petfirst veterinary

February 2026

Paws-pectives

SIMPLE & FUN ENRICHMENT
for your dog's best life

Plus: Agility talk with calendar stars OutwestK9s

Cover photo: OutwestK9s by Brya Ingram

Top tips for medicating your fur friend with ease!

Keeping up *sparkling* dental habits in 2026

Check in on your pet's dental homecare routine – or get back on track with some simple tips.

WIN A $100 Prezzy Card!*

More info on page 7.

It's time to check in on your fur friend's oral health

Back in August and September, we shared some toothy tips and tricks to keep your fur friend smiling. We talked about the importance of regular FREE dental checks to head off issues before they arise and the difference that homecare - even the smallest actions - can make to your pet's health and wellbeing.

How are you getting along with your fur friend? Is it time for another free and friendly check? Do you need some more homecare advice or ideas? Or perhaps you'd like a demonstration from your Petfirst nurse or to refresh your technique with a helpful video from our website.

1

Regular FREE dental checks will head off problems before they start.

click or scan here to book now!

2

Even small, regular actions at home can make a big difference!

Find out what you can do at home and get your teeth into video tutorials at mypetfirst.co.nz

click or scan here to see how!

Their best oral health is as easy as 1-2-3!

3

It starts with a clean slate.

How preventative cleaning can help your fur friend live their best life.

click or scan here to read more!

How to brush your pet's teeth

and other homecare options to suit your lifestyle

Daily is best, but research now shows that even brushing once a week helps to reduce plaque build-up and improve gum health. Use a pet-safe toothbrush and paste and take it slow to help this become a positive, regular habit that you both look forward to.

If your pet is new to brushing, get comfortable and start gradually, rubbing the sides of their face and mouth and gently lifting their lip to look at their teeth.

Pet toothpastes are safe for pets (human toothpastes aren't!) and come in flavours your fur friend will love! Let them taste the toothpaste on your finger so they learn that brushing is a positive (and delicious!) experience.

Introduce a finger brush - let them investigate with no pressure and taste more of that delicious toothpaste! Take it slow, if your fur friend is unsure, slow down or even go back a step so that they are comfortable and confident.

Lift the lip and brush teeth in a gentle circular motion, starting with just one or two teeth, allowing plenty of time for pats and praise. As your dog gets more comfortable, slowly introduce a larger brush if needed and finish with a dental treat!

More homecare options to suit every pet and pet parent

Ask your Petfirst Veterinary team for a personalised recommendation. The best dental care for your pet is achievable and fits in with your life together! Consider:

Dental diets
e.g. Royal Canin dental foods

Water additives
e.g. Aquadent

Dental chews and treats
e.g. Veggiedent, PlaqueOff

Find tips, tricks and videos at mypetfirst.co.nz

click or scan here

Simple enrichment to support your dog's best life

with Petra Hall and Chase Dargaville, Petfirst Veterinary

Is your dog getting into mischief, barking more than usual, or acting a bit 'meh'? Just like us, our dogs can get bored so new and unwanted behaviours may be your fur friend's way of saying they need more to do.

That's where enrichment comes in. Enrichment simple means adding safe, enjoyable stimulation and opportunities for activity into your dog's day, supporting their emotional wellbeing, mental wellbeing and behaviour.

Let's talk about five types of enrichment for your fur friend:

Meet someone new! - social enrichment

Give your dog chances to connect with the world around them. Think other dogs (when appropriate), different people and safe new experiences.

Try this! Calm playdates, a new walking buddy or a gentle 'meet and greet' in a low-stress environment.

Dogs with (part-time) jobs - occupational enrichment

Some dogs thrive when they have a "job", especially breeds with strong working instincts. Take a moment to explore what your dog was bred to do (or what they seem naturally drawn to), then consider activities that suit them that you can enjoy together. The goal isn't perfection — it's giving your dog an outlet that feels satisfying.

Try this! Agility, rally obedience, scentwork, or herding-style games. Check out our next article from Petfirst Veterinary 2026 calendar stars, the OutwestK9's Agility Team!

Physical enrichment

Like us, dogs like to see new things. Mix up your walks and let your dog explore different safe environments. Encourage natural movement such as stepping over logs, weaving around obstacles or walking up and down gentle slopes.

