



SPECIAL TO THE DAILY

Drew's pooches, Lucy (left) and Linus (right), rocking their "doggles" on a summertime hike. The goggles made for dogs protect Lucy's eyes from exposure after she was diagnosed with Pannus, a canine eye issue.

Linus and Lucy and doggie wellness

If reincarnation exists, I want to come back as one of two things: Sasquatch (duh) or a mountain dog. If reincarnation does not exist, and I get to the pearly gates and am asked, "Drew, how would you like me to judge you?" My response is simple: "I want to be judged on how I treated my dogs." My passion, unconditional and never-ending love for my dogs cannot be understated.

In Summit County, we get it — dogs are the greatest people on earth. A few years ago, when my dog Cali passed away, it was the worst day of my life. She died from an allergic reaction to medication that I gave her. Between her, my mental-health issues and a friend recently passing, I spiraled. Badly. You see, Cali literally saved my life at a time when I didn't think I would make it. She was my all. I miss her every day. She watches over me and still gets me through trying times.

Cali was even set to be the ring-bearer in my wedding the next month, and, unlike anywhere else I have ever

been, Summit Countians understood: premade dinners, cards, friends and more all showed up at our house.



Drew Mikita
Dear Drewbie

Why? 1) Everyone was worried about me going off the deep end. Valid. 2) You all love your pups with the same robustness as I do.

This is not true of all people. Our dogs have the greatest playground on earth, are welcomed everywhere and generally scoff at leashes, kennels and rules. It's a doggie wonderland.

LUCY AND LINUS AND MENTAL HEALTH

Molly and I made it about four days before we needed another canine lover in our life to complete our family. We rescued Lucy, and, about a year later, she got a sister, Linus (one guess what our cat's name is!). The Peanuts gang is my family. They are my everything.

When Lucy and Linus are happy, so am I. They make me get out on the trail, force me to exercise and fill a part of my soul that can't be filled by anything else. No matter how crappy my day is, they

are there, so excited to see me they pee (literally for Linus). They encourage me to be healthy, active and outside — all extremely important for my mental health.

ACTIVE PUPS

Like many of you, my dogs do everything with me: They hike, bike, backcountry ski. In SC, we are gear snobs. You know it's true. We like nice gear because of performance, safety and comfort.

Well, what about your outdoor pursuits partner? Do you protect them from the Summit County elements like you do yourself?

Doggie wellness is very important in our extreme winter conditions. It doesn't take much to protect them, but you want your four-legged mountain buddy to shred as much gnar as possible before going to powdery puppy heaven.

Few things in life bring me as much joy as watching Lucy and Linus chase me down Baldy while backcountry skiing. So I asked super-vet Christy Murphy of Buffalo Mountain for a few paths to better dog wellness. (Christy has far eclipsed sainthood in our household. She saved Liney's life when her liver failed as a puppy.)

1. Be aware of the conditions: We bundle up to prepare for the elements and avoiding over-exposure is important for people and dogs, alike. Factors that influence exposure are temperature, dehydration and getting wet. Do not keep dogs out too long in extreme conditions. Signs your dog is getting cold: shivering, "tripoding" (standing only on three legs), not playing or running and fatigue.

Tool: Having a quality doggie jacket for dogs who get cold on hikes is paramount. Shorter fur dogs, like Linus, have a much higher chance of needing a jacket. Longer hair dogs, like Lucy, may not need a jacket.

2. Take care of the feet:

Again, depending on the dog, they may or not have foot issues. Some dogs will get a giant ball in their feet. This can be painful, and pulling out the fur can be a health risk.

Tool: Musher's Wax is at local pet shops and often helps. Also, booties for dogs can help prevent snow build-up and provide warmth. Get high-quality booties (The Dog Mocs made locally are really cool).

3. It may be "doggie" time:

A couple of years ago, Lucy developed Pannus, an eye issue. It looked like she was getting a film over her beautiful eyes. She is on meds that have worked, but more was needed.

Tool: Doggles — yes, doggie goggles. This will help protect their eyes from wind, sun and snow. We got Linus a pair as well, so she didn't feel uncool.

4. Protect the pink noses: Doggies who have pink noses need to be protected.

Tool: Get a pet-safe sunblock with zinc oxide. Children's sunblock should be more than fine for your dog.

5. Doggie hydration:

Yes, dogs can and do eat snow. However, it is hard to process frozen water, and, just like with people, hydration can have negative consequences.

Tool: Bringing a little bowl for your dog to have some fresh, non-frozen water will help. Don't forget treats on longer adventures. Calories can be good.

6. Days off are OK: I asked Christy years ago about doggie days off. Giving your buddy occasional days off

can help prolong their ability to play, just like you.

Tool: If you notice your dog struggling at all — limping or looking sore after a day outside — give them the next couple of days off.

7. Know your dog's limits:

As Summit County locals, we are not great about knowing and respecting our limits. We are adrenaline junkies, and our pups take after us.

Tool: Your dog has limits, too. Don't put them in a situation where they might panic and get injured. Start small and introduce bigger situations.

Remember, dogs can't speak directly and tell you they are cold, sore or injured. Some dogs, like Linus, will cry, shiver, scream bloody murder and look as pathetic as they come, and yet she is having a blast. Lucy could be bleeding from the ears and never make a peep. Know your dogs and watch for peculiar behaviors, peculiar to your dog. Linus is always strange.

Take care of your pups this winter. Some of my favorite Summit County locals are of the furry, four-legged variety.