



Pet Care

Feeding Fresh Food

You've seen or heard the commercials for fresh pet food. You probably already know it comes with an increased price tag over traditional pet food. It also, however, comes with increased benefits.

Feeding pets a fresh food diet has numerous health and quality of life benefits for your pets. Here's a look at what you need to know.

NUTRITIONAL BENEFITS

Fresh food for pets often contains higher quality proteins, healthy fats, and a variety of vitamins and minerals. Unlike kibble, which can be highly processed and may lose nutrients during production, fresh food maintains its natural nutritional value. This can lead to better overall health.

The American Kennel Club points to benefits such as promoting heart health, increasing energy levels, making coats shiny, treating bad breath and improving eyesight.

IMPROVED DIGESTION AND GUT HEALTH

Fresh foods are easier for pets to digest compared to processed kibble, which often contains fillers and artificial additives. Improved digestion



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can result in healthier stools, fewer gastrointestinal issues and overall better gut health. Research published in 2022 in the journal *Animals* found that fresh food consumption increases gut microbiome diversity.

HEALTHIER WEIGHT AND INCREASED ENERGY

With fewer fillers and low-quality carbohydrates than dry food, fresh food diets

can help maintain a healthy weight and increase energy levels. This reduces the risk of obesity and related health issues, promoting a more active and energetic lifestyle for pets.

BETTER DENTAL HEALTH

If bad breath is a concern for your dog, a fresh diet can help. Chewing on fresh food items like raw bones can reduce plaque and tartar buildup,

resulting in fresher breath.

REDUCED ALLERGIES

Kibble is often packed with potential allergens such as wheat, corn and chicken. A fresh food diet can help avoid allergic reactions by making sure that you know exactly which ingredients your pet is getting.

CONSIDERATIONS

Although the benefits of

feeding fresh food are clear, consider the potential drawbacks. Fresh food is more expensive, and if you prepare it yourself, can be time consuming and take up storage space.

If you can't commit to preparing meals, consider a delivery service that will prepare and deliver fresh pet meals to your door. Of course, this service also comes with additional costs.



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Buying Pet Insurance

Buying pet insurance can help protect you from shouldering the cost of a major medical expense for your pet alone.

Like any kind of insurance plan, there are many options out there, making it crucial that you do your homework before buying a policy.

WHAT'S COVERED

According to Nerd Wallet, basic pet insurance plans typically cover medicine, surgery, hospitalization and other

expenses if your pet is sick or hurt. This could include injuries caused by accidents, and common illnesses such as cancer or diabetes. Genetic conditions may be covered, depending on the plan rules.

These plans typically come at a lower premium.

LIMITATIONS TO COVERAGE

It's important to know that unless you select a more expansive plan, you will be missing out on coverage for preventive care, such as annual checkups and vaccinations, and many more services, such as spaying/neutering, heartworm and flea and tick preventive medications, bloodwork, dental cleanings and

more. These plans are often called “wellness plans” and the increased benefits come with a higher premium.

Insurance plans may not cover pre-existing conditions, such as a congenital heart problem, so be sure to read the policy carefully.

SHOP SMART

Once you know what kind of coverage you need, consider using an online tool, such as Nerd Wallet's comparison tool at bit.ly/3A50BcN, to compare plans.

Your car or home insurance provider might provide pet coverage, and you might qualify for a multiple policy discount. Some employers offer pet insurance discounts to their employees.

Check with your benefits department.

PREPAID PLANS

Some private clinics offer an alternative to insurance, which is more like a pre-paid service plan. Pets need routine care, and paying for these services up front can help prevent large, unexpected vet bills. Prices will vary depending on your pet's size, age and pre-existing conditions.

OTHER SERVICES

Other services that may be included in an insurance or pre-paid plan include virtual vet visits, the ability to chat 24-7 with a nurse, unlimited office visits, nutrition coaching and more.

How Cats Communicate

Our cats can sometimes display behavior that leaves us puzzled.

We should remember that cats are, in fact, animals with millions of years of evolution influencing their behaviors. Often they are trying to communicate with us with their behaviors.

