



Pet Care



Why You Should Adopt

If you're looking for a new furry friend, consider a visit to your local animal shelter.

More than 6 million companion animals are placed in these facilities every year, according to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. That's why it's so important to adopt pets.

HOW MANY STRAYS?

While the exact number of stray dogs and cats in the U.S. is unknown, estimates suggest there are more than 70 million stray cats. A fertile female dog can produce at least one litter every year, with an average of four to six puppies. Cats have a shorter gestation cycle, however, and may have three or more litters a year. Each can produce four to six kittens. Overpopulation in the stray community can then quickly overwhelm local shelters.

INSIDE THE SHELTER

There's a nearly perfect balance of cats and dogs at animal shelters. About 4 million pets find new homes every year, with a similar distribution of cats and dogs. With so many entering these facilities, however, about one million animals are euthanized annually. Those numbers have been going down over the past decade or so, but they're still painfully high.



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The ASPCA reports a welcome rise in adoption rates but also cites improvements in technology that have helped more people reunite with their strays. In all, some 810,000 animals are reunited with their owners annually. Dogs are reunited more often, experts say, because they more frequently have collars

or microchips to help with identification.

WHEN YOU ADOPT

Adopting a pet can be more economical than purchasing one from a breeder. You're also paying it forward: By choosing to adopt, you save an individual pet while helping to alleviate shelter overcrowding.

Bringing a pet home creates space for more strays in need of care, and your adoption fee directly supports the shelter's mission of providing care for the other animals.

Adoption fees typically cover the costs of neutering or spaying, along with initial vaccinations and sometimes even microchipping. The fees are

generally lower than those breeders charge, and some local municipalities even offer subsidies when you adopt. Many pets from shelters are already housetrained, and that can save you both time and money. Some pet supply stores and trainers provide discounts on services and products for rescue animals.

When There's an Emergency

By their very nature, our pets tend to be inquisitive — and that can sometimes lead them into dangerous situations.

They may ingest something they shouldn't, encounter another less friendly animal or dart into traffic. Severe weather systems might pose sudden problems. Creating a plan helps you know how to respond quickly and effectively. Here's how to prepare for the unexpected:

PLANNING AHEAD

Discuss your veterinarian's emergency protocols, particularly after-hours or 24-hour care. If they don't offer these services, ask which animal hospital they would recommend for referrals. Make sure that all relevant contact details are readily available. With certain emergencies, including car accidents or suspected ingestion of something toxic, immediate transport to the emergency room is recommended. In other cases, a simple phone call to the vet may be all that's needed to understand the seriousness of the situation. Advance research might help you decide how to proceed with less serious issues.

PROVIDING FIRST AID

If your pet suffers an injury, begin by assessing the severity of the wound. You may be



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able to provide all the care that's necessary right at home. There are times when first aid is needed to stabilize the animal before leaving to see the vet. For example, you can control bleeding by applying gentle pressure with a bandage and elevating the affected area. If an animal is choking, attempt to remove

the obstruction by using your fingers or by performing the Heimlich maneuver. Always keep essential supplies such as medical tape and bandages readily available.

WEATHER DANGERS

Even a passing storm can be disturbing for some animals. They need to be part of

your emergency planning when there are larger weather threats, too. Make sure pets are wearing collars and updated name tags.

Consider microchipping. Keep their leash and carrier near a door so it's easily accessible. Create a pet disaster kit with food, any medicine and other needed

items. Any evacuation plan should also account for your pets, since non-service animals are not typically permitted in local shelters or evacuation centers.

Identify animal hospitals near your intended destination in case medical assistance is needed during your evacuation.

Smarter Dog Food Options

Everyone should maintain a healthy diet — including your pets.

That can present its own challenges, considering the many dog food options that are currently available. Here's how to determine the healthiest choice for your pet.

AVOID THESE FOODS

Before deciding on a dietary approach, talk things over with a veterinarian. They'll help you make food selections that meet your pet's individual needs. In the meantime, however, be aware that several kinds of food can be toxic to dogs. The American Kennel Club specifically warns against feeding dogs things like almonds, chocolate, cinnamon, garlic, ice cream and macadamia nuts. Your pet may have specific food allergies, as well.

DRY DOG FOOD

Kibble is available in many forms, and there are rules and regulations about how it's made. The USDA mandates that animal food products like dry dog food are safe for consumption, free from harmful substances, produced in hygienic conditions, and accurately labeled. A good rule of thumb when examining the label is to make sure a protein source is listed as the first ingredient in any kibble. The best options typically boast a single protein source. Avoid trendy grain-free diets since



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carbohydrates are vital for energy.

