

A Guide to
Pet Care
Options

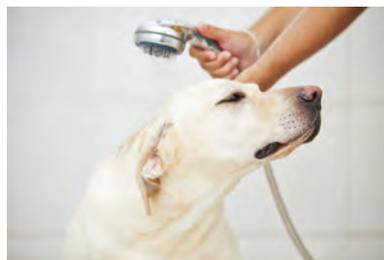
PET CARE *handbook*



Vaughan, D. (2014). *Pet care handbook*. (A. Moyer, Ed.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Options. Copyright © 2015 by Workplace Options

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Are You Ready for a Pet?	5
The Annual Cost of Keeping a Pet	6
Choosing the Right Dog	6
Types of Dogs	7
The Unique Benefits of Dog Ownership.....	7
Choosing the Right Cat.....	8
Breeds of Cats	8
The Issue of Declawing.....	9
Preparing a Child for a New Pet	9
Where to Get Your New Pet	10
Shelters and Animal Welfare Agencies.....	10
Breeders.....	11
Pet Stores.....	11
Equipment for Your Pet.....	12
Dog Supplies	12
Cat Supplies.....	13
Selecting the Right Stuff	13
Pet-Proofing Your Home.....	13
Holiday Safety Tips.....	14
Training Your Pet.....	15
Training Your Dog.....	15
Professional Trainers.....	16
Training Methods to Avoid.....	16
Selecting a Veterinarian.....	17
Veterinary Specialists.....	17
Pet Insurance.....	17
Boarding Your Pet.....	18
Veterinary Boarding.....	19
Pet Stores.....	19
Private Sitters.....	19
Caring for an Aging Pet.....	19
Euthanasia: When It's Time to Say Goodbye.....	20
Additional Resources	21
Resources for Low-Cost Services	22



Introduction

When you bring an animal into your home, whether it's a dog, cat, hamster, fish, or snake, you take on a big obligation. Your pet will depend on you for everything, including food, shelter, companionship, and medical care, and it becomes your responsibility to ensure that all of those needs are met. Pet ownership is essentially a 24-hour, 365-day job—but one with tremendous benefits.

The good that pets can bring to your life is immeasurable. They provide companionship, amusement, and, in the case of dogs and cats especially, unconditional love. There is also evidence that pet companionship can reduce stress, improve mood, and make you feel happier overall.¹

Smaller pets can also bring value to a household. Commonly known as **pocket pets** because of their diminutive size, hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, and the like can be loving alternatives to dogs and cats. Even tropical fish can help reduce stress through the calming effect of their leisurely swimming.²

If you have never owned a pet, the task may sound a little daunting. After all, there's so much to learn. But your investment in time and money will almost certainly pay dividends. At the very least, a pet can make you a better person—if you let it.

1 Allen, K., Shykoff, B. E., Izzo, J. L., Jr. (2001). Pet ownership, but not ace inhibitor therapy, blunts home blood pressure responses to mental stress. *Hypertension*, 38, 815–820.

2 DeSchrive, M. M., Riddick, C. (1990). Effects of watching aquariums on elders' stress. *Anthrozoos*, 4, 44–48.



Are You Ready for a Pet?



Bringing a companion animal into your life is a decision to be considered carefully. All animals, from goldfish to Great Danes, require care and support for a lifetime, so it's a good idea to ask yourself a few basic questions before making such an important decision.

Is your home a good fit?

Living space is an important consideration when choosing a pet. If you live in a small apartment, for example, then a cat or pocket pet (such as a hamster or guinea pig) would probably be a better choice than a large, energetic dog. Birds, fish, and small reptiles also make good pets for those with limited space.

Can you afford a pet?

Your financial situation may be a determining factor when choosing a pet, because generally speaking, the larger the animal, the more expensive it will be to keep. If your finances are limited, a smaller, easier-to-maintain pet may be the better option.

How much free time do you have?

Dogs and cats require quality time with their owners every day. As a result, if your job requires that you work late or travel out of town on a regular basis, or you're a social butterfly who is seldom home, a fish or reptile would probably be a more responsible choice.

Have you considered the safety of the pet and all family members?

Large, powerful, or excitable dogs can be an issue. Their rambunctiousness can pose an unintentional hazard to babies, small

children, and frail older adults. If this describes your family situation, consider a smaller or lower-energy dog or one that is a little older and has mellowed a bit.

Who will care for your family's new pet?

Responsibility of care is a very big issue when selecting a new pet. The person in charge must be mature enough to handle such care obligations as meals, grooming, play, daily walks, and cleaning up after the animal.

How's your health?

Animals can have an adverse effect on your health, often in ways you don't consider. Whoever thought that handling a pet lizard could be dangerous? Yet the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warns that young children and individuals with suppressed immune systems should avoid handling reptiles because of the risk of contracting salmonella.³

One of the most common health issues among pet owners is an unexpected allergy to their pet's dander. It's not always possible to anticipate allergies, but try to assess your risk ahead of time.

³ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (Updated 2014, April 30). *Reptiles*. Retrieved April 12, 2014, from <http://www.cdc.gov/>



The Annual Cost of Keeping a Pet

Even if you acquire your pet at no cost, there will be expenses that range from food to toys to medical care. This can add up over the course of a year. For example, the first-year cost of owning a cat or small dog can exceed \$1,000, depending on an animal's individual requirements. Expect to spend more than \$250 for a small bird. Even something as relatively low-maintenance as an aquarium can cost up to \$200 the first year.

The annual outlay for pocket pets such as mice, hamsters, gerbils, and guinea pigs can be significantly lower, because their needs are fewer. However, even pocket pets should receive routine veterinary care, so that expense must also be factored into the annual cost of keeping such animals.⁴

Choosing the Right Dog

Dogs make wonderful pets, but adding a dog to your family should be done with care. It's important that you ask yourself some important questions before making your decision. Issues to consider include

- **Temperament**—Dogs exhibit a variety of temperaments depending on breed.⁵ So the big question is: What canine temperament would be best for you and your family? Do you want a dog with a lot of energy, or one that is more laid back? A pet that is easy to train, or one with a strong will?

