

Preparing for your pet/ General Pet care

1. Be prepared

- A pet is a huge commitment and they will share your home for years.
- Good pets are a reflection of good planning and consistent effort.
- Before you bring home any pet, you must be prepared to lay the groundwork, potentially adjust your housing arrangements to be pet-friendly, set aside time daily, put in the training, buy the right food and be able to pay for veterinary care when needed.
- Understand your domestic situation and what kind of pet will be the best fit. Committing to the wrong pet can cause situations that are sources of ongoing, prolonged stress for both owners and pets. For example, bringing home a cat that is reactive to your small children, or keeping an energetic dog that requires plenty of exercise in a small apartment.

2. Selecting the right pet

- When choosing a pet, choose the type of animal that is appropriate for your household. Some temperaments are not suited to children and some animals just will not get along with others of the same or different species.
- Once you know what type of animal you are after, consider the most appropriate type or breed. Consider costs of general care and veterinary care. Larger animals are generally more expensive to care for and feed properly.
- Specifically bred puppies will usually provide more predictability regarding adult size and temperament while adopting an adult dog will allow an insight into the mature personality of the dog after the first meeting.
- Kitten personalities can be difficult to assess, so adopting adult cats can give a better guarantee of temperament.

Certain cat breeds have particular typical behavioural traits, so sometimes knowing the breed temperament you are after can help you choose the right cat.



3. Buying from a breeder

- Ensure that you are buying from a responsible breeder.
- Make sure their animals have had all the recommended breed-specific health screening done.
- Ideally view the parents first.
- Educate yourself about breed-specific diseases and disorders.

4. Adopting from a shelter

- Be very clear about what type of animal will fit into your home and lifestyle well before you choose it.
- Know what you are looking for and wait until you find it.
- If you don't know animals, find someone who can help you assess potential pets and stay objective.

5. Common stress triggers for pets

- Dogs and cats are by nature social animals. In their natural environment, they form social groups and are stimulated by the constantly changing environment, flux of their social group, playing, fighting, sometimes hunting, often scavenging and eating a somewhat varied diet.
- Pets usually need to fit into our busy schedules, so some of the basic requirements for their emotional well-being can be discounted or completely overlooked. Backyards are becoming smaller or non-existent and many animals live on their own without the company of other animals.
- Many of our pets are treated as highly valued family members however anxiety-related disorders are increasingly common and they usually manifest as unacceptable behaviours.
- Stress triggers and resultant anxiety disorders can be prevented by ensuring the environment in which our pets live promotes emotional well-being.



6. Develop a Routine

- Establishing and maintaining a routine is very important, can be difficult and requires a high level of commitment from the owner.
- A comprehensive routine includes scheduled meal times, walk times and/or play times, and routine sleeping patterns.
- If an animal's expectations of the day are met regularly and on time, their anxiety levels remain lower.
- You must be prepared to set aside time for your pet each day to meet their basic care needs and provide social interaction.
- Environmental enrichment is always important, not just for destructive animals but for any animal that spends time by itself for hours during the day. Consider treat balls, treat mazes and treasure hunts, as well as chew toys. Small dietary variations within meals can also help with environmental enrichment.



7. Set boundaries and commit to training consistently

- Ensure everyone in the household understands what behaviours are acceptable.
- Be patient, calm and consistent when teaching your pet the rules of the house.
- Expect younger animals to take longer to learn.
- Giving attention is important however in dogs, rewarding over-excited behaviour should be avoided. Waiting for calm behaviour before giving attention will prevent inadvertent positive reinforcement of boisterous behaviour.
- Educate yourself about how to teach and train your chosen pet.
- For dogs, consider puppy school or obedience training for the benefits of both learning and socialisation.
- Educate yourself about how to read your pet's body language so you can meet their needs as effectively as possible. In particular, learn how to tell when your pet is stressed.
- If you have a very busy household with young children, provide an area for your pet where they can retreat to if need be and always fully supervise children with pets so that if you need to intervene they are within reach (not just in the same room). Intervene at the first sign of stressed body language from your pet.