important function of monthly heartworm preventative is protection against intestinal parasites such as whipworms, hookworms, and roundworms. There are many different options for heartworm and intestinal parasite prevention at various price points. We ask that you discuss your needs with your veterinarian to decide which product will work best for you, your dog and your lifestyle. Preventatives should be administered year-round. This helps protect from mosquito hatches in unexpected warm snaps, as well as for travel to warmer environments. It is essential that your dog be free of intestinal parasites for your dog’s health, your own health and for the protection of others as your dog works through public places.

The next thing I want to talk to you about is protection from fleas and ticks. There are different types of flea/tick preventative that are on the market under many different names and brands. There are oral (pill) type medications and topical liquid medications. Flea/tick prevention, like heartworm prevention, should be given all year due to fluctuations in temperatures in all regions resulting in fleas and ticks being found even in the coldest winter months.

Topical product is applied by parting the hair and applying it to the dog’s skin. Various products are applied in different areas- for example, some are applied in a line down the back from the shoulder blades to the rump, and others are applied between the shoulder blades. It is important to follow the application instructions for the product you choose. Because topical products can be harmful to cats, we recommend applying them at night and keeping cats separated until the next morning when the liquid has completely dried.

Oral flea/tick prevention comes in the form of a flavored tablet or chew, and like other preventatives it is given once a month. There is also currently an oral flea/tick product that can be given every three months. Heartworm prevention can be given at the same time as flea/tick prevention, and there are even some pills that combine them as an all-in-one product. All oral preventatives should be given with your pet’s meal as they have a higher efficacy if given with food. You will receive a complimentary 12-month supply of prevention before going home. When you return home, you should collaborate with your veterinarian to determine what kind of flea/tick prevention may work best for you and your dog based on your region and lifestyle. We do ask that you obtain these products through your vet office or by their prescription to make sure that products are safe for your dog.

**Routine Maintenance:**

All your dogs’ teeth have been assessed and cleaned if needed prior to you meeting them. During future visits with your chosen vet, they will assess tartar build up and general oral health as part of the physical exam. We suggest brushing your dog’s teeth with a toothpaste formulated for dogs at least twice a week to help limit tartar build-up, but every day is ideal if you can. If your vet feels that there is excessive tartar build-up, he or she will recommend a dental cleaning be performed under light sedation or anesthesia. You may use your Graduate Assistance Fund for a dental cleaning. If your dog tends to build tartar quickly, you can also talk to your vet about dental products to help prevent tartar build up. Dental disease can be uncomfortable for dogs, and dental procedures are quite costly so the best thing to do is keep up with routine brushing. If you need tips on brushing beyond your instruction in class, please reach out to your instructors or the veterinary staff.

To maintain your dogs’ ears please use a tissue to gently wipe the outer canal and check for waxy debris or odor. If there is no buildup, you may not need to routinely use an ear cleaner to clean your dog’s ears. If ear cleaning is needed, please put a small amount of ear cleaner (for dogs) into the canal, massage the canal and then wipe out any excess. After swimming and bathing, it is helpful to use a cleaner with a drying agent so that your dog does not have a moist environment in the canal and predispose him or her to infection.

When choosing dog food, stick with major brands such as Hills, Iams, Purina, Eukanuba, and Royal Canin. Most of your dogs have been eating Science Diet Food unless a particular circumstance required an exception. If you choose to switch dog foods, it is important you do it slowly over several days. You should use the small bag you will be sent home with to mix with whatever brand of food you choose. Add in ¼ cup more of the new food each day while subtracting the same amount from the previous food until the switchover is complete. Weigh your dog within 4 weeks to see if there has been any significant weight change. If your dog has gained more than two pounds, decrease the amount fed by ¼ cup per day. If they have lost weight, increase the amount fed by ¼ cup and reweigh again within a month.