⁴ American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. (n.d.). Pet care costs. Retrieved April 15, 2014, from <http://www.asPCA.org/>

⁵ American Kennel Club. (n.d.). Breeds. Retrieved April 9, 2014, from <http://www.akc.org/>

- Your temperament and lifestyle should also be taken into consideration. It's important that your personality and that of your new pet match as closely as possible so that both of you will be happy.

- **Living arrangements**—The size of your living space should be an important factor in determining what breed of dog you choose. If you have a lot of room indoors and out, then you should have no trouble accommodating a larger, more active breed of dog. But if you live in an apartment or small house, then a smaller breed would be the wiser choice.

- **Grooming needs**—Many long-haired dogs require extensive grooming to stay healthy and looking good. This can be time-consuming, so consider your availability to perform such tasks or get the dog to a groomer. If your time is limited, choose a lower maintenance breed.

- **Age**—Puppies are cute and full of energy, but they require a lot of time outside, frequent meals, obedience training, and regular interaction with their owners. Adult dogs, by comparison, typically require less training and tend to be calmer.



Types of Dogs

The American Kennel Club recognizes seven specific breed groups, each of which comprises a wide variety of individual breeds. They are

- **Sporting Group**—This division includes pointers, retrievers, setters, and spaniels, many of which are known for their hunting skills. As a result, these breeds make great outdoor companions. If considering a Sporting dog, remember that these breeds require a lot of exercise and outdoor time.
- **Hound Group**—Like the Sporting breeds, those in the Hound Group are also accomplished hunters. Other than that, however, members of the Hound Group could not be more different in size or temperament.
- **Working Group**—The breeds in this group are exactly as the name suggests: hard-working, strong, and dependable. They're also quite intelligent and easy to train. The dogs that comprise the Working Group are used for a variety of jobs, including water rescue and guarding.
- **Herding Group**—Prior to 1983, when the American Kennel Club introduced this new classification, breeds that now comprise the Herding Group were included in the Working Group. The varied breeds in the Herding Group are intelligent, easy to train, and love a challenge, which is why you often see Herding breeds participating in agility competitions.
- **Terrier Group**—Terriers are energetic dogs with distinctive personalities that require an owner who can match their determination. Because terriers were

originally bred to hunt and kill vermin, they often don't get along with other animals, including other dogs.

- **Toy Group**—Don't let their small size fool you: Toy breeds are fun, energetic, and tough when they have to be. Their size also makes Toy breeds ideal pets for those with limited space.
- **Non-Sporting Group**—There's something for everyone in the Non-Sporting group, which comprises breeds of all sizes, temperaments, and personalities. Some members of this group are quite common, such as the poodle and the Boston terrier, while others are more rare, such as the Finnish spitz and schipperke.

The Unique Benefits of Dog Ownership

Being a doggie parent has many wonderful perks.⁶ For example

- Owning a dog can make you more physically fit—That's because dogs require daily walks, which is great motivation to exercise.
- Studies have found that quality time spent with your dog is a great way to melt away the stress in your life⁷—In fact, dogs make such good stress relievers that they are

6 Andrews, L.W. (2014, April 16). *Dog walking has psychological benefits for you*. Retrieved April 16, 2014, from <http://www.psychologytoday.com/>

7 CNCA Health. (n.d.). *The surprising (and multiple) health benefits of owning a pet*. Retrieved April 16, 2014, from <http://www.cncahealth.com/>





sometimes used to help soldiers deal with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)⁸.

- The stress-reducing social contact and exercise that comes with dog ownership can help your heart and your brain⁹—The greatest benefits are a reduced risk of heart disease and stroke.

Choosing the Right Cat

Cats are the second most popular pets in the United States, with an estimated 30.4% of households owning at least one. (Dogs are the number 1 pet, with more than 36% of American households claiming ownership.)¹⁰ The popularity of cats is understandable, because they bring so much to the family-pet relationship, including plenty of affection and companionship.¹¹

Issues to ponder when considering a cat include your living arrangements, your financial situation, your time availability, and whether you are prone to pet allergies. The latter issue is especially important, because an allergy to cat dander is twice as common in the United States as an allergy to dog dander, affecting between 47 and 95 million Americans.¹²

8 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for PTSD. (Updated 2014, March 18). *Dogs and PTSD*. Retrieved April 16, 2014 from <http://www.ptsd.va.gov/>

9 American Heart Association. (Updated 2014, February 3). *Owning a pet may protect you from heart disease*. Retrieved April 16, 2014, from <http://www.heart.org/>

10 American Veterinary Medical Association. (n.d.) *U.S. pet ownership statistics*. Retrieved April 14, 2014, from <https://www.avma.org/>

11 American Pet Products Association. (n.d.). *Cats provide companionship, company and love*. Retrieved April 12, 2014, from <http://media.americanpetproducts.org/>

12 Kerr, M. (2012, May 4). *Cat allergies*. Retrieved April 14, 2014, from <http://www.healthline.com/>

It's important to remember that cats have very different

care requirements than dogs. For example, cats possess an innate need to scratch rough surfaces. It's how they communicate, show happiness, stretch, and keep their claws healthy. If you don't provide your cat with some type of scratching surface, it may turn its attention to your favorite couch instead.

Cats also have distinctly different dietary requirements than dogs.¹³ To ensure that your cat is receiving proper nutrition, feed it only age- and health-appropriate foods.

