



## Selecting a Pet for Your Family

What pet should you get? A cat? A dog? A hedgehog? And, of course, every kid wants a pony!



Whether you are considering a pet bird or counseling someone who is, we have information and tips that will help.

When you choose a pet, you accept responsibility for the health and welfare of another living thing. You're making a promise to care for your pet for his/her entire life. You also become responsible for your pet's impact on your family, friends and community.

Your pet-owning experience will be most enjoyable if you consider carefully what type of pet best suits your family, home, and lifestyle. Unfulfilled expectations are a leading reason why people give away, abandon, or give pets up for adoption, so invest the time and effort to make an informed decision and ensure the years with your future pet are happy ones.

When considering a pet that's right for you and your family, consider the following:

- **Do you already have any pets?** If so, will your current pet accept another pet of the same or a different species? If you're not certain, your veterinarian can help you answer this question.
- **What are you looking for in a pet?** Do you want a lap warmer? A running buddy? Or a pet that's easy to care for? This will affect your pet choice. Who will care for your pet? Consider the experience level and abilities of the caretaker who will provide for the pet, as well as how much time they will have available. If you have young children, a pet that's active at night would not be as good a choice as one that is active during the time your child is awake. Although it's good to involve children in caring for pets if you have them, it is unrealistic to expect a child to be solely responsible for any pet's care and welfare.
- **Do local laws or your housing arrangement limit your choice of pet?** If you rent, your landlord may restrict the type or number of pets you can have. Condominium and townhouse associations may have similar restrictions. If you live in a city, your choice of pet may be very different from your choice if you lived in the suburbs or the country. Some species or breeds of pets are not allowed by building, town, county or state ordinances. Consider also the amount of exercise your pet will need, and whether your living arrangements accommodate that need.
- **Are you able to provide the amount of attention your pet will need?** And how many years are you willing to commit yourself to caring for a pet? Different species and breeds of animals have differing needs for companionship and attention, as well as differing life expectancies. For example, some larger birds have been known to live more than 100 years! Do your research to make sure you have a realistic understanding of the commitment you're making when you get a particular type of pet.

- **Can you afford the costs of caring for your pet?** Some species or breeds of pets have special needs that may require additional cost or effort. Think of the needs your pet will have for food, housing, socialization, exercise, grooming and veterinary care, and make sure you can afford and are willing and able to provide them. Our [Money Tips for Caring Pet Owners](#) article offers good advice that can help reduce pet-related expenses, but every pet requires a financial commitment. Some pets (such as reptiles, amphibians, pocket pets and birds) require special veterinary care, so make sure there's a veterinarian in your area who can provide that care.
- **How long will you be away from your pet?** Do you work long hours or travel frequently? Some pets need more frequent exercise or feeding, and might not be a good choice for owners who spend a lot of time away from home.
- **Who will care for your pet in your absence?** Consider not just short-term absences, but also what might happen if your pet outlives you, and plan accordingly for your pet's care.
- **What future changes might occur in your living situation that would affect your ability to keep your pet in years to come?** You are making a commitment to that pet for their life, so consider what you will do with your pet if your life situation changes.

## Your veterinarian can help

If you're not sure that a pet you're considering is right for your family, talk to a veterinarian. Veterinarians can help you better understand a potential pet's needs and how they may or may not be compatible with your family's lifestyle.

Once you choose your pet, your veterinarian will help you provide the best care for your pet to ensure a healthy life. Regular veterinary exams and preventive care are critical to your pet's health and welfare. Most owners are aware that dogs and cats need appropriate vaccinations and parasite control, but other species benefit from routine veterinary care too!

## Wild animals as pets

Wild animals should not be kept as pets. They are not domesticated and often do not behave in a manner that's acceptable in a family home. Wild animals have specific needs that are difficult or impossible to meet in a home environment, and this can put their health and life at risk. In addition, they may pose a threat of disease for other pets and for human family members. Leave wild animals wild and appreciate them from afar, for your safety and theirs.