It is important to maintain the proper weight. Obesity is the #1 reason for early retirement and health problems. Your dog is finished growing, so stay within three pounds of the target weight that we have set here. Please give no treats except for training purposes. You can take a small handful of your dog’s kibble out of the bowl in the morning before feeding to fill your treat pouch. Studies have shown that even being moderately overweight can decrease lifespan. Obese dogs have an increased chance of:

* + Cancer
  + Diabetes
  + Heart disease
  + Early arthritis and faster degeneration of affected joints
  + Anesthetic complications
  + Heat and exercise intolerance

If your dog’s weight is increasing by a few pounds, we would ask that you cut back on the food amount and increase exercise. If your dog is more than 8 pounds over target, you may need to start a prescription weight reduction diet. These can be costly, so it is always better to avoid weight gain in the first place. If you are struggling with your dog’s weight, we do ask that you contact us for assistance.

While in class, you have been offering your dogs a limited amount of water at specific times during the day – 2 cups, four times a day. At home, most dogs will do fine if you just leave a fresh bowl of water down during the day. However, if your dog likes to drink a lot and you know you will be traveling, you can limit their water intake to lesser amounts until you arrive at your destination. Some dogs are not able to self-regulate their own water and may require a more structured schedule of drinking and eliminating. Remember that your dog will need to drink more in hot weather or after strenuous exercise.

For chew toys, we recommend firm rubber toys such as Kong toys. Although benebones and nylabones can be given in moderation they do sometimes come with a risk of fracturing teeth. When the nylabone becomes small enough that it could be swallowed whole please make sure to swap out for a new one to avoid the risk of obstruction. Do not give your dog rawhides, pig ears, cow hooves, or bones from the butcher or the table. These can get stuck in the dog’s stomach or intestines and cause vomiting or diarrhea. There is also a risk of splintering and intestinal perforation. Rope and stuffed toys can also cause blockages if ingested whole or partially, so we ask that you offer them only with supervision (if at all).

Maintaining healthy joints is particularly important for a guide dog. Your veterinarian may recommend joint supplements, and this may be age dependent or not. Two joint supplements used by many veterinarians are Dasuquin and Cosequin from Nutramax Laboratories.  Both support cartilage production, protect cartilage from breaking down, and are well-tolerated. Dogs can remain on these long-term.

Nutramax Laboratories has kindly offered to provide Dasuquin or Cosequin free of charge to any working guide dog from Guiding Eyes for the Blind.  To receive Dasuquin or Cosequin, your veterinarian must call Nutramax Laboratories at 803-313-4041 (9-5 Mon-Fri) and provide some basic info about your dog.  Guiding Eyes will then be contacted to confirm that your dog is an active guide from our school.  Once that has been done, one bottle of Dasuquin or Cosequin will be shipped directly to you or to your veterinary clinic. Please note that you should not call Nutramax directly about this offer - only your dog’s veterinarian can call. This is also available to guides in Canada.

**Illness**

Diarrhea has many causes including bacteria, viruses, food sensitivity, eating human food, and scavenging. If your dog is fine otherwise, diarrhea can usually be treated at home. If your dog is feverish or tired, visit your vet. For home treatment, first skip the next meal. Then feed small amounts (1/2 a cup at a time) of a bland diet 4 to 5 times a day until the diarrhea resolves. Once your dog has had normal stool for 48 hours, the regular diet can be mixed in gradually with the bland diet. For a bland diet, you can purchase a small bag of prescription food from your vet, or you can make a bland diet at home. When making a diet at home, cook plain white rice or boiled potatoes and combine it with boneless chicken breast without the skin, and/or ground beef. Once cooked, drain the water and fat away. Begin with small amounts of rice as tolerated, and then add in the chicken or beef. Do not add anything else to this diet. Water can be given with no restriction. If your dog’s diarrhea worsens or does not improve within 2 days, see your local vet as your dog may require medication for resolution.

The same process should be followed with vomiting of short duration in an otherwise normal dog. After the vomiting has ceased for at least three hours, begin by offering small amounts of water (1/2 cup at a time) every two hours. If there is no additional vomiting after 6 hours, you may begin with the bland diet as discussed above.

Cause for concern would be repeated vomiting or diarrhea, the presence of significant blood in the vomit or stool, lethargy and/or fever as well as being nonresponsive to bland diet by day two of treatment. Under these circumstances you should contact your local vet.

Other common issues that warrant scheduling veterinary evaluation include:

* Ear infections- often present with head shaking, scratching or smelly debris.
* Frequent or inappropriate urination
* Limping
* Scooting
* Open wounds

If treatment is prescribed, it is important to discuss with your veterinarian if medications used may impact your guide’s ability to work safely.

