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GETTING A PET DOG

Thinking of getting a dog?

Owning a dog can bring many rewards. They are great companions and can help you to get out and about in your community. It is, however, a big commitment. It is a good idea to ask yourself the following questions first:

- *Can I afford to have a dog?* The initial cost of the dog is only the beginning! There will be ongoing costs such as food, flea and worm treatment. Other vets costs will include vaccinations and neutering as well as the unexpected illnesses and injuries. Pet insurance, paid by a monthly premium, can help cover the costs of the unexpected (see our pet insurance fact-sheet for more information). Our Complete Care Club can help spread the cost of routine treatments using a monthly direct debit. We can advise about the costs of routine treatments before you buy a dog. Generally, the larger the dog, the more expensive food and routine treatments will be. Depending on the breed, there may also be regular grooming costs.
- *Can I make a lifelong commitment to a dog?* A dog's average life span is 12 years, with smaller breeds of dog generally living longer than larger breeds.
- *Do I really want to exercise a dog every day?* Dogs need to be exercised every day. The amount will depend on the breed and age of the dog.
- *Will there be someone at home for a dog and will I find time to train, groom and generally care for a dog?* A dog should not be left alone for more than 4 hours. Puppies shouldn't be left for long and take a lot of time to train. Most dogs will benefit from being regularly groomed, either at home or by a professional groomer.

What type of dog to choose?

- *Puppy or adult dog?* There are many adult dogs available at re-homing centres. Some of these dogs will have behavioural problems or special requirements but many will be well-trained pets who have been sadly given up for a variety of reasons. It is best to choose a reputable centre that will try to match you with an appropriate dog. You should be given information about the dog's history and health status. It is not sensible to re-home a dog with behavioural problems unless you have the experience to deal with them. Puppies are lots of work in the early stages, but with the right training and socialisation you can create a great family pet.
- *Male or female?* This is largely personal preference. We can advise about neutering.
- *Size of dog.* Think about your home and car. Also consider who will be walking the dog – frail adults or children will only be able to manage a small dog. Think about relatives or friends who may help to look after the dog.
- *Coat length and type.* Dogs with long coats will need more regular grooming and may shed more hair around the house. Dogs with long, pendulous ears are more prone to smelly ears and ear infections. Some breeds of dog are non-moulting, so tend not to shed their coat –

there is a list on the Kennel Club website (<http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/>).

- *Health.* There are breeds of dog in which certain conditions tend to surface more. Common problems that are more prevalent in certain breeds include skin allergies, upper airway breathing problems, eye problems, hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia and heart disease. We can advise further about diseases we see frequently in common breeds. There are some health problems that can be tested for in the parents of a puppy – see the Kennel Club website for more information (<http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/>).
- *Temperament.* Consider what the dog was bred for. Dogs bred for their working ability e.g. Collies and Springer Spaniels need lots of exercise and stimulation.

Finding a puppy

- To find a pedigree puppy, a good starting point is the Kennel Club website Find a Puppy service.
- Be wary of buying puppies you have seen advertised on the internet or puppies for sale in a pet shop. Unfortunately, many puppies in the UK are reared in 'puppy farms' where conditions are not suitable. Some puppies are also imported from abroad and may have come from poor conditions and not even be legal to travel. Although it is easy to feel sorry for these puppies and therefore buy them, this simply fuels the puppy farming trade. 3rd party sales of puppies were banned in April 2020 (Lucy's Law). This means you must buy direct from the breeder or adopt through a rescue centre.
- You can download a puppy contract, designed by the British Veterinary Association and the RSCPA here: <http://puppycontract.rspca.org.uk/home>. Take this to the breeder and ask them to complete it. It has been designed to protect purchasers from unscrupulous breeders and encourage responsible puppy-rearing.
- The government also has a new website to help you buy safely: <https://getyourpetsafely.campaign.gov.uk/>.

Questions to ask the breeder:

Before you visit a puppy, it's recommended to phone and ask some questions first.

- Did they breed the puppy? Sometimes people will buy a puppy and then quickly sell it on. It is important to be aware of what has happened to the puppy during this time.
- Are the puppies kept where they were bred? The puppies should still be in the home where they were born, with their mum.
- How many puppies are/were in the litter? The breeder should know the answer to this, so uncertainty raises concerns.
- Have the puppies or their parents had any health problems? A good breeder will be honest about this.
- Have the puppies been treated for worms or other parasites? Puppies should be wormed from 2 weeks old. Find out what they have been treated with and how often.
- Have the parents been screened for any inherited problems known to be a problem in that breed? Examples include hip-scoring, elbow-scoring and eye tests.
- Do the puppies have any form of identification, such as microchips? By law, puppies should be micro-chipped by 8 weeks old and registered in the name of the breeder. The breeder should then transfer the registration details to the new owner.

Visiting the breeder:

- Make sure you see the puppy's mum. The mum should still be with the puppies and should appear healthy and in good condition. The mum should have enlarged nipples, indicating she has been feeding the puppies.

- If applicable, ask to see certificates of screening for problem diseases, vaccination and microchipping records. The vaccine records should be attributable to an individual puppy and have the details of the vet and veterinary surgery that did the vaccine on them.
- Check for any signs of illness e.g. thin, weak puppies, diarrhoea or runny noses.
- When it comes to choosing your puppy, try and look for a happy interactive puppy.
- Generally it is best not to buy on the first visit. Puppies should be re-homed around 8 weeks old, not younger.
- Consider if the puppy is being well socialised, even at this young age. Does the breeder have children? Is the puppy being carefully exposed to noises like the Hoover?

Once you have bought your puppy or new dog we can register them on our system. This can be done by phone, in person or online. We can then get them booked in to see the vet for a health check, vaccinations and advice about worming and flea control. Your puppy can also visit us for free weight checks and cuddles with the nurses and our free puppy parties.

For more advice, ask for a telephone call or appointment with one of our team of vets or nurses.