

Pet Insurance

We strongly recommend that our clients take out pet insurance.

These policies cover the cost of illnesses and accidents that your pet may suffer from.

They work like most other insurance policies. You submit a claim, you pay the first part of treatment (the excess) and the insurance company pays the remainder.

We usually like you to pay us in full for your pet's treatment and then the insurance company sends you a payment having deducted the excess. In some circumstances we do accept direct settlement from the insurance company, meaning that you just pay us the excess and they settle the rest with us.

You ask your insurance company for a claim form, you complete your section and we complete the 'Vet' section before returning it for authorisation.

Insurance covers one off accidents and injuries (e.g. broken leg, dog bites, wounds) but also gives ongoing cover for illness both short and long term (e.g. heart disease, arthritis, eye problems, kidney failure). With ongoing problems you can submit a periodic claim at intervals. If your pet needs regular tablets at £15.00 per month then every few months you can put a claim in for a period of treatment. Similarly sometimes we might see your pet with sore ears and then again 2 months after and again 1 month after that. Even though the cost of each visit is below your excess, we total those separate visits up for you and can put them in as one claim once it becomes clear that they are all linked as the same problem.

Some things are not covered by insurance policies:

- Routine treatments like vaccinations and neutering.
- Any costs related to breeding of pets
- Some policies cover dental procedures but most do not cover routine scaling and polishing of teeth.

Read all policy terms and conditions carefully.

Most policies can be paid for by monthly direct debit.

There are a huge range of policies available from a great many insurance providers. This bewildering array can confuse and even put people off.

There are very few bad policies which are to be avoided. Most offer good cover and treat their claims fairly. Because all claims submitted have to be co-signed by your vet, pet insurance claims are not as open to fraud as some insurance claims can be and as long as the claim is a valid one then most claims are settled.

Insurance companies will not pay for any conditions that started prior to the onset of insurance. If your pet develops skin problems you cannot take out pet insurance after the problem starts and then expect them to pay for treatment. We, as your Vet, will be asked to

state when the problem was first noted and we have to truthfully provide that information based on your pet's medical records.

The best time to insure your pet therefore, is while it is young and healthy and before it develops any problems. Some pets suffer with recurring problems as the years go by and old age tends to bring with it a range of health issues. Put pet insurance in place before all these things start and your pet will be covered when you need it to be.

Some pets are more likely to suffer from problems than others. Insurance underwriting is all about risks. Premiums for breeds that tend to visit the vets more (e.g. Westies, German Shepherds, Boxers etc) will be higher than premiums for mongrels and crossbreeds and breeds less prone to problems e.g. lurchers, staffordshire bull terriers and border terriers). There are always exceptions to these generalisations so don't assume your Labrador cross won't ever get ill! Similarly some pedigree cats are more prone to problems than your average domestic moggie so premiums tend to be higher for the former.

Most policies offer varied levels of cover.

Key feature to watch out for is insurance for life versus limited cover.

If your pet gets a long term problem such as heart disease and needs long term medication for the rest of its life then limited cover policies stop paying (typically after a year of treatment) whereas insurance for life will pay for as long as your pet needs treatment or until the limit of your cover.

Insurance for life is always better but does cost more than time limited cover. Be aware when you compare premiums that you are comparing like with like as some policies look inexpensive but aren't offering long term cover.

Most policies offer a range of cover such as Bronze, Silver, Gold or Platinum cover. The more expensive policies cover lots of extras like boarding your pet if you are ill, 3rd party public liability if your pet causes an accident etc but the key feature should always be cover for vet's fees. Some policies offer unlimited cover (if your pet breaks a leg then it doesn't matter how much it will cost, they will cover everything after you pay the excess) but most have a limit of cover 'per condition'. If your pet gets Diabetes then they will cover all the costs (after your excess) up to the maximum benefit payable e.g. £6,000. If the total cost of treatment finally exceeds that limit then you are liable for the ongoing cost after that. These limits vary and you pay more for greater cover. Most limits of cover will mean that you don't need to keep finding extra but be aware that some demanding and long term problems or very expensive treatments can gobble up your cover and leave you with a shortfall to meet.

Many companies offer 2 tiers of policy; one life time cover and one limited. Always look closely and compare like with like.

We generally advise you to go for the best cover you can afford but equally you don't necessarily need the 'all singing and all dancing' Platinum policy to give you good peace of mind. A sensible middle of the road policy will cover you for most eventualities and shouldn't break the bank. Spreading premiums into monthly direct debits means cover becomes affordable.

If you would struggle to pay a large vet bill e.g. £500, £1,000, £1,500 then pet insurance is for you. In many instances it is the people who could least afford to pay for a vet's bill that should make most effort to put insurance in place. Budgeting for that regular monthly payment is much easier than dealing with an unexpected large bill. Peace of mind that whatever goes wrong with your pet, you can offer it the treatment it needs without having to dig too deep into your pocket can be well worth the regular premium.

Paying premiums for multiple pets however can mount up. Some pet owners with lots of pets find it prohibitively expensive to cover them all. Some policies do offer discounts for multiple pets.

Some people choose to save a regular sum to cover unexpected vets bills and this can be another way of protecting you against an unexpected vets bill. Being disciplined is important however, so start now while your pet is healthy and build up a bit of a fighting fund. The attraction of this method is that if your pet never gets ill you can go on holiday one day on your savings. The down side is that lots of problems or a very expensive one can gobble up your savings and still need you having to find more.

Pet insurance is not for everyone but with more and more services available to your pet when it is ill and with vets bills steadily rising then some sort of provision for your pet's care is helpful.

Please ask one of our team if you need any help with pet insurance questions. Financial service regulations mean that we cannot recommend individual policies but we can give general useful advice so please call if you need assistance.