The Value of Indoor Living

Many people erroneously believe that a cat isn't happy unless it can roam, but outside living places your pet in jeopardy. Studies have found that indoor cats typically live far longer than cats allowed outside, because they don't have to worry about motor vehicles, predators, or contracting an illness from parasites such as fleas and ticks.¹⁴

Breeds of Cats

The Cat Fanciers' Association (CFA) recognizes 40 pedigree breeds of cat for showing in the Championship Class and two breeds in the Miscellaneous Class.¹⁵ Among them are the Abyssinian, American Shorthair, Burmese, Colorpoint Shorthair, Cornish Rex, Persian, and Siamese.

13 Cornell University College of Medicine, Cornell Feline Health Center. (2002). *Feeding your cat*. Retrieved April 11, 2014, from <http://www.vet.cornell.edu/>

14 University of California–Davis School of Veterinary Medicine. (n.d.). *Cats: Indoors or outdoors?* Retrieved April 12, 2014, from <http://behavior.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/>

15 The Cat Fanciers' Association. (n.d.). *Breeds*. Retrieved April 13, 2014, from <http://www.cfainc.org/>

A cat's characteristics and personality are often determined by breed.¹⁶ The Abyssinian, for example, is known for being busy, active, and affectionate. Other popular breed traits include

- **American Bobtail**—Loving and intelligent
- **Chartreux**—Quickly becomes attached to its family
- **European Burmese**—Intelligent, affectionate, and loyal
- **Siamese**—Vocal, active, and can be insistent

The Issue of Declawing

In years past, it was fairly common for cat owners to have their pets declawed in an effort to prevent damage to furniture and belongings. Today, both the Cat Fanciers' Association and the American Veterinary Medical Association formally oppose declawing except in cases of owner safety, and increasingly, veterinarians are refusing to perform the procedure except as a last resort.^{17,18}

The most commonly performed surgical procedures—*onychectomy* and *deep digital flexor tendonectomy*—can put a cat at risk of significant complications, including hemorrhaging, infection, and nail regrowth. The CFA encourages cat owners to use alternative methods for keeping their pets from scratching furniture and other surfaces. These include training the cat to use a scratching post at an early age, having more than one scratching post in the home, and redirecting the cat

¹⁶ The Cat Fanciers' Association. (n.d.). *Breed characteristics and personalities*. Retrieved April 13, 2014, from <http://www.cfainc.org/>

¹⁷ The Cat Fanciers' Association. (Revised 2003, June). *CFA guidance statement on declawing*. Retrieved April 15, 2014, from <http://www.cfainc.org/>

¹⁸ American Veterinary Medical Association. (2003, April 1). *AVMA position statement on the declawing of domestic cats*. Retrieved April 15, 2014, from <https://www.avma.org/>

to more appropriate scratching surfaces when necessary.

Preparing a Child for a New Pet

Bringing a pet into the family can be a wondrous experience for a child. For many youngsters, it's their first extended interaction with an animal, as well as their first emotional bond with someone other than immediate family.

Indeed, the child-pet relationship can be quite rewarding. The opportunity to assist in caring for a pet, under the watchful eye of a parent, can improve a child's social skills, help develop compassion and empathy for other living things, and instill life lessons such as love and loyalty. Pets can also encourage a child to get more exercise, and enable a child to experience the cycles of life as his or her pet matures.¹⁹

Pet companionship can be an important aspect of growing up, and you can make the transition easier by preparing your child in advance for all that the job entails. This begins with encouraging your child to participate in the pet selection process. Once the type of

¹⁹ North Shore Animal League America. (n.d.). *Children and pets: A perfect match*. Retrieved April 20, 2014, from <http://www.animalleague.org/>





pet your family will be getting has been determined, enlist your child's help in preparing the home and family for its newest member. For example, your child could assist with pet-proofing the home, setting up the pet's living space, deciding on what to name the pet, and agreeing to certain responsibilities if the child is old enough.

The age of the child should be a vital consideration when deciding what type of pet to get. Keep in mind that children under the age of 4 can be prone to bouts of aggression or anger, and should be monitored when handling a pet to avoid accidental injury to the animal.²⁰ Parental supervision is appropriate for children up to the age of 10, at which time most children begin to exhibit more responsibility around animals.

A goldfish makes a good starter pet for a young child, because it requires minimal care. Make feeding the fish a daily family activity and cleaning its bowl something you do together with your child on weekends. Once your child is a little older, a pocket pet may be a more appropriate choice.

If you are acquiring an adult cat or dog from a shelter, make sure that it is comfortable around children. Bring your child to the shelter so he or she can interact with the animal before you bring it home. You want an animal that is playful and affectionate with your child, not skittish or frightened, and one that won't run away if your child makes a loud noise or sudden movement.

Once a pet has been brought into the home, help your child become a good caregiver by being a good role

model yourself. This means handling the animal responsibly, taking care of all of its daily needs without complaint, explaining why animals should be treated with respect and compassion, and discussing why animals engage in certain behaviors that your child may find curious. Children often watch their parents for behavioral cues, so don't be surprised if your child quickly begins to mimic your interaction with the animal.

Where to Get Your New Pet

There are a variety of options when it comes to getting a new pet. The most common include

- shelters and animal welfare agencies
- breeders
- pet stores

SHELTERS AND ANIMAL WELFARE AGENCIES

If you're looking for a dog or a cat, visit your municipal shelter or animal welfare agency first, because they're usually filled with adoptable dogs and cats in need of a loving family. A shelter should be your first choice even if you



²⁰ American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry. (2013, May). *Pets and children*. (Facts for Families No. 75). Retrieved April 20, 2014, from <http://www.aacap.org/>



want a specific breed, because there is a good chance you'll find it there. Keep in mind that some shelters are no-kill, meaning they care for the animals in their charge until they are adopted, while others are able to house animals for only a short period before they must be put down.

Most municipal animal shelters charge an adoption fee, which typically covers vaccinations, spaying or neutering surgery, and either a microchip or a tattoo to help identify the animal should it get lost. However, many shelters offer special deals on animal adoptions during certain periods, which allow you to adopt an animal at a reduced rate. And if you want to look before you drop by, more and more shelters are profiling available animals on their Web sites.

