

What to Consider Before Adopting a Pet



If you're like most of us, falling in love with a pet is easy. And no wonder! Sharing your home with a four-legged friend can be one of life's greatest joys. Dogs, cats, and other pets give us unconditional love, loyalty and acceptance, provide constant companionship, and even help relieve stress after a hard day's work.

Adopting a pet, though, is a big decision. Dogs and cats require lots of time, money, and commitment—more than 15 years' worth in many cases. Pet ownership can be rewarding, but only if you think through your decision *before* you adopt a companion.

Things to Consider

The fact that you're thinking about adopting from an animal shelter means you're on the right track—it's definitely a responsible, caring thing to do. Thank you! But here are some things to think over first:

- **Why do you want a pet?** It's amazing how many people fail to ask themselves this simple question *before* they get a pet. Don't forget that pets may be with you 10, 15, even 20 years.
- **Do you have time for a pet?** Dogs, cats, and other animal companions cannot be ignored just because you're tired or busy. They require food, water, exercise, care, and companionship every day of every year.
- **Can you afford a pet?** The costs of pet ownership can be significant. Licenses, training classes, veterinary care, grooming, toys, food, kitty litter, and other expenses can add up quickly.
- **Are you prepared to deal with special problems that a pet can cause?** Scratched-up furniture, accidents from animals who aren't yet housetrained, fleas, pet hair, and unexpected medical emergencies are unfortunate but common aspects of pet ownership.
- **Can you have a pet where you live?** Many rental communities don't allow pets, and most of the rest have restrictions on species or breed or size. Or, they allow pets, but you must first pay a pet damage deposit or additional monthly rent. Make sure you know the rules and restrictions *before* you bring a companion animal home.
- **Is it a good time for you to adopt a pet?** If you have kids under six years old, for instance, you might consider waiting a few years before you adopt a pet. Pet ownership requires children who are mature enough to be responsible. If you're a student, in the military, or travel frequently as part of your work, waiting until you settle down is wise.
- **Are your living arrangements suitable for the animal you have in mind?** Animal size is not the only variable to think about here. For example, some small dogs such as terriers are very active—they require a great deal of exercise. On the other hand, some big dogs are laid back and quite content to lie on a couch all day. Choose an animal who can accommodate your living arrangements.
- **Are you considering the right animal for your lifestyle?** Think about what you like to do, and what you'd like to do with a companion animal. Are you a homebody? A runner?

Have allergies? Like to go for walks? Have a lot of friends with animals? The answers to these and other lifestyle questions will help you determine the most appropriate age, size, temperament and more?

- **Will you be a responsible pet owner?** This includes not only obeying community leash and licensing laws and keeping identification tags on your pets, but being responsible for your pet in public, and keeping your pet safe at home. Of course, giving your pet love, companionship, exercise, a healthy diet, and regular veterinary care are other essentials.
- **Finally, are you prepared to keep and care for the pet for his or her entire lifetime?** When you adopt a pet, you are making a commitment to care for the animal for his or her lifetime. Sharing your life with a companion animal can bring incredible rewards, but only if you're willing to make the necessary commitments of time, money, responsibility, and love—for the life of the pet.

Need some help answering some of these important questions. Visit your local animal shelter, talk to one of the shelter's adoption counselors, and meet some of their available animals. Take the time to make a decision that will bring a lifetime of rewards, for you and your pet.