Occasionally dogs may need to be seen on a more urgent or emergent basis. We recommend that you call to make sure your vet is open, and if not seek out care at your closest Emergency Veterinary Center. Check first that they can accept your guide as a patient before heading out.

Some examples of urgent or emergent concerns are:

* Trauma from an accident
* Swelling of the eyes/face or difficulty breathing
* Unconsciousness or collapse
* Violent intractable diarrhea or vomiting puts your dog at risk of dehydration.
* Non weight bearing lameness or pain
* Suspected poison or toxin ingestion, some of the most concerning for dogs being:
  + - **Over the counter or prescription medications** many of which are dangerous.
    - **Xylitol candies and gum** can cause hypoglycemia, liver failure, and seizures.
    - **Batteries**are toxic and can lead to ulcers in the mouth, esophagus, and stomach.
    - **Chocolate**can cause seizures and death. Darker chocolate is more toxic than milk or white chocolate. Even cocoa bean mulch, when eaten in large enough quantities, can be a problem.
    - **Rat and mouse poison** can cause dire coagulations issues.
    - **Ethylene glycol**is found in antifreeze, windshield de-icing agents, and motor oils. Animals are attracted to its sweet taste, and even a small amount can cause kidney failure.
    - **Grapes**, **raisins, and currants** in any amount can cause kidney failure.
    - **Household cleaners**, such as bleach, drain cleaners, ammonia, and toilet bowl cleaners, can cause gastrointestinal ulcers and other problems.
    - **Marijuana-** Signs of marijuana poisoning in dogs and cats include glassy-eyes, stumbling/incoordination, dilated pupils, vomiting, and occasionally agitation. Urinary incontinence/dribbling is also quite common. Serious effects include changes in heart rate, coma, tremors, and seizures.

Time is of the essence in these situations, and it is important that you have the numbers for pet poison control and your emergency vet contact in the event of suspected toxin ingestion.

The ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center is your best resource for any animal poison-related emergency, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. **If you think your pet may have ingested a potentially poisonous substance, call (888) 426-4435.** A consultation fee may apply.

**Funding**

Guiding Eyes has an annual fund which to help you pay for veterinary care for your dog called the Graduate Assistance Fund. This fund provides $600 each calendar year. A letter in your go home materials explain the fund to your vet and asks them to bill us directly for up to the eligible amount each year. You should provide your vet with this form. If your vet requires payment at the time of service, we will reimburse you if you send us a copy of the invoices marked “paid.” Please keep track of the balance in your graduate assistance fund. If you need to check the balance at any time you can contact Client Services or the vet hospital. This fund can be used toward pet insurance if you elect to research the many options and levels of coverage available and move forward with a plan.

Another fund that is available for your working guide dog is called the Hockmeyer Fund. If your dog ever requires a referral to a veterinary specialist for diagnosis and treatment of a condition, this fund can help pay for the visit(s) so long as there is a good prognosis for your dog to be able to return to full working condition afterwards. To qualify, **you must be referred to a specialist by us or by your regular vet.** If your regular vet refers you, **you MUST contact one of the Guiding Eyes veterinarians to discuss the referral BEFORE visiting the specialist to get approval**. If you wish to use GEB funds we can be reached the next business day to review and consider for approval.

There is also a single use fund called the Gootter fund. This fund is like the Hockmeyer fund in that **you must contact Guiding Eyes first for approval, and your dog must be able to return to work after veterinary care.** There is currently a $1500 limit on this funding, and it can only be used once during the working life of the dog.

**Staying Connected with GEB Vet Staff**

I want to wish you a long and happy working life with your dog. Your local veterinarian should become your main contact for routine care and illness, but we are always happy to hear from you if you need anything further. You may have times where you have questions about your dog’s history or need further direction. You can feel free to reach out by calling the main number and asking to be connected with one of our veterinarians.

On a yearly basis, you will receive a health survey. We ask that you fill this out to help us keep track of any health concerns so that we can update our medical records and share the information with genetics. Reporting any significant conditions diagnosed is an immense help to us and aids us in shaping our breeding program to eliminate heritable conditions.

We would love to hear from you any time, so please stay connected!

In good health,

Dr. B and the Guiding Eyes Veterinary Team

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