Try this! At home, you can create a mini obstacle course using cardboard boxes, rolled-up towels, and tarps — always keeping your dog's size, confidence, and safety in mind.

Nutritional enrichment

Turn mundane mealtimes into meaningful brain work by challenging your pet to sniff food out, solve problems or puzzles to access food or treats or 'work' for their food, delivering a slower but more satisfying meal.

Try this! Check our our range of food puzzles and slow-feeding bowls and other enrichment ideas or try DIY options like hiding food in a rolled-up towel or freezing bone broth for a longer-lasting treat.

Nutritional enrichment

Engage in a little mindfulness and stimulate your dog's different senses.

Try this! Tempt their taste buds with different treats, slow down your walk to allow for more sniffs or bring interesting smells home, see something new or sit and let the world go by, try some calming classical music (50-60bpm) or learn how to gently massage your dog or groom them with a soft brush or glove.

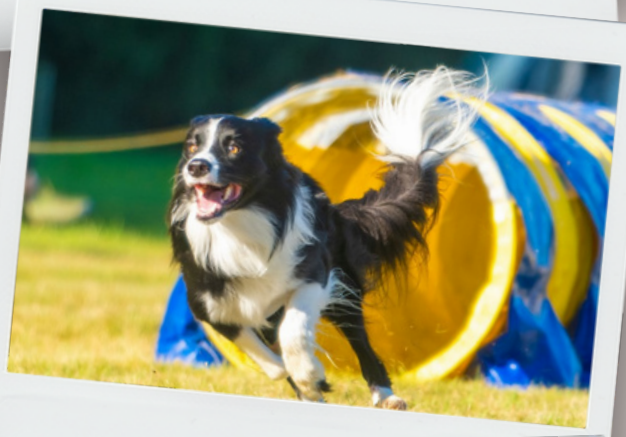
Providing enrichment is a balancing act: if the game is too easy, it is over quickly; if it is too difficult, frustration can build. Start easy, keep it positive and don't be afraid to try different things to find what works for your unique and special dog. Need ideas? Pop in and chat to your Petfirst Veterinary team!

Looking for ideas to keep your favourite feline friend healthy, happy and entertained? Click or scan the QR code to check out our previous article to find enriching activities for your cat too!

We chat with Petfirst Lincoln customer Shelley and her Petfirst calendar stars Spyro, Sonic and Bella!

Enriching competition

Agility for body and mind



Dog agility is a powerful form of enrichment that benefits both the mind and body. In New Zealand, many pet parents are discovering how navigating obstacles, learning cues, and solving problems provides meaningful mental stimulation for their dogs.

This type of enrichment helps reduce boredom, anxiety, and destructive behaviours by giving dogs a positive outlet for their natural instincts to move, think, and work. Alongside improving fitness, balance, and coordination, agility builds confidence and focus. Training together also strengthens the bond between dogs and their humans, supporting emotional wellbeing and creating calmer, more fulfilled dogs at home.

This year's Petfirst Veterinary calendar features two agility teams, including September's OutwestK9's Agility Team, led by Shelley Baikie.

Shelley began agility at the age of nine after watching a demonstration at her primary school. A local parent, Heather, had brought along her dogs and invited the children to try running them through a simple course. Shelley was instantly hooked!

She soon convinced her mum (and Heather!) to let her tag along to the local agility club each week with the family dog, Meg, a Border Collie/German Shepherd cross.

More than 30 years later, Shelley has competed across New Zealand from Invercargill to Whangārei, and almost everywhere in between. Her most successful partnerships so far have competed in the top grades and placed at a national level.

These days, her breed of choice is the Border Collie, and her youngest dog, Spyro, is gearing up for his first full year of competition, including the NZ Dog Agility Championships to be held over Labour Weekend 2026 in Tokoroa.

In loving memory of Bella

Medicating your fur friend

A step-by-step guide from Petfirst Veterinary

Top tips

Whether it's a short-term medication, long-term support, or a proactive supplement, this can be a simple, bonding activity for you both.

Create a calm space - including you!

Cats will feel more secure in a quiet room with minimal movement, noise or other pets. Both cats and dogs are experts at reading your mood so stay calm, upbeat and relaxed and they'll relax too.

Go slow and offer breaks and reassurance

If your pet shows signs of tension or tries to move away, pause and give them a moment. Use gentle and secure handling - a soft towel for cats and a stable surface for all pets will help them feel safe and secure. Never force or shout - take the time to make this a positive experience from the start and medicating will get easier and easier.