Yet another option is breed-specific rescue organizations, which can be found in most cities. These groups rescue and house specific breeds of dogs or cats, rehabilitate them if necessary, then make them available for adoption to good homes.

There are rescue groups for the most common breeds of dogs and cats, as well as many lesser-known breeds, and groups devoted to animals other than dogs and cats are also growing in popularity. In most cases, there is nothing

wrong with the rescued animals—their owners simply couldn't care for them anymore. Some rescue groups also take in animals removed from breeding mills.

BREEDERS

Breeders are an option, especially if you are looking for a purebred or "designer" breed of dog or cat. Use caution. Not all breeders are

reputable or treat their animals humanely. So-called puppy and kitten mills remain a problem throughout the United States and should be avoided.²¹ If you come across a breeding mill—characterized by squalid conditions and poor animal care—during your efforts to find a new pet, report the operation to the proper authorities immediately.

Responsible breeders have nothing to hide. They will show you where their animals are housed, let you interact with the animals they are looking to sell and at least one of their parents, and provide documentation of their veterinary care. Reputable breeders also socialize their puppies and kittens before they release them.

PET STORES

Some pet stores sell dogs and cats as well as smaller animals, but you should approach them

²¹ The Humane Society of the United States. (2013, May 3). *In the market for a puppy?* Retrieved April 17, 2014, from <http://www.humanesociety.org/>

with caution; many receive the animals they sell from puppy and kitten mills, which means their health and lineage cannot be guaranteed.²² In addition, the conditions in which dogs and cats are kept can vary dramatically from store to store. Some are clean and spacious, but others house animals in cramped cages, don't exercise them properly, and neglect their medical care.

Most pet stores also sell small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and fish. Before you buy, find out where the store gets the animals it sells, and how they were raised. If it sounds like a breeding mill, walk away.

Regardless of what kind of animal you are buying, make sure the store offers a guarantee and will take the animal back if any significant health issues are discovered after you bring it home. Get the guarantee in writing.

²² PetMD. (n.d.). *Where to get a puppy*. Retrieved April 17, 2014, from <http://www.petmd.com/>

Equipment for Your Pet

Regardless of what type of animal you get as pet, you will have to buy some necessary supplies. Of course, what you will need depends on a variety of factors, including the animal's age, your home situation, and whether or not the animal is well socialized.

DOG SUPPLIES

- **Food and water bowls**—These should be sturdy and made of stainless steel or hard plastic; ceramic bowls, while attractive, can break.²³
- **A collar and leash**—These are vital, because your dog should always be under your control when you walk it. If your dog is still a puppy, check its collar often and adjust it as needed.
- **Toys**—All dogs love to play, so toys are a must. Some toys are designed to hold treats, which can make playtime even more fun for your pet.
- **Bed**—Purchase a bed that allows your pet sufficient room to stretch out and either is washable or has a removable cover.
- **Grooming supplies**—For most dogs, a comb or brush, nail clippers, toothbrush, toothpaste, and pet shampoo are all that you'll need. If your dog is a long-haired breed that is prone to developing mats in its fur, an electric trimmer may also be necessary.
 - **Crate**—A wire crate large enough for your dog to stand and turn around in can come in very handy when you need to keep your pet from roaming the house in your absence. Crates are also helpful when houstraining your new addition.
- **Clothing**—If you live in a region that

²³ Nylabone. (n.d.). *Dog supplies*. Retrieved April 18, 2014, from <http://www.nylabone.com/>





gets cold during the winter, your dog will appreciate a sweater or jacket when you take it for a walk. Booties will protect your pet's feet from snow and ice.

CAT SUPPLIES

- **A scratching post**—Cats love to scratch, so give your pet an appropriate surface on which to do it, or risk having your favorite furniture clawed to shreds.
- **Litter and a litter box**
- **Portable carrier**—You'll find a carrier invaluable when you have to take your cat to the veterinarian or on any trip. Make sure it is well ventilated and escape-proof.
- **Perch**—Cats have a fondness for high places. Most pet stores sell easy-to-assemble perch kits, or you can build your own.

Selecting the Right Stuff

Dogs and cats have unique nutritional needs, so choosing the right food for each is important to your pet's growth and overall health.²⁴ Making that decision can be difficult, however, because of the seemingly endless array of pet food brands and specialty diets.

Make sure that the food you choose is nutritionally sound and appropriate for the life stage of your pet. Read the nutritional adequacy statement on the label. It should say something such as, "This food is complete and balanced for all life stages," or "This food is complete

²⁴ PetMD. (n.d.). *How to choose the best dog food*. Retrieved April 18, 2014, from <http://www.petmd.com/>

and balanced for adult maintenance."

The nutritional needs of dogs and cats change considerably as they age, and the food you give your pet should reflect these changes. You can also use your pet's food to address certain health issues, such as kidney disease, obesity, allergies, and arthritis. However, consult your veterinarian before placing your pet on a specialty diet.

Pet-Proofing Your Home

Pets, like small children, often get into trouble by snooping where they shouldn't. That is why you should pet-proof your home before you bring an animal into your family.²⁵

Start by looking behind and under furniture, behind all appliances, and along baseboards. Block any holes, niches, and other openings that might attract your pet. Kittens can wriggle through surprisingly small holes, so you can't be too careful.

Kitchen and Bathroom

- Use childproof latches to keep cupboards locked, especially if they contain potentially hazardous chemicals.
- Store medications, cleaners, laundry supplies, and other dangerous substances on high shelves.
- Cover trash cans with a locking lid or store in a latched cabinet.
- Keep all food out of your pet's reach. Some human foods are dangerous for dogs and cats, and certain kinds of food wrappers can be a choking hazard.