FRESH FOOD

Some pet owners may opt for freshly prepared meals that are specifically designed for canines. Experts don't recommend creating a fresh food diet on your own, however, since managing a pet's dietary needs

can be challenging. You may not be fully aware of all your dog's complex nutritional requirements. Once you've settled on an approach, look for selected items at pet stores or contact local companies that offer refrigerated delivery. Similar to dry dog food, carefully read all labels and follow all recommended portion sizes.

RAW DIETS

There's more to these diets than just raw meat. Items are also available in freeze-dried or dehydrated forms that may include organ meats, whole or ground bones, raw eggs, muscle meats and dog-safe fruits. Some advocates support the inclusion of raw vegetables and dairy products. They claim that raw

diets can lead to shinier coats, better dental health, improved skin conditions and higher energy levels in dogs. Just remember that there are specific recommendations about handling certain raw foods. As with any major health decision, consult your veterinarian before initiating a raw food regimen.

Before You Bring a Bunny Home

You've probably guessed that dogs and cats are the two most popular pets in America. Rabbits are now in third place, according to the Humane Society of the United States.

It's no surprise, considering how affordable they are. Rabbits are easy to care for and fun to be around – but they have special needs.

WHERE THEY LIVE

Rabbits are social creatures that naturally live in large groups, and their environment should reflect that. They need a space to rest, but bunnies should not be isolated from family interactions. Suitable housing options include spacious cages, puppy pens or even something more creative like a cardboard castle. Provide a litter box, along with items like chewable paper toys that will enhance their lives.

WHAT TO FEED THEM

You should have a solid understanding of rabbit nutrition before welcoming this new pet into your home. For instance, rabbits don't live solely on carrots. They need to have unlimited access to grass hay and fresh water. Commercial pellet food is available. You can offer them a variety of pesticide-free vegetables. Some



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popular choices include celery, lettuce, basil, clover, parsley, collard greens and watercress. Consult a veterinarian for other nutritional tips. Certain fruits can serve as occasional treats, including bananas, strawberries, apples (after you remove the seeds) and raspberries.

BUNNY PROOFING

Rabbits are naturally inquis-

itive and tend to chew on things. This can lead to damage to carpets, wiring, molding and even paper items around the home. To protect your belongings, cover things like wiring with flexible tubing. Move other items out of reach. Try baby gates to restrict access to areas where your rabbit cannot play safely. Just make sure they are

constructed with sturdy material and that the slats are spaced closely enough that the rabbit can't slip through.

HOW LONG THEY LIVE

Time spans vary by pet and living conditions, but rabbits can generally live for more a decade. Unlike many other small pets, they require more than just basic maintenance.

But the better they're treated, the longer they'll live. They can even be kept indoors and allowed to roam freely, similar to dogs or cats, with the proper training.

Just consider their particular housing needs, the cost and hassle of bunny-proofing, and ongoing expenses such as food and litter before bringing one home.

Choosing a Groomer

Choosing a groomer can be even more complicated than deciding on our own hairdressers or barbers.

After all, this is more than simply a haircut or pedicure. The groomer is going to be responsible for the care and well-being of your pet throughout the entire process. Here's how to find the best one:

LOCATION AND SERVICES

When deciding on a groomer, look for a clean, well-ventilated environment equipped with sturdy tables and tubs. Check to make sure the products they use are specifically formulated for pets rather than humans. Most groomers provide basic services such as hair trimming, shampooing and brushing, but be sure to ask about additional services like ear cleaning or teeth brushing.

Request a breakdown of the costs for each service to prevent any unexpected charges. The price of grooming can vary based on pet size and coat length; some prices may change with the seasons. Don't forget to ask about arrangements following your pet's session. They'll need to be secured when not on the grooming table. Those who are not being groomed would likely be placed in a crate or a designated play area. The



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crates must accommodate only one pet, provide adequate ventilation, include clean bedding, and be visible to staff members.

TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

The amount of training involved can differ significantly. Some groomers simply

have on-the-job experience, while others go through formal apprenticeships and mentoring programs. The best have attended a specialized grooming school. Once you've decided on a groomer with the training background that suits your needs, ask to observe the grooming process. Being on hand might be particularly

important to make sure you're both comfortable during your pet's initial grooming session.

