

Fact Sheet

Welcoming a New Pet

Congratulations on your decision to bring a pet into your home. Whether you're acquiring a puppy or kitten, or adopting an adult pet, you're probably eager to learn more about proper care and feeding. The following tips can help you get off on the right foot with your new family member.



Veterinary care

Just as you require regular visits to your doctor to stay healthy, so does your pet. At a minimum, a veterinary visit should be a once-a-year event, and more frequent checkups may be needed. Regular exams are likely to include a thorough physical exam, a weigh-in, immunizations and parasite checks (a heartworm test and fecal exam). Blood tests and dental cleanings are also routine procedures.

Feeding

Your new pet may be eyeing your plate with interest, but don't give in! Pets shouldn't eat like people. Cats are carnivores, so they need plenty of protein in their diets — roughly twice the percentage that you do — and they need it in the form of meat, poultry or fish. And while your dog, like you, is an omnivore, that doesn't mean he should share your meals. A food formulated especially for dogs is much better, and treats should make up no more than 10 percent of a dog's caloric intake.

Parasite prevention

You've probably heard of pests such as heartworm, fleas, ticks and intestinal parasites, but understanding how and when to prevent them is a different matter. Both dogs and cats can become infected with heartworms, whether they spend their time indoors or out. Because mosquitoes spread heartworms, dogs and cats need protection year-round, thanks to a mosquito's ability to survive in a variety of environments. A bonus is that many heartworm preventives also protect pets against other internal parasites. Meanwhile, fleas and ticks live on the outside of pets. Not only are these pests unwelcome houseguests, they also can cause allergies and spread diseases to your pet and your family. Ask your veterinarian how you can keep your pet protected from all these parasites.

Bathing

Most of us wouldn't dream of letting a day go by without a shower or bath. But daily bathing is unnecessary for pets, and can dry out their skin and hair. Most dogs are fine with a bath every three months, unless they get extra dirty or have silky hair. Cats usually keep themselves clean without any help from you, although brushing long-haired cats on a regular basis is advised to keep their fur tangle-free and help prevent hairballs.

Communicating with your pet

Dogs and cats relate to their owners in different ways. As pack animals, dogs expect you to lead their pack and to give them rules to follow. Cats attach to their people as social partners, using affectionate behaviors, such as purring, kneading and rubbing against you to show their affection.

Bringing a pet into your home is one of the greatest joys in life, but it means more responsibilities. Understanding your pet's behavior, as well as the do's and don'ts of pet health care, will help make your bond with your pet a lasting one.