

Choosing a Pet

www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk

Pets are good for people but not all people are suited to all pets – matching one to another is very important.

Pets are loyal and loving companions and can be good for your health. Scientists say that stroking a pet can lower your blood pressure and studies show that new dog and cat owners enjoy reductions in minor ailments such as headaches, colds and flu. Pets can act as a 'social lubricant' for their owners and can even help improve children's focus at school.

So it's no wonder so many people keep pets. However, there's a lot to think about before you take an animal into your home. You need to know how to care for your pet and accept that you're taking it on for the whole of its life – not just until the novelty wears off. So follow these simple guidelines to make the right choice for you and your new pet.

THINK BEFORE YOU BUY

Before deciding which type of pet to buy, you need to think about:

Lifestyle – How would a pet fit into your daily routine? If you're out all day, or keep irregular hours, a cat is a better choice than a dog. Cats are independent creatures, and can come and go as they please through a cat flap or you can provide a litter tray. Two cats are often better than one, as they keep each other company.

It's not fair to leave a dog cooped up inside on its own all day. Only get a dog if you enjoy regular walks or running. Depending on its size, a dog will need to exercise every day for at least 30 minutes a day.

Space – Check before you buy a dog 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!

Budget – Choose a pet that is within your budget. Boarding kennels or catteries, pet insurance, veterinary bills, feeding and grooming are some of the costs you should bear in mind.

The best time to buy – A new pet needs lots of 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. Christmas is not a good time as you'll be busy and it will be almost impossible to establish any regular routine for your pet.

PETS FOR CHILDREN

Looking after a pet can be a very rewarding and educational experience for children. They learn about responsibility, caring for others and gain a respect for living things. Gerbils, hamsters, guinea pigs and rabbits are good first pets for young owners.



BUYING A PUPPY OR KITTEN

Never take a pet because you feel sorry for it. A poor, shivery, sickly animal can often prove a problem.

It's best to get a puppy or kitten directly from the home in which it was born when it is between 8 to 10 weeks of age. By seeing the mother (and the father if possible) you'll be able to judge the kind of temperament the animal is likely to develop and, most importantly for dogs, the size to which it will grow. If you would have liked the parent as your pet, then, and only then, choose a son or daughter. Fish, birds and small mammals such as gerbils, hamsters and guinea pigs can be bought from a reputable pet shop or breeder.

CHECKLIST FOR A HEALTHY PET

Before you buy, examine the animal closely for clean ears, a clean and glossy coat, bright, clear eyes and a clean bottom. Also check that the animal is of normal weight and that dogs and cats have been fully weaned and wormed. Finally, make sure you choose an animal which is lively and affectionate. A listless, withdrawn kitten or puppy may prove to be a liability.

A TIP FOR A FRIENDLY KITTEN OR PUPPY

A kitten or puppy which has been handled from a very early age is always gentle and accepts humans easily. The kitten who meets humans for the first time when it's already 8 weeks old is almost always timid and will need extra attention to help it build its confidence.

Choosing a Pet

www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk

DON'T BE AFRAID TO SAY NO

Examine your potential pet very closely. If in doubt, either say "No, thank you" – or get a vet to check the animal on your behalf.

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 feel nervous, so give it lots of attention during this important time.

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 will be happy to advise you on a feeding regime suitable for a young animal.

FURTHER CARE

Find out about vaccines, pet insurance, neutering and worming when you get your puppy, kitten or other pet. Puppies and kittens should already have been wormed before you buy them. Remember that you will need to have your puppy or kitten vaccinated regularly throughout its life.

Don't delay – register with a vet straight away. Every vet is happy to advise a new owner, and regular contact throughout your pet's life gives the opportunity for a 'health check' which can help nip any potential problems in the bud. You can also visit your local pharmacist for pet health advice.

Remember a healthy pet is a happy pet and a happy pet means a happy owner!

The Pet Health Council was formed in 1979 with the specific aim of promoting the health and welfare of pet animals in the interests of both pets and people. The PHC works with medical and veterinary advisers who are experts in this field.

The leaflet range currently comprises the following:

Insuring your Pet	Pets and The Family
Choosing a Pet	Your Pet's Teeth
Fit Not Fat	Practical Steps for Healthy Pets
Getting a Puppy	Stressed Pets
Health Benefits of Pets	The Facts about Toxocara
International Pet Travel	The Facts about Toxoplasmosis
Nutrition for Cats and Dogs	Worm Your Dog
Pets and Allergies	Your First Pet

Download leaflets from the PHC website:
www.pethealthcouncil.co.uk

The Pet Health Council 
working for healthy pets & people

The Five Golden Rules to Successful Pet Ownership

1. Follow a preventive health programme for your pet that includes:
 - a good diet
 - regular exercise
 - worming
 - vaccination
 - annual veterinary check ups
 - health insurance
2. Observe basic hygiene practices around your pet
3. Respect your pet, you have a duty of care, to fulfil your pet's basic needs including privacy and space as well as love and attention
4. Be a responsible owner, clear up after your animal and be considerate of other people and animals
5. Consider the changing needs of your pet throughout his life.

Associated organisations of the Pet Health Council include:

Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Animal Therapy, Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors, British Small Animal Veterinary Association, British Veterinary Association, National Office of Animal Health, National Pharmacy Association, Pet Food Manufacturers' Association, Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and Society for Companion Animal Studies.



For press information, please contact:
Pet Health Council Press Office
20 Bedford Street, London, WC2E 9HP.
Tel: 0207 379 6545