²⁵ American Humane Association. (n.d.). *Pet-proofing your home*. Retrieved April 19, 2014, from <http://www.americanhumane.org/>

- Keep the toilet lid down so that your pet can't accidentally fall in and drown, or ingest poisonous cleaning chemicals.

Living Room

- Place dangling wires from lamps, DVD players, televisions, and telephones out of reach.
- Store all children's games and toys. Small pieces can be a choking hazard.
- Place fragile knickknacks on a high shelf, away from curious paws and wagging tails.
- Remove all houseplants that may be poisonous, and move hanging plants that could be accessed by leaping from a nearby surface.
- Secure all heating and air conditioning vents.
- If you sew or enjoy related crafts, properly store thread, needles, and other bits and pieces so they cannot be swallowed by curious kittens or puppies.

Bedrooms

- Keep clothes and shoes in closed closets and dressers. Shoelaces and loose buttons are a dangerous choking hazard to small animals.
- Make sure dressers and bedside tables are clear of medications, cosmetics, and other items that could be consumed by pets.

Garage

- Secure all access ways to the garage so that they cannot be accidentally opened by a larger dog.
- Store all chemicals in locked cabinets or on high shelves.
- Antifreeze is extremely poisonous to dogs, so make sure you immediately clean up any spills.



- Keep sharp tools and other objects out of reach.

Holiday Safety Tips

The holidays are a lot of fun, but many aspects of these joyous occasions can pose a hazard to dogs, cats, and other pets. Here are a few tips from the ASPCA for keeping your pet safe and healthy.²⁶

- Keep all holiday food out of reach. Items like chicken and turkey bones can be a choking hazard.
- Avoid holiday decorations that could endanger your pet, such as tinsel, fragile glass bulbs, and so on. As you decorate, ask yourself: Is this something my pet could swallow? If the answer is yes, place it out of reach.
- Never leave lighted candles unattended.
- Secure holiday trees and larger decorations so they cannot be knocked over. Change tree water regularly, and dissuade your pet from drinking it because it could contain illness-causing bacteria.
- Do not leave alcoholic drinks unattended. Consumption of alcohol can be dangerous, even deadly, to dogs.

²⁶ American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. (n.d.). *Holiday safety tips*. Retrieved April 18, 2014, from <http://www.aspca.org/>

- Make sure that all holiday plants are nonpoisonous. Mistletoe and holly, in particular, can make dogs and cats sick if ingested.

Training Your Pet

Animal owners have an obligation to teach their pets to be good citizens. This means training your dog or cat to behave properly when around people or other animals, and to follow basic commands. A dog that is not properly trained may exhibit undesirable behavior, such as excitedly jumping on people, that makes it unpleasant to be around. Training is usually not difficult, although it requires time and consistency. It can be fun, and it can strengthen the special bond between you and your pet.

There are a number of ways to train your pet. Professional trainers can be found in most towns, and your veterinarian can also make recommendations. Many large pet stores also host seminars taught by trainers. Certified animal behaviorists can be hard to find and are usually reserved for pets with known behavioral issues. As with hiring any expert, be sure the trainer's philosophies about animal care and treatment are sound and aligned with yours, verify his or her training or experience, and ask for references.

TRAINING YOUR DOG

A reward-only approach is the best way to begin training.²⁷ Every time your dog does what you want it to do, reward immediately with a

small treat. Remember, a treat isn't always food. For many dogs, it's a toss of their favorite toy or a pat on the rump! If your dog does not do what you want, withhold the reward and try again. Don't be concerned if your pet backslides a bit during the training period. Continue with positive reinforcement until the desired behavior is established.

For best results, exercise your dog prior to training, and keep training sessions frequent, brief, and positive—just 10 to 15 minutes at a time when training is going well. Dogs have short attention spans and are easily distracted. If your dog loses focus, take a break to let it calm down, then resume training. If a particular training session isn't going well, just come back to it another time. Training takes time and lots of repetition in a variety of surroundings. There's no need to frustrate yourself or your dog. Remember to keep training fun for both of you!

Training is important for your pet's safety as well as good manners. It also makes your pet a more sociable family member. There are several actions your pet should be able to do when commanded, including

- Come when called
- Sit and stay
- Lie down and stay
- Leave it

There are many situations in which your dog must follow your commands to be safe. The most common of these involve running into people or dogs who have not learned good

²⁷ American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. (n.d.). *Training your dog*. Retrieved April 18, 2014, from <http://www.aspc.org>



canine manners. *Come* can help you direct your dog away from trouble in the dog park. *Sit* and *stay* can make introductions to new pet friends less stressful. Once you and your dog have mastered the important commands, you can use the same training techniques to teach your pet tricks such as how to shake hands or roll over.

PROFESSIONAL TRAINERS

Sometimes you need help. Whether it's a question of boosting your confidence, maximizing your training time, or working on a particular behavior problem, there are experts who can assist you.²⁸ They include

- **Trainers**—Education and experience can vary greatly, so check the background and credentials of anyone who calls him- or herself an *animal trainer*, *behavior counselor*, or *pet therapist*. Some trainers are certified, others are not.
- **Certified Professional Dog Trainers**—These individuals are certified by the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers, an independent organization created by the Association of Professional Dog Trainers. However, that doesn't guarantee competence or experience, so ask for references from previous clients, and conduct a careful interview before accepting services.

²⁸ American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. (n.d.). *Finding professional help*. Retrieved April 18, 2014, from <http://www.asPCA.org/>

- **Veterinary Behaviorists**—Some veterinarians receive specialized education in animal behavior and earn certification through the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists. In addition to treating pet behavior problems, veterinary behaviorists can also prescribe medication to address issues such as separation anxiety and compulsive behaviors.

TRAINING METHODS TO AVOID

A gentle hand goes a long way in training a dog to behave well. Like people, animals respond better to kindness and positive reinforcement than to any kind of punishment.