VOCALIZATIONS

Pets meow primarily to communicate with their humans. (Cats don't meow at each other in the wild.) As you get to know your cat, you will come to understand the meanings of their particular meows. They could be happy, hungry, bored, in need of attention or upset. Their meows often become a language between pet and owner.

Purring is almost always a sign of contentedness; while growling and hissing are a cue to back off and give the animal space.

A cat who sees prey it cannot reach, such as a bird perched outside a window, may chirp repeatedly to express excitement and frustration.

Have you ever heard your cat make a trilling sound, kind of like a high-pitched purr? According to PetMD.com, this is often a sound made to convey greetings or gratitude.

Caterwauling, a long low-pitched whine, is used by unsprayed females to try to attract a mate. In spayed animals, this can also be used as a



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way of communicating discontent, pain or fear.

BODY LANGUAGE

If you've been around cats very much, you know their ears can be very expressive. Forward-facing ears signal the cat is interested. When a cat senses potential danger, its ears may

turn outward and scan back and forth to gather data. Ears facing backward combined with a hiss or attempt to scratch are your sign that the cat is in distress.

A cat's eyes are also very telling. When a cat's pupils dilate quickly, this signals the cat is experiencing a strong emotion,

such as fear.

A cat blinking its eyes slowly at you is akin to the cat smiling. It shows trust and contentment. Try slow blinking at your cat first and see if they mimic the behavior.

BEHAVIORAL CLUES

Other ways your cat communi-

cates with you include rubbing against you to mark you with their scent, signaling affection and ownership. Delivering "gifts," such as dead mice or birds, means the cat is attempting to share with you. Kneading you with their paws, or "making biscuits," is likewise a show of affection.

Reptile Tank Essentials

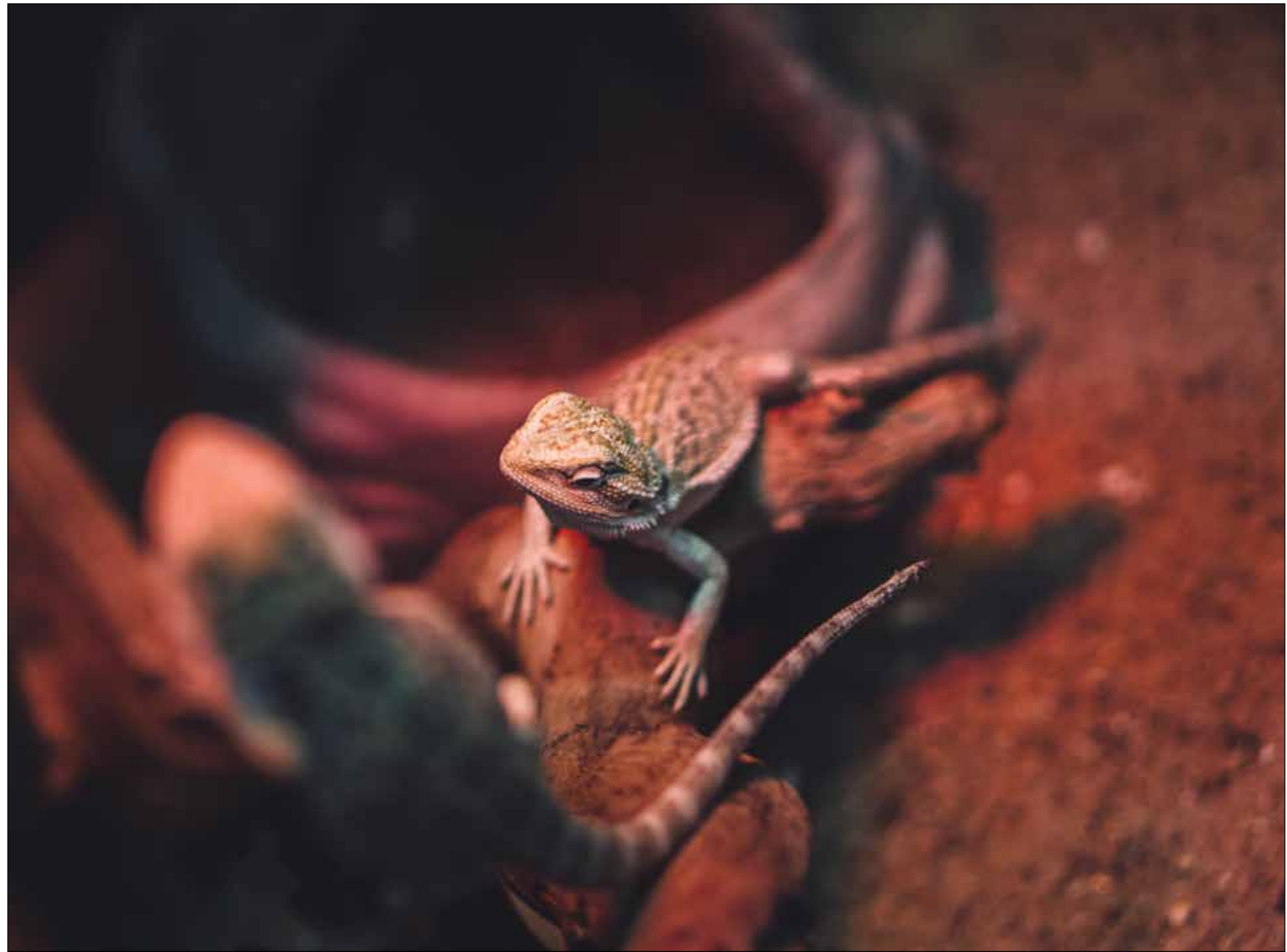
There are many things to consider when setting up a tank for your new reptile. Ensuring you have the essential components will help keep your pet healthy and happy.

