

## Some Things To Do If You Are A New Pet Owner

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If you've gotten a new companion animal over the holidays, here are some things to think about to help your relationship get off to a good start.

**1. Develop a long-term relationship with a veterinarian.** Few things can extend the life of your pet or improve the quality of her life more than regular veterinary care. Your veterinarian can also be an excellent resource for the answers to questions about nutrition, grooming and many other topics, as well as referring you to other people such as trainers, behaviorists and boarding facilities. If you already have a regular veterinarian for your other pets, make sure to take your new pet in for a health check and vaccinations.

**2. Be realistic in your expectations about pet ownership.** Your life will change because of this new critter who has come to share the rest of his life with you. Expect to lose something of value to you, because of your pet's normal chewing and playful behavior. This is especially true with puppies and kittens. Your new pet will need training to learn appropriate behaviors. Pets also housesoil from time to time, or vomit or have diarrhea when not feeling well. Dog and cat hair will also accumulate on furniture, rugs and clothes. Pet owners must develop a higher level of tolerance for household messes.

**3. Provide a safe, secure place for your pet when she is outside.** Dogs and cats who run loose in the neighborhood can not only be a hazard to people, but are also at risk for injury and a shortened life. Some cities now have ordinances against cats roaming outside of their own yard. Outdoor containment systems for cats are available. Make sure that your pet has adequate shelter from weather extremes whenever she is outside.

**4. Don't let bad habits develop.** Puppies who jump up on people or kittens who play too rough may be cute for awhile, but these behaviors can become serious problems when the animals mature. The more these annoying behaviors are allowed to go on, the harder they are to change. Focus on encouraging and reinforcing good behavior rather than punishing bad behavior. For example, rather than scolding your puppy for jumping up, reward her instead for sitting when greeting people.

**5. Become an educated pet owner.** Ask your veterinarian or local animal shelter for some good books and videos about cat and dog behavior. You must learn to be a discriminating consumer of educational materials about dog and cat behavior, as the popular literature contains many myths and misconceptions, some of which can actually harm your relationship with your pet. Don't believe everything you read. Trust your instincts – if you don't feel comfortable following the recommendations contained in popular materials, then don't.

Adding a new pet to the family is usually a mixture of fun and frustration, but preparation professional help can make things go more smoothly.