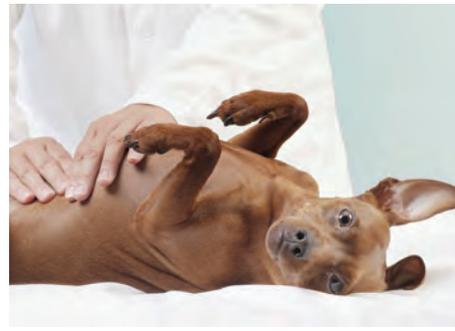
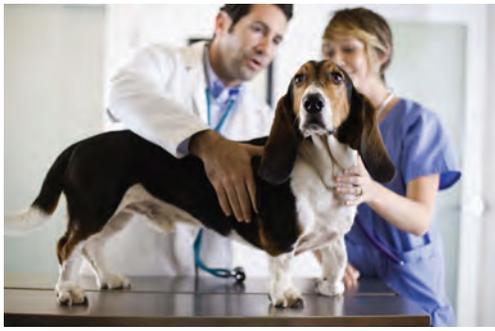
The Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT) discourages the use of so-called *dominance training*. In this approach, the owner forces the dog into a submissive position within the family hierarchy by showing it “who’s the boss” through specific actions.²⁹

According to the APDT, rather than making a dog submissive and easier to control, dominance training may make the animal fearful and less willing to engage in positive behaviors. It can also make a dog more aggressive as it tries to protect itself from what it perceives as an aggressor.

There are far more effective ways to get your pets to do what you want. Dogs are individuals,

²⁹ The Association of Professional Dog Trainers. (n.d.). *Dominance and dog training*. Retrieved April 18, 2014, from <http://www.apdt.com/>





and learn at their own pace and through various means. Dominance training, when carried to extremes, borders on cruelty, and that's no way to treat something you love.

Selecting a Veterinarian

Choosing a veterinarian is an important decision, because that individual will be responsible for your pet's health and safety over the course of its lifetime. It's not a decision you should make lightly. After all, you want the very best care for your new family member.

There are several ways to find a good veterinarian. First, you can ask friends, neighbors, and family members with pets for their recommendations. In addition, the American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) features a list of accredited veterinary practices by geographic region on its Web site at http://www.aaaha.org/pet_owner/.³⁰

Visit prospective veterinarians without your pet first, so you can meet the doctor and check out the facilities. Are they clean, tidy, and well organized? Are staff members polite and friendly? Are animals separated by species? Some clinics have an entrance for dogs and another for cats to avoid problems in the waiting room.

Ask how many veterinarians are on staff, and whether you'll have the same doctor every time you visit. Are walk-ins accepted? Does the facility offer 24-hour emergency services? How

³⁰ WebMD. (n.d.). *Finding the right vet for your pet*. Retrieved April 19, 2014, from <http://pets.webmd.com/>

about boarding facilities? Are any of the doctors on staff board-certified specialists? Give the practice brownie points if the answer to any of these questions is yes.³¹

Over the course of your pet's life, there will be numerous reasons why you may visit the veterinarian. Puppies and kittens require important vaccinations, and older animals will need boosters. All animals should receive a checkup at least twice a year, and there will be the inevitable emergency visits. Veterinarians can also help you with behavioral problems, life-stage issues, and palliative care for older animals when needed.

VETERINARY SPECIALISTS

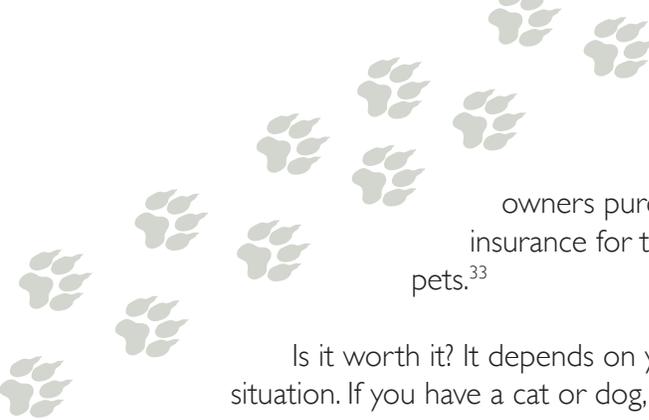
Like human physicians, veterinarians sometimes specialize in a particular aspect of animal medicine. The AVMA currently recognizes 22 veterinary specialty organizations comprising 41 specialties. These specialty organizations are known as colleges, but they are certifying bodies, not schools in the traditional sense.³² A veterinary specialist can literally be a lifesaver when it comes to your pet's health, but such services can be pricey. One contributing factor is the advanced technology that specialists often rely on to do their jobs.

PET INSURANCE

Veterinary care can be costly. Routine checkups can cost more than \$100, and emergency care can cost hundreds, even thousands of dollars. Because of this potential expense, many pet

³¹ The Humane Society of the United States. (2014, April 21). *Choosing a veterinarian*. Retrieved April 19, 2014, from <http://www.humanesociety.org/>

³² American Veterinary Medical Association. (n.d.). *Veterinary specialists*. Retrieved April 19, 2014, from <https://www.avma.org/>



owners purchase insurance for their pets.³³

Is it worth it? It depends on your situation. If you have a cat or dog, the answer may be yes; if you have only pocket pets, then probably not. Many people find that insurance gives them peace of mind should something serious happen to their pet. But many financial experts suggest you would be better off putting a few dollars aside each month in an emergency medical fund for your pet in lieu of buying insurance.

There are many pet insurance companies from which to choose, and they vary in regard to what is covered, the cost of premiums, payouts per claim, and co-pays.³⁴ Shop around, and make sure you understand what you are getting for your money. Many plans reimburse up to 90% of medical bills, but there can be restrictions.

