

National Pet Month – 5th April to 5th May 2008

In anticipation of National Pet Month, (NPM), which launches under the theme 'Great British Pets' on 05 April this year, the Pet Health Council (PHC) celebrates the unique relationship between people and their pets and provides some advice on how you can find your perfect pet match.

Pets can be loyal and loving companions and can be good for your health. Scientists say that stroking a pet can lower raised blood pressure and reduce stress hormones. Studies show that dog and cat owners enjoy reductions in minor ailments such as headaches, colds and flu. Pets can act as a welcome 'social lubricant' or catalyst for their owners to interact with un-related people and they can even help improve children's focus at school by developing their social and concentration skills.

Whilst cats and dogs are the most commonly kept pets other species such as rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters and reptiles are becoming increasingly popular and can be very rewarding companions.

Choosing the right pet is important as not all people are suited to all pets. But there's bound to be the right pet to share your life with! Before deciding which type of pet to get you need to do your research, particularly if you are new to pet ownership or new to a particular pet species. Always seek advice from vets, pharmacists, pet shop staff, kennel and cattery owners, as appropriate. Here are some things you should think about:

Think before you own!

1. **Lifestyle:** How would a pet fit into your daily routine? If you're out all day, or keep irregular hours, a cat may be a better choice than a dog. Cats can be independent creatures and if permitted can come and go as they please through a cat flap. Instead they can be house confined assuming they have space to wander and things to interest them – like scratching posts, toys and climbing frames – in which case you will need to provide a litter tray. Two cats may be better than one, as they can keep each other company, play and groom each other.

It's not right to leave a dog cooped up inside on its own all day, as this will give rise to destructive behaviour, potential depression and boredom. Only get a dog if you enjoy regular walks or running. Depending on its size, a dog will need to exercise every day for up to 30 minutes or more a day.

2. **Space:** Check before you acquire a puppy how big it will be when it's fully grown. Don't get a large dog unless you have a large home with a garden to keep it in!

3. **Budget:** Choose a pet that is within your budget. Boarding kennels or catteries, pet insurance, veterinary care- to include annual vaccinations, worming up to 4 times annually, flea and tick treatments regularly and other medical care, feeding and grooming are some of the costs you should bear in mind.
4. **The best time to acquire:** A new pet needs lots of caring that involves love, attention and a daily routine for feeding, training etc. to help it settle into its new environment. Make sure you choose a quiet period in your own life so you can devote time to making the pet feel at home.
5. **Run the 'healthy pet' checklist:** Before you buy, examine the animal closely for clean ears, clean teeth and breath, a clean and glossy coat, bright, clear eyes, normal length nails and a clean bottom. Also check that the animal is of normal or expected weight and that dogs and cats have been fully weaned and wormed.

Caring for your new pet

Once you've chosen your new pet you need to prepare for its arrival home. In the first few days in a strange new environment the pet will probably be nervous from feeling lost, so give it lots of care and devotion of time during this important time, but also give it some time to relax and get used to its new surroundings. Make sure that you have a bed, cage or tank ready prepared for your new pet and that you have a good supply of the right food. Your vet or pet care professional will be happy to advise you on care and a feeding regime suitable for your animal.

Notes to Editors:

About the Pet Health Council

Established in 1979, the Pet Health Council promotes, informs and advises on the health and welfare of pet animals in the interests of both pets and people.

In addition to offering advice regarding the latest pet issues, the PHC promotes responsible pet ownership and the health benefits of pet interaction. www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk is a comprehensive source of information for consumers with a more detailed section for human health and veterinary professionals.

The PHC pools the expertise of its medical and veterinary advisors: Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors, British Small Animal Veterinary Association, British Veterinary Association, National Office of Animal Health, Pet Food Manufacturers' Association, Society for Companion Animal Studies, Royal College of Nursing Complementary Therapies Forum and Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain.

Pet Health Council

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National Pet Month runs from 05 April – 05 May. For further information:
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