

Guidance on Pet Insurance Policies

Veterinary medicine is constantly evolving with more and more treatment options available, but these can be costly, especially if your pet is referred to see a specialist. In 2016 the Association of British Insurers reported the average insurance claim as £757, although if referred to see a specialist costs are more often in the thousands. For example, the costs for a common type of surgery for cruciate (knee) problems, a TPLO, start from £2,500. If you are unsure how you might finance the costs of veterinary care for your pet then pet insurance can be a great option. It can help provide for the unexpected expense, such as a road traffic accident or poisoning, as well as help out with the financial demands of long-term conditions, such as allergic skin disease, heart problems and osteoarthritis.

With many different companies offering lots of different levels of cover it can be difficult to understand which policy meets your needs and to avoid being “caught out by the small print”. Below you’ll find a basic guide on some aspects of pet insurance to help you understand the types of cover available and the type of cover that may best suit your needs.

LEVEL OF COVER

When choosing a policy you need to consider the level of cover as well as the price of premiums and it’s typically true to say “you get what you pay for”. The financial limits or exclusions of a cheaper policy may mean it’s not right for you, despite an attractive price. When considering an insurance policy make sure you understand and are happy with the points outlined below before signing on the dotted line.

- **The Financial limit** of the policy: the maximum paid out per claim.
- **The Time limit** of the policy: Life-long policies have no time limit on how long a health condition is covered as long as you keep paying your premiums. Time-limited policies are often cheaper, but will typically cover 12 months worth of a health problem. After 12 months that health problem is not covered and that condition will not be insurable by a different company as it will be a pre-existing condition. Time-limited policies are therefore of limited use in longer term conditions such as diabetes, heart conditions and arthritis where an owner will have to fund any ongoing costs themselves after the time-limit is up. We would normally recommend considering a life-long policy over a time-limited policy.
- **Exclusions:** some policies are Accident only so will only pay out for injuries, but not illnesses. Some policies may have exclusions for certain body systems even if there are no pre-existing problems (e.g. would never pay out for any skin problem or a dental problem). The reduced level of cover of these policies will usually mean cheaper premiums, but can leave owners in the lurch if they haven’t understood the limitations of their cover. Most policies will exclude pre-existing conditions (see below) and it can be variable if policies will pay out for therapies such as physiotherapy, hydrotherapy and behavioural therapy.
- **The Excess:** this is the contribution you will have to make towards a claim, e.g. the first £100 and/or a fixed percentage of the total claim. Sometimes, particularly as pets age, you may find your policy states you are responsible for paying a fixed excess plus a percentage of the total costs. You often have to pay the excess for a particular claim for each policy year that you claim for it.
- You may also wish to look for a policy that offers cover in addition to medical needs such as for third party liability, cover for lost/stolen pets, accidental damage, holiday cover etc.



SWITCHING INSURANCE POLICIES

As animals get older it is an unavoidable fact that they are more likely to become ill. Many pet insurance policies will reflect this as premiums become more expensive with age. If you've been comparing costs of policies and find a cheaper deal it is very important to consider any Pre-Existing Conditions before switching. For example, if your pet is on long term medication for a health problem (e.g. skin disease, heart disease, diabetes) this health problem will be deemed a pre-existing condition by a new insurance company so they likely won't pay out, and that condition will then be uninsurable by any new company once the original insurance policy has been cancelled. This can be particularly tricky with skin conditions where a previous history of minor skin or ear problems could be considered the start of a long-term skin condition by a new insurance company.

MAKING A CLAIM

Typically as a practice we deal with Indirect Claims. This is when you settle medical bills with us as they occur and then claim back the costs from your insurance company (minus your excess). We have members of staff who complete all the medical and financial details of your claim form and aim to send this within 5 working days of receiving your completed claim form. No administration fee is charged for processing your claim. Once your claim has been sent from us it may take a further 5-7 days for your insurance company to log the claim, and up to 6 weeks for the claim to be processed.

In some circumstances you may wish to get Pre-Authorisation from your insurance company to make sure the veterinary costs will be covered for that claim.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information visit our webpage www.croftvetcentre.co.uk/fees-payment where you will find further information on how to make an insurance claim as well as links to the Consumer Guide to Pet Insurance, an independent and comprehensive guide produced by the Association of British Insurers.

Please note, as we are not insurance brokers we are not able to recommend any particular insurance companies.