33 LaPonsie, M. (2013, October 16). *Should you buy pet insurance?* Retrieved April 20, 2014, from <http://money.msn.com/>

34 Weisbaum, H. (n.d.). *Pet Insurance: A good deal? Or a rip off?* Retrieved April 20, 2014, from <http://www.nbcnews.com/>

Full-coverage fees average \$19 a month for cats and around \$30 a month for dogs, depending on breed and any preexisting conditions.³⁵

Boarding Your Pet

As much as you love your pets, there will be times when you will have to leave them behind. This means finding a place to board them, an issue best addressed before you need it. There are several options when it comes to boarding pets, including

- Boarding kennels
- Veterinary practices with boarding facilities
- Pet stores
- Private pet sitters

Boarding kennels are among the most common options for pet owners and offer several benefits, including companionship, playtime with other dogs, and experienced supervision. Prices can vary and may depend on such factors as the breed of your dog or cat, the animal's special needs, and the length of stay.

Before placing your pet in a boarding kennel, visit the facility and meet the staff. The building should be clean, odor-free, and orderly, and the staff friendly and enthusiastic.³⁶ Questions to ask include

- Does each animal get its own room?
- How often are the animals exercised? How many staff members participate in exercise time?
- How are emergencies addressed?
- How are the animals cared for on weekends? Is staff on premises?
- Is a veterinarian on call 24/7?

35 Pet insurance 101. (2014, May 23). *All You Magazine*.

36 American Kennel Club. (n.d.). *Boarding your dog*. Retrieved April 21, 2014, from <http://www.akc.org/>

Reputable boarding kennels will require that your pet's vaccinations be up-to-date and that your pet be free of illness. Most also require that your dog be vaccinated for *bordetella* and *canine influenza*, highly contagious infections that can spread quickly in closed quarters. Bring a copy of your pet's health records with you as you tour the facility to show that your pet's shots are current.³⁷

VETERINARY BOARDING

Many veterinary practices offer nonmedical boarding to clients on an as-needed basis. These services are usually not free, but they do give you extra peace of mind knowing that your pet is being cared for in a medical facility—especially if your pet has special medical needs. Most veterinary boarding facilities offer the same amenities as commercial boarding kennels, including playtime with staff and interaction with other animals.

PET STORES

Some pet stores, including many national chains, also offer boarding services. The rules are usually the same as those of unaffiliated commercial boarding kennels, including the requirement that an animal's vaccinations be up-to-date.

PRIVATE SITTERS

A private pet sitter is a great option for owners who prefer to leave their pets at home—especially older pets and those with special needs. When hiring a pet sitter, confirm his or her experience and insurance, and call two or three references. Most pet sitters will visit your pet at least twice daily to feed it, walk it, and play with it. Some will also board your pet in their home if necessary.

³⁷ Jimerson, D. (n.d.). *12 top tips for boarding your pet*. Retrieved April 21, 2014, from <http://www.bhg.com/>

Caring for an Aging Pet

With proper care and a lot of love, your pet should live to a ripe old age. But with age come changes in such things as physical appearance, health, and activity level. And that means your approach to care will have to change, too.

When it comes to animals, old age is relative. Dogs age more quickly than cats and may be considered old at 10 to 15 years, depending on breed. Larger dogs tend to age more quickly than smaller dogs. A cat is considered old at 15 to 20 years.³⁸

The AVMA advises semiannual veterinary visits for aging dogs and cats as a way of catching illness early and ensuring that an animal ages well. Senior physicals may include dental care, blood work, and specific checks for ailments more common among older animals. You can help your pet age well by being proactive. For example

- Maintain your pet's mobility through daily exercise.
- Make sure your pet receives vaccinations appropriate for its life stage.
- Maintain your pet's cognitive function through mentally stimulating interaction.
- Modify your pet's environment to accommodate any age-related issues. If your pet

³⁸ American Veterinary Medical Association. (2009, February). *Senior pet care (FAQ)*. Retrieved April 23, 2014, from <https://www.avma.org/>



should brush your pet's teeth on a regular basis and bring it

has mobility problems due to arthritis, for example, move its bed to a lower level so it no longer has to climb stairs.

- Make sure your pet maintains a healthy weight.

The first signs that your pet is getting older may include changes in behavior or routines, which may also indicate health or other problems.

Changes to watch for include

- Increased vocalization such as barking, mewing, crying, and baying
- Decreased interaction with family members
- Aggressive or protective behavior
- House soiling
- Decreased response to commands
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Decreased self-bathing or grooming

Among dogs, some of these changes may be indicative of *canine cognitive dysfunction*. This condition was first identified in the 1990s and can affect dogs in much the same way that Alzheimer's disease affects humans. Common symptoms include confusion, disorientation, irritability, and lack of awareness of surroundings. Canine cognitive disorder sometimes can be slowed with medication, but there is no cure.

It's very important that you pay attention to your pet's dental care. Tooth decay and other forms of dental disease can have a dramatic impact on an animal's overall health, including tooth loss and the development of serious conditions such as heart disease.³⁹ You

to your veterinarian for a professional cleaning as needed. If you notice that your pet appears to be in pain while eating, has extremely bad breath, or is losing teeth, take it to a veterinarian right away.

Euthanasia: When It's Time to Say Goodbye

Having a pet euthanized can be the most emotionally difficult decision a pet owner must make, but sometimes it is necessary. In most cases, the decision to euthanize is made jointly by the pet's owner and veterinarian, and is based on a variety of factors, including the age of the pet, existing medical conditions, and the long-term outlook. Common reasons for euthanasia include an accident or illness that has left the animal incapacitated, untreatable chronic pain, a terminal illness such as cancer, and diminished quality of life as a result of advanced age.⁴⁰

Sometimes it can be difficult to determine if an animal has reached the stage where euthanasia is the best option. The American Veterinary Medical Association suggests using a 10-point scale to determine your pet's quality of life based on such factors as pain, hunger, hydration, happiness, and mobility. The lower the score in each area, the more an animal may be suffering—a strong indicator of whether it should be euthanized.⁴¹

40 American Humane Association. (n.d.). *Euthanasia: Making the decision*. Retrieved April 24, 2014, from <http://www.americanhumane.org/>

41 American Veterinary Medical Association. (2009, February). *Senior pet care (FAQ)*. Retrieved April 24, 2014, from <https://www.avma.org/>

39 American Kennel Club. (n.d.). *Aging dogs*. Retrieved April 23, 2014, from <http://www.akc.org/>

Euthanasia is most commonly done in a veterinary clinic, but some vets make house calls. For dogs and cats, the process involves an overdose of an anesthetic called *sodium pentobarbital*, which causes unconsciousness and slowly stops the heart. Often a sedative will be administered before the final injection. The procedure takes just a few minutes and is completely painless.