Build a simple and happy routine

Offer medication at roughly the same time each day and create a routine that your pet will enjoy. Cats recognise consistency and will love knowing what to expect. For dogs, choose a time or activity they already love - walks, mealtime, snuggle times - so that your pet begins to associate their medication with a no-stress, pleasant experience.

Check medication labels and recommendations

Check whether medications need to be given with a meal, after food or on an empty stomach. This helps the medication work properly and reduces tummy upset.

Reward and celebrate achievement

Finish the session with your fur friend's favourite treat, gentle pats or playtime and they'll look forward to the next one! If you can hide oral treatments in their favourite treat, your fur friend will look forward to the experience even more.

Get help from your Petfirst team

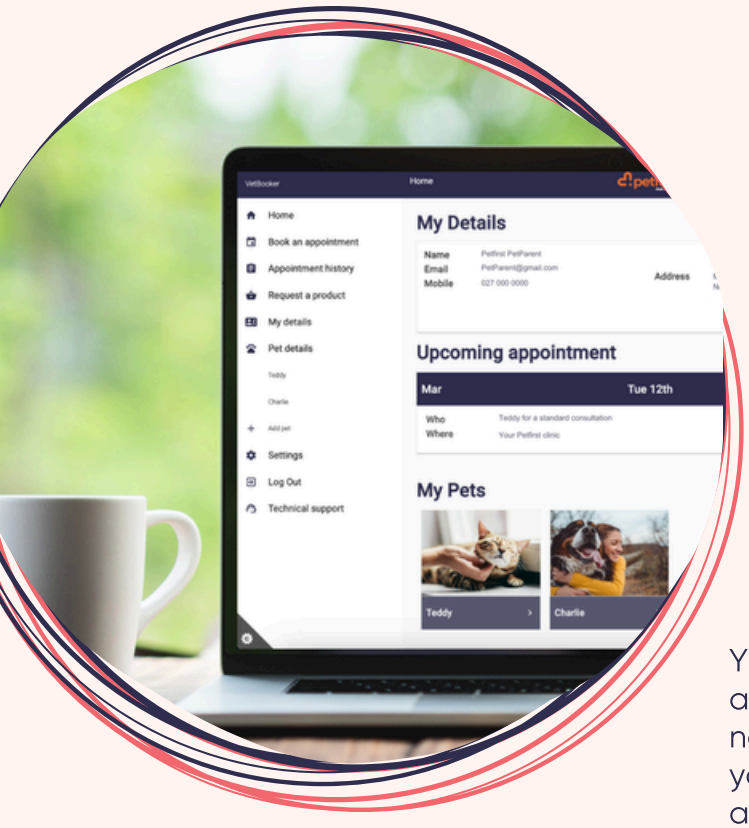
Check out the videos on our website to see great techniques for giving oral tablets and capsules, oral liquids, eye or ear medications or spot-on treatments. **You're never alone! If anything feels tricky, reach out to your local Petfirst Veterinary team for more resources or in-person help.**

Sometimes, things don't go to plan. Don't panic, just try again!

If your fur friend hides or becomes stressed or reactive, take a break and try again later. And, if the medication is spilled or spat out, only redose if advised by your vet - call or message us if you're unsure.

Seeing is believing!

Scan or click the QR code to find tips, tricks and videos at mypetfirst.co.nz



my petfirst portal

Custom designed for you and your fur friend

Have your registered for mypetfirst portal - your online pet hub? Register to book online and much more!

Life is busy! All too often, it's when you're relaxing on the couch with your pet that you remember you need to book an appointment - but your Petfirst team is at home on the couch with their fur friends too!

Your mypetfirst portal lets you book that appointment any time it suits you - and cancel or reschedule it if needed. You can also see your recent visits, change your details, register new pets and even re-order pet products or repeat prescriptions for easy pickup.

Getting started is easy - simply use the email address you have registered in-clinic. Forgotten it? **Click here to WhatsApp us** to check your on-file email.

Click or scan this QR code to register, log in or find out more.

win!

Upload your pet's pawsome picture to your mypetfirst portal account and email a screenshot to hello@mypetfirst.co.nz to be in to win a $100 Prezzy Card!*

*Competition closes 31/3/26, ts & cs apply

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