



Dressing up is fun and while you may want to include your pet, their experience and reaction to costumes may be different than ours. When considering a costume for your pet, it's important to ensure a safe, enjoyable experience, or explore alternatives if costumes cause stress or discomfort.

## Choosing a Costume

Anything your pet wears must be safe and allow them to behave normally. When deciding on a costume, look for the following:

1. Safety - Clothing or costumes shouldn't restrict movement, cause overheating, or have components that could get caught somewhere or that can be ingested.
2. Normal Behaviour - Your pet should be able to move normally and shouldn't have their senses -- like vision, hearing, or ability to vocalize -- restricted. We recommend avoiding costumes with a head component or hood, as they can feel uncomfortable and block many senses.
3. Limitations - Be mindful of your pet's medical or physical limitations. For example, a puppy might not be able to get into a costume well or have the coordination to move normally in the costume, while a senior might have sore spots that a costume can irritate.

## Introducing Your Pet to Wearing a Costume

Resist the urge to put the entire costume on your pet right -- taking small steps instead will set them up for a more positive experience. Your pet may need some time to adjust to seeing, feeling, and wearing the costume.

- ✓ Introducing your pet to their costume as early as possible
- ✓ Practice wearing the costume daily
- ✓ Go slow, exposing them to the costume for short periods and gradually increasing as they become more comfortable
- ✓ Reward your pet for interacting with the costume with treats, a favourite toy or lots of praise - whatever they like best!
  - For example, your pet might start by sniffing the costume on the ground, then sniffing it when you hold it up, then putting only their nose through the head hole, then half of their face, then their entire face, and then their whole head and ears.

It's important to remember pets should be supervised when wearing a costume and we recommend only allowing your pet to wear their costume for short periods of time, to ensure they're comfortable.

## Signs to Watch for and When NOT to Put Your Pet in a Costume

If your pet is actively avoiding the costume, appears to be in physical discomfort, or if it causes fear or stress, a costume is not a good choice for your pet.

Signs to look for include:

- 🐾 Walking or running away, ducking their head, or physically avoiding the costume
- 🐾 Changing how they move - walking stiffly or abnormally, “slinking” on the ground, freezing
- 🐾 Trembling/shaking
- 🐾 Scratching, pawing at, chewing at, rubbing on things, attempting to get the costume off
- 🐾 Displaying wide eyes
- 🐾 Panting, drooling
- 🐾 Low or tucked tail
- 🐾 Yawning or licking their lips and nose
- 🐾 Ears pinned back
- 🐾 Acting “flighty”, “flinchy” or “on edge” while wearing it
- 🐾 Becoming more vocal – whining, growling, making unusual noises

## Alternatives to Costumes

If costumes don't suit your pet or your pet just isn't 100% comfortable yet, here are some fun and safe alternatives:

- ✓ Decorate their walking gear or use a Halloween themed harness, collar, or leash instead
- ✓ Have them wear a themed bandana or bow tie
- ✓ Have them wear a themed sweater or coat if they are comfortable
- ✓ Incorporate your pet into your own costume – for example, you can be Dorothy and Toto from the Wizard of Oz (no costume needed for your dog)!

Holiday celebrations can be a fun time of year, but costumes may not be the right choice for your pet. Always keep in mind what is safe and in their best interest.

## **Additional Resources:**

For more information on how to have a safe Halloween or Holidays with your pet, visit our blogs:

- 🐾 <https://www.edmontonhumanesociety.com/pet-safe-halloween/>
- 🐾 <https://www.edmontonhumanesociety.com/holiday-hazards-for-pets/>

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