

ABOUT ANIMALS

Write it down to control holiday stress

It's important to get the facts; misunderstandings dangerous

DOMESTIC PLANNER



DIANA KOENIG

A: The holiday season can be very stressful because it costs us money and time. Instead of deleting activities and projects, we end up adding things to our already busy schedule.

A: A written plan will help control holiday stress. With a written plan you can control your time and the money you spend.

M: Make a list of the projects you need to complete before the end of December. Your list may include the following:

- Christmas Cards Bought
- Christmas Cards Written, Addressed and Sent
- Christmas Gift Shopping List Written
- Your Personal Gift List/Wish List Written
- Holiday Baking Completed
- Holiday Decorating Completed
- Holiday Activities Scheduled
- Wrapping Supplies Bought
- Gifts Bought
- Gifts Wrapped
- Holiday Party Planned
- Party Invitations Sent

Make a check mark by each item once completed. Create a holiday budget worksheet to help you plan your expenses for the holiday season. Use the first column to enter

your *target amount* for each item which is what you plan on spending. In the second column, enter in the *actual amount*. Make sure your household budget can support your target amount.

Examples of items are gifts, cards, postage, wrapping supplies, house/tree decorations, entertainment decorations, and food (parties, holiday events). Include any other special items you may have.

Make a holiday gift list that includes the person's name, the gift, if the gift was bought, and if the gift was wrapped.

Finally, write a holiday card list. Make a table to keep track of all the holiday cards you have sent and received.

Your columns should include name, address, sent, and received. Create several columns for sent and received. If someone hasn't responded to you in several years, you may choose to delete him from your list.

Make sure you store your holiday decorations efficiently. Use containers that fit in your storage space. Be willing to purge instead of cramming things into limited space. Don't fill each con-

tainer to capacity. Leave room for new decorations you may acquire.

A perfect example is your clothes closet. Instead of removing clothing you don't wear, you decide to buy more hangers. Eventually clothes will be so stuffed into the closet, items will wrinkle and be difficult to access. Likewise your decorations will get broken and lost if you cram too many into a container.

Buy each child his own ornament organizer container. Each year they can store their special ornaments in the container. When they are grown and have a home of their own, you can send the container filled with ornaments with them to decorate their first tree.

Today's refrigerator bulletin: "Plan ahead so you can enjoy the holiday season!"

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ASK THE VETS



DR. BRAD DAVIS

In undergraduate school I toyed with the idea of becoming a reporter. My writing impressed one of my journalism professors to the point that she offered me a job writing a column explaining medical information. I declined. My focus remained unwavering from becoming a veterinarian, and whoever heard of a vet with a newspaper column?

Still, these classes taught me some very important lessons. Make sure you have your facts correct before you publish. Lately I've seen way too much misinformation, both published and in rumor, that could end up causing trouble.

In a syndicated column discussing vaccines, a veterinarian wrote something that quickly raised my ire. He called giving an elderly cat vaccines "malpractice." His tone almost seemed angry, giving the impression that vaccinating animals bordered on evil.

I rarely get through his column without rolling my eyes and laughing at his mistakes, but in this case the misinformation could become dangerous.

It seems every year, someone comes out with a shocking new revelation about vaccines to change everything for the better. Studies done in a university setting, away from real practice conditions, get quoted out of context, and receive too much weight because they are new and different.

Even this columnist couldn't debate the importance of getting puppies vaccinated to keep them healthy. Rarely does a week go by at my clinic without us being treated to a parvovirus puppy. Lack of vaccines leaves these pups vulnerable to the disease.

So everyone should get every vaccine? No. If you have questions, call your vet. Helping a client feel comfortable about doing the best for their pet makes a day worthwhile.

Sometimes misinformation comes from within our psyche, such as believing rattlesnakes are a scourge on society, and that rattlesnake roundups help.

Groups of men, usually in Texas, get together for these roundups, often as a city event with beer companies as sponsors. They collect the rattlesnakes from the surrounding areas, decapitate and skin them, barbecue the meat and use their skins for the manufacture of belts and other souvenirs.

Mark Honas, radio host and exotic animal expert, says the practice of clearing rattlesnakes damages the environment much more than it helps, not to men-

tion that rattlesnakes generally try to avoid people.

These roundups "deplete rattlesnake numbers in the Southwest to the point they could become endangered," Honas said. This damages the American Southwest eco-system.

The methods of capture can defy logic. Participants will often pour gasoline into the rattlesnake dens, forcing them out, where men wait to catch them, Honas said.

He said this practice hurts not just rattlesnakes, but other snakes, frogs, rodents and any other critters that might be using the den, not to mention the gasoline contaminating the ground water. It may be wiser to learn methods of coexistence with the snakes than to try to eliminate them.

Also, the current world situation demands correct information.

At a news conference, a reporter asked the president about the virus, anthrax. Anthrax is not a virus, it is a bacterium. If you are going to ask the leader of the free world a serious question, you might actually want to know what you're talking about.

Anthrax, a bacterial disease, has pockets all over the world, including the United States. Spores form with oxygen exposure, which then resist damage from chemicals or temperature extremes. People usually contract the disease from consuming

or working with affected animal products.

I am not qualified to speak of this disease in context of human medicine, but I can talk about it as one of the true bad boys in the world health scene for animals, and the people who work with them.

Antibiotics can be used to treat anthrax, but the best way to prevent it comes with knowledge. Ask your health care professional, or check out respected medical Web sites, not obscure rumor factories, as the load of half-truths we hear nowadays clouds the facts.

As I heard someone say at my clinic, "I'm worried someone's going to get a dust cropper and start spreading Amtrak!"

Take Home Message: Knowledge is more important now than it has ever been. Make sure you get all the facts before letting misinformation hurt you. Check multiple sources and ask experts like your veterinarian or physician.

Dr. Brad Davis is the medical director for the VCA of Garden City, 2085 Inkster Road, Garden City, MI 48135. Feel free to write him there with questions and comments. He is also one of the hosts of the nationally syndicated radio show "Animal Talk." Visit the Web site at www.AnimalTalkRadio.com You can send e-mail questions or comments to DrBrad@AnimalTalkRadio.com

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