



Adopting a Pet?

It can happen to the best of us. You see a cute, tiger-striped kitten with white paws and green eyes, just begging for attention, or maybe it's a gorgeous, tail-wagging Labrador mix who couldn't be more friendly. You take one look, and the next thing you know, you are walking down the pet food aisle at the local supermarket.

If you are like the 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 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 are living beings who require lots of time, money, and commitment over 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 a pet from an animal shelter means you are a responsible and caring person. But before you make that final decision to bring a furry friend into your life, take a moment to think about these questions:

Why do you want a pet? It is amazing how many people fail to ask themselves this simple question before they get a pet. Adopting a pet just because "it's the thing to do" or because the kids have been pining for a puppy usually ends up being a mistake. 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 are tired or busy. They require food, water, exercise, care, and companionship every day of the year. Many animals in the shelter are there because their owner's didn't realize how much time it took to properly care for them.

Can you afford a pet? The monetary costs of pet ownership can be quite high. Licenses, training classes, spaying and neutering, veterinary care, grooming, toys, food