Having a pet euthanized should be a family decision, including children if they are mature enough to deal with such issues. Each family member should have the opportunity for a private goodbye with the animal before the procedure. Afterward, it often helps for family members to share their favorite memories of the animal; this can make saying goodbye a little easier.

Children should be prepared in advance for the loss of a pet—never have a pet euthanized without telling them first. Discuss the decision, why it is necessary, and answer any questions the child may have. You may also want to give your children an age-appropriate book on grieving the loss of a pet to help them through the process.

Once your pet has passed away, the veterinary staff will wrap up the body and present it to you for burial. What you do with the remains should be a family decision. Home burial with a marker is a very popular option, as is cremation. Many owners who choose cremation keep their deceased pet's ashes in decorative urns. Burial at a commercial pet cemetery is another option, if there is one in your area.

The loss of a pet can be emotionally grueling, especially if the animal has been part of the

family for some time. Feelings of sadness, even depression, can last for weeks, and are perfectly normal. Your first inclination may be to immediately go out and buy a replacement pet, but that's probably not a good idea. Instead, give yourself time to process your loss, and enjoy the memory of your pet. Once your family's sadness has diminished, you can begin the search for another pet.

Additional Resources

Books

- *The Complete Healthy Dog Handbook* by Betsy Brevitz, DVM, Workman Publishing Company, 2009
- *Dogs All-in-One for Dummies* by Consumer Dummies, For Dummies, 2010
- *Complete Dog Care Manual (ASPCA)* by Bruce Fogle, DK Adult, 2010
- *My Dog! A Kids' Guide to Keeping a Happy and Healthy Pet* by Michael J. Rosen, Workman Publishing Company, 2011
- *The Cat Owner's Manual: Operating Instructions, Troubleshooting Tips, and Advice on Lifetime Maintenance* by Dr. David Brunner and Sam Stall, Quirk Books, 2004
- *Cats for Dummies* by Gina Spadafori and Paul D. Pion, For Dummies, 2000
- *The Complete Cat's Meow: Everything You Need to Know About Caring for Your Cat* by Darlene Arden, Howell Book House, 2011





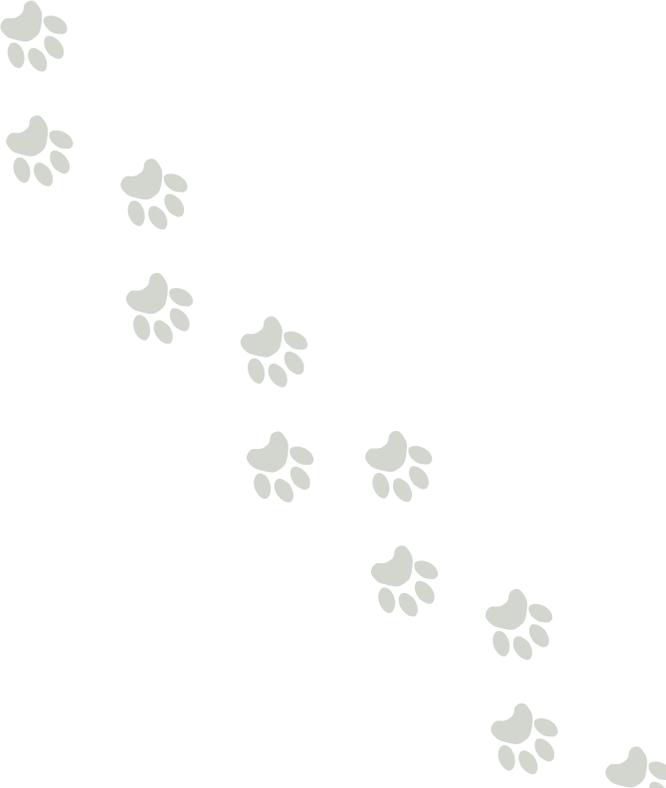
Web Sites

- American Kennel Club: Breed information and general dog care (<http://www.akc.org/>)
- The Cat Fanciers' Association: Breed information and general cat care (<http://www.cfainc.org/>)
- American Veterinary Medical Association: All aspects of pet care (<https://www.avma.org/public/petcare/Pages/default.aspx>)
- PetMD: Vet-approved site containing essential information on pet care (<http://www.petmd.com>)
- Petco: Pet information sheets for first-time owners (https://www.petco.com/petco_Page_PC_petcareinfo.aspx)

Resources for Low-Cost Services

- The ASPCA has partnered with PetSmart Charities® to help pet owners find low-cost spaying and neutering programs in their communities. To locate one in your area, visit <http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/spayneuter>.
- The Humane Society of the United States offers a comprehensive list of pet financial aid-related organizations for those in need of assistance paying for veterinary care. Many organizations also assist with low-cost veterinary prescriptions. To see what's available in your community, visit http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/resources/tips/trouble_affording_pet.html#.UIb3CVdsIpc.
- Many municipalities have charitable organizations that assist low-income families in purchasing food and supplies for their pets. To find out what is available in your area, place "Your city + pet food pantries" in your favorite Internet search engine.





**PET
CARE**
handbook

A Guide to
Pet Care
Options