Here's a list of what you'll need.

Tank: The tank should be appropriately sized for your reptile. Depending upon the specific reptile's needs, you may want a vertical or horizontal setup. You may need to start with a smaller tank and switch to bigger tanks as your pet grows, until it reaches full size. Glass terrariums provide visibility and durability; PVC tanks are lightweight and customizable; wood terrariums are another option for a visually appealing setup.

Heating and lighting: Reptiles need a heat source to regulate their body temperature. This can be accomplished with a heat lamp, heat mat or dual-purpose bulbs. Place the heat source on one end of the tank to create a temperature gradient. Provide a day/night cycle using UVA and UVB bulbs. UVB light is essential for calcium metabolism and overall health.

Substrate and bedding: Choose reptile carpet, coconut coir, aspen shavings or sand, depending on your animal's natural habitat. You will need



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to ensure the substrate is clean and free from contaminants. Regularly replace or clean the substrate to prevent mold and bacterial growth.

Humidity and ventilation: Be sure your reptile gets enough humidity, based on its specific needs, through regular misting, water bowls, or using a mister or fogger. With

all that moisture, good airflow is essential to prevent mold and ensure a healthy environment. This could include a screen top, as well as ventilation holes lower down in the tank to allow natural air flow.

Decorations and hides: Aim to mimic your reptile's natural habitat with decorations, hiding spots, climbing

structures and non-toxic plants. Secure these items well to keep your pet safe.

Water dish: Place a water dish on the cooler side of the tank to inhibit bacteria growth. If your reptile is a species that likes to submerge, ensure the water dish is large enough.

Safety and security: It's

important to be sure your reptile cannot escape its tank. Securely lock all openings. Keep a thermometer and hygrometer on hand to monitor temperature and humidity levels and adjust as necessary.

By following these steps, you can create a safe and comfortable home for your reptile.

Why Do Dogs Lick?

A dog that licks its owner can be endearing. After all, who doesn't enjoy a sloppy hello kiss from their pup? But if it's becoming a compulsive habit, licking can be a concern for owners.