FIRST AID AND INSURANCE

Make sure there's a first aid kit available and that it's readily accessible. Talk to the staff about the kit's contents, making sure it's fully stocked. Ask

about liability insurance. While it may feel uncomfortable, you'll want to confirm this in the unfortunate event that injuries occur while your pet is in their care. The policy should address any medical costs that arise. Finally, make sure the groomer has an emergency response plan — and familiarize yourself with it.

Importance of Spaying and Neutering

Spaying and neutering have many benefits, beginning with reducing the homeless pet population.



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These permanent, very effective methods of birth control contribute to longer lifespans for animals. And they're very affordable: A single spay or neutering procedure usually costs less than the cost of having a pet for a year.

BIG HEALTH BENEFITS

Studies show that pets from states with higher spaying and neutering rates tend to live longer. Neutered male dogs have been found to live nearly 20% longer than those who haven't had the procedure, while spayed female dogs can live almost 25% longer than their unspayed counterparts.

The procedures eliminate the risk

of testicular and uterine cancers, and reducing aggressive behavior can save lives. Neutered and spayed pets are less likely to wander, which decreases the chances of dangerous encounters with vehicles or other animals. Finally, unplanned pregnancies can pose significant risks to the mother's health, particularly over time.

WHEN TO DO IT

Millions of healthy dogs and cats are euthanized annually in U.S. shelters, and spaying and neutering can play a crucial role in reducing these figures. You're effectively saving lives. The appropriate age for neutering dogs is generally between

six to nine months. Kittens can be spayed or neutered as early as eight weeks. For optimal recovery, closely monitor the surgical site for any worrying signs of redness, swelling or discharge. Immediately consult your veterinarian if the incision opens.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

Each year, millions of homeless animals enter shelters – and many never find a way out. In certain states, the number of euthanized homeless animals reaches into the hundreds of thousands annually. And yet some people shy away from spaying and neutering – sometimes because of common misconceptions.

The procedures do not inherently cause weight gain in pets. Instead, that's usually due to overfeeding and insufficient exercise.

Neutering can help reduce certain undesirable behaviors by lowering testosterone levels, but it's not meant to be a comprehensive solution for all behavioral issues. Ideally, the procedure should be performed before a cat reaches five months of age. Contrary to another popular idea, it's possible to spay animals while they are in heat. Older dogs can also undergo neutering, although there is an increased risk of complications – particularly in overweight animals.

Careful with the Table Scraps

Sharing human food with your favorite companion may seem like a fun indulgence, but it can be hazardous to their health.

Certain foods can lead to severe health outcomes and even death. So, avoid giving them table scraps and if you must, stay away from these dangerous items:

THE THREE CS

The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has come up with a handy way to remind people of the most dangerous everyday items: The Three Cs are chocolate, caffeine and coffee. These substances contain methylxanthines, which can lead to symptoms such as vomiting, diarrhea, hyperactivity, excessive thirst and urination, panting, tremors, seizures, irregular heart rhythms and, in severe cases, death. Some forms of chocolate are worse than others. Baking chocolate is especially dangerous due to its high methylxanthine content; darker chocolates pose a greater threat than milk chocolate.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Beyond chocolate, caffeine and coffee, avoid uncooked yeast doughs as they may expand in your pet's stomach.



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The build-up of gas can be very painful; if the stomach ruptures, it's life-threatening. Don't give pets anything containing raisins, alcohol or macadamia nuts. Garlic and onions should be avoided. Bones, especially those that splinter, can create choking hazards and potentially cause life-threatening punctures in the digestive system. Raw eggs

and meats may harbor dangerous levels of salmonella and E. coli. If you suspect your pet has ingested something harmful, immediately contact your veterinarian or the ASPCA's Animal Poison Control Center at 888-426-4435.

ONLY IN SMALL AMOUNTS

Some table scraps can be

safely given to pets, but only in very small amounts. Obesity has emerged as a significant nutritional concern for pets. When offering treats, you are increasing their daily caloric intake to a point that may be more than they require. So, offer them only small, lean pieces of cooked beef, turkey, fish and pork, provided they are skinless and boneless. Raw

vegetables such as carrots, celery, lettuce and cabbage hearts are also acceptable. Cooked yeast should be significantly limited. The ASPCA suggests that doughy treats should not exceed 5 to 10% of your pet's daily caloric intake. Raw pumpkin can serve as a fun seasonal treat, and peanut butter is also suitable in limited quantities.