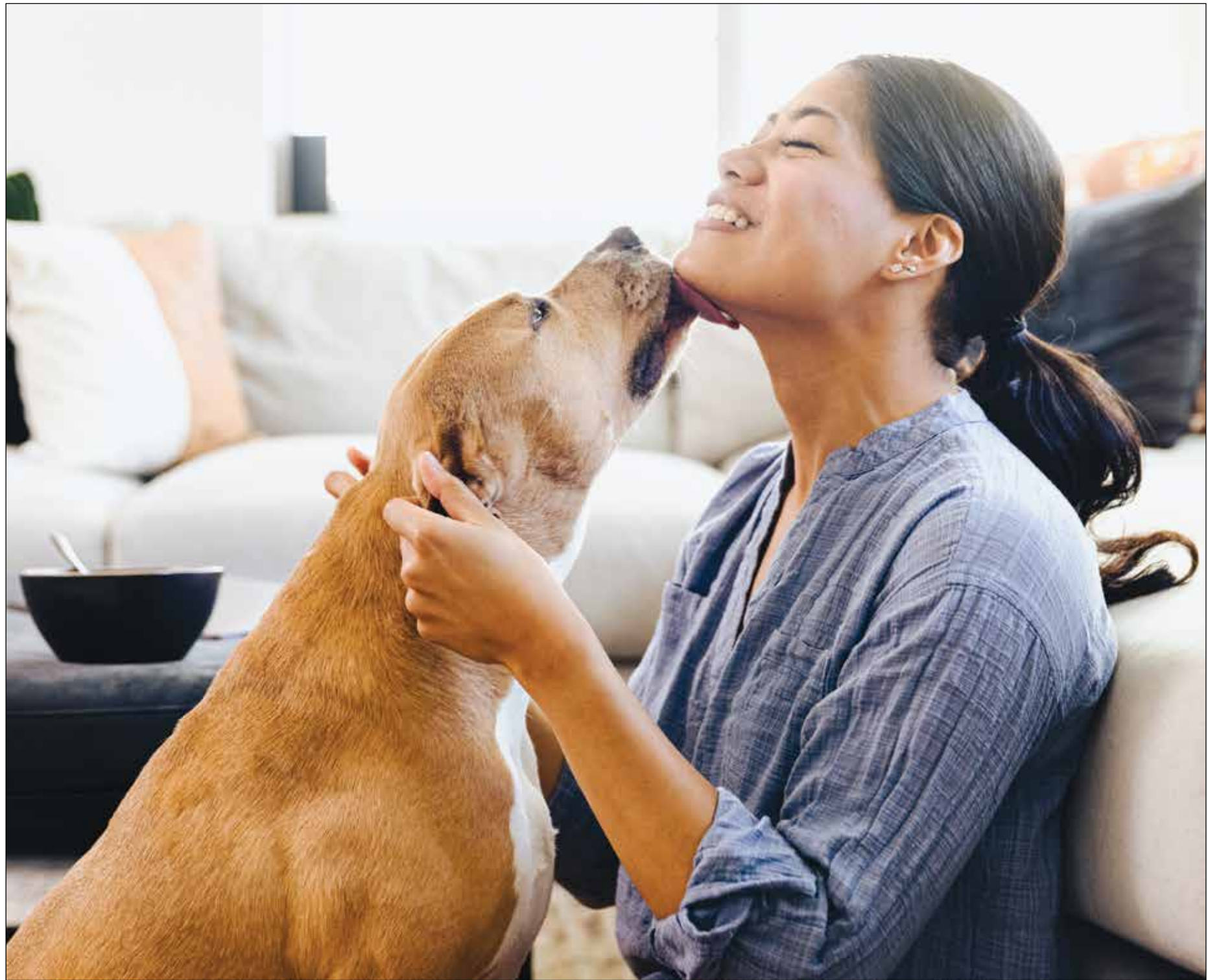
Here are some ways to know if licking is a problem and what to do about it.

UNDERSTANDING THE BEHAVIOR

The American Kennel Club says it's hard to know what your dog is trying to communicate by licking. "Believe it or not, what people interpret as affection might, in fact, be your dog encouraging you to throw up what you ate for lunch for them," writes the AKC on its website. That's right.

Your dog could be repeating behavior seen in wild dogs and wolves, who lick their mothers' faces when she returns from a hunt in the hopes she will regurgitate some of the kill for them to enjoy.

In the wild dogs sometimes greet each other by licking. Mothers will often lick their puppies to keep them clean, give them comfort and encourage them to go to the toilet, according to The Kennel Club.



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It's also possible your dog enjoys the salty taste of your skin. Licking may also be calming for the dog.

WHEN IT'S A PROBLEM

A dog who licks excessively

or seems to be self stimulating may be experiencing anxiety, boredom or pain, according to the AKC. It also could signal allergies or another health problem, especially if the dog licks itself until it bleeds or causes an infection.

Your vet can help identify a medical issue and give you options for treatment.

If a medical examination doesn't turn up any issues, try redirecting your dog when they lick, by trying to interest them in a toy or treat.

Dogs who still insist on licking might enjoy a lick mat, which is a rubber mat that can be attached to the floor or wall with suction cups to keep it still, while your pet licks a treat such as peanut butter or plain yogurt off the surface.

Adopting A Special Needs Pet

Animals with disabilities or health problems and senior pets are difficult for shelters to place.

If you are willing to take on such an animal, it can be challenging, but also very rewarding to know that you have given an animal a chance to be loved and cared for as a member of your family.

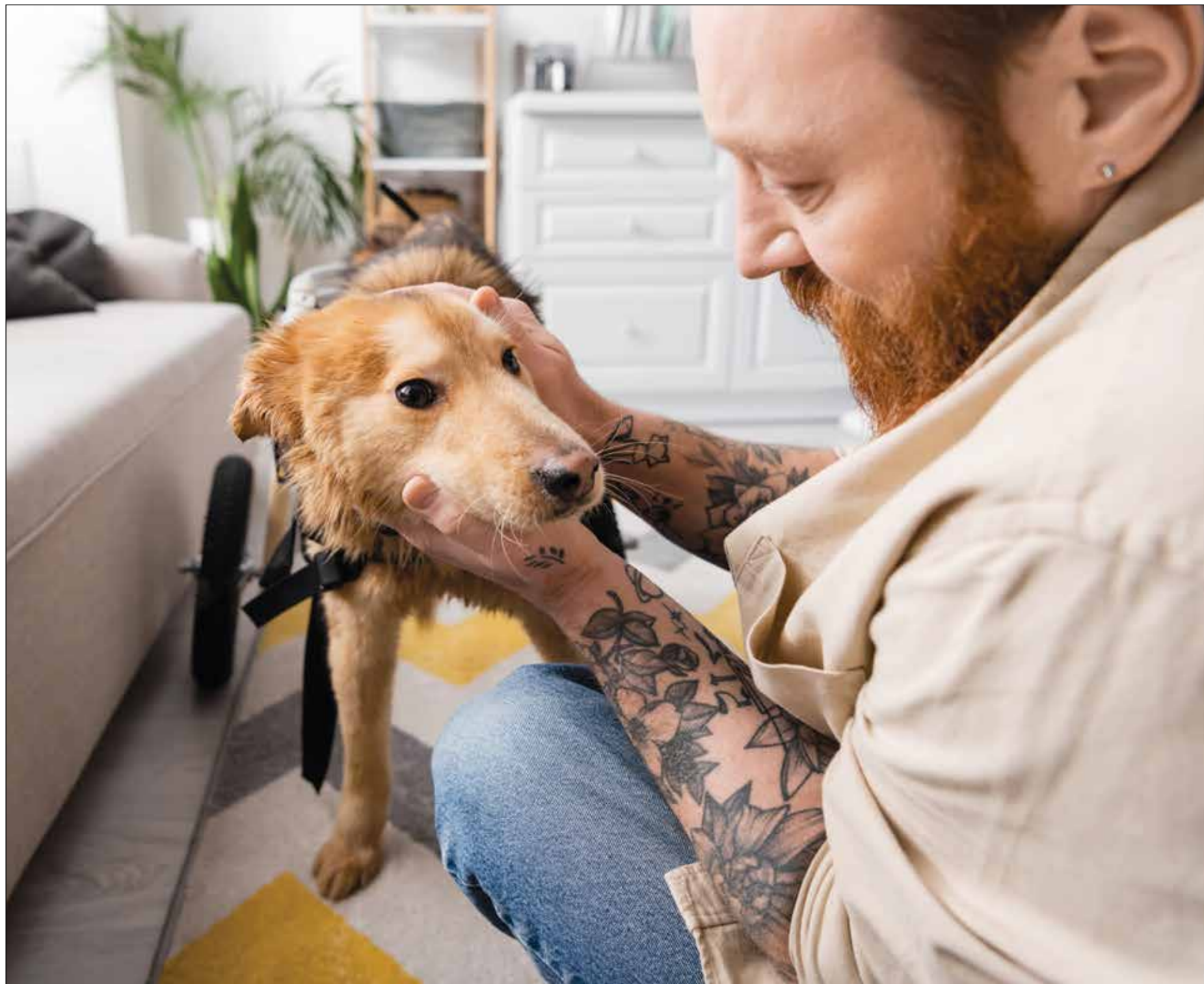
WHAT IS A SPECIAL NEEDS PET?

Special needs can cover a range of issues a pet might have. This can include chronic health issues such as diabetes, which requires daily medication, or feline immunodeficiency virus, which can greatly shorten a cat's lifespan. It can also include animals with limited mobility, vision or hearing loss, or a missing limb, due to a birth defect, illness or injury. Dogs with past trauma who have resulting behavioral problems are also considered special needs.

Senior animals are also difficult to adopt because many adopters want a younger animal that is less likely to have health issues and whom they can welcome into their family for many years to come.

THE CHALLENGES

Caring for a special needs pet will require more money, a bigger time commitment and will have a greater impact



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on your daily life than caring for other pets.

Special needs pets often rely on medication and need more frequent vet visits than other animals, which can be expensive. Their treatments can limit your schedule, as

you need to be home to provide medications on a schedule or take them to the vet for treatments. Pets with severe disabilities may even need a home with modifications to help them get around, which can be expensive.

It may also be difficult to find boarding facilities that can serve a special needs pet, so you will need an in-home dog sitter or a friend or family member to help out when you travel.

You can also expect the

adoption process to be more rigorous than you might experience adopting another pet. The shelter will want to make sure you have the resources, space and ability to care for the animal considering its unique needs.

Automating Pet Care

New technology offers many opportunities to simplify pet care tasks, from feeding to exercising to training.

Just keep in mind that caring for your pet is part of how you bond with it, so be sure to dedicate time each day to hands-on care.

FEEDING

Automatic feeders that feed a pre-set amount of food at a set time each day have been around for decades. Newer versions, however, are wifi or Bluetooth linked, allowing you to set and monitor your pet's automated feeder using an app on your phone.

SMART PET CAMERAS

Devices like the Furbo camera allow you to see and communicate with your dog, even from thousands of miles away. The Furbo 360 rotates 360 degrees to keep tabs on your pet, allows you to talk to your pet and even toss treats from afar. With a paid subscription, you can store photos and videos of your pet taken with the camera, and even share them with family and friends.

AUTOMATED PET DOORS

Allow your dog to roam the backyard free or keep it confined indoors using a smart pet door. Some units use an RFID unit attached to your pet's collar to unlock the door, ensuring that only your pet can enter your home.

TRACKING

Keep track of your pet's whereabouts with a wearable tracker. Most systems include a GPS tracker that can be attached to your dog's collar, which then transmits location data to an app. If your



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dog is lost or stolen, you can use the app to quickly locate your furry friend. Look for a unit that is waterproof or an activity monitor that can alert you when your pet is less active than usual.

SMART THERMOSTAT AND LIGHTING

Make sure your home stays comfortable for your pet using a smart

thermostat. If it gets very hot or cold while you are away, you can adjust the temperature in your home remotely using a smart thermostat app. Some thermostats even have a motion sensor to help determine whether your pet is home and adjust the temperature automatically.

Similarly, a smart lighting setup can help you keep your pet from being in

the dark while you're away from home.

TRAINING

Keep your pet off certain surfaces while you're away using an automated trainer such as PetSafe's Scat Mat. The mat has smart sensors that detect when your pet is in a forbidden area, then discharges a mild static shock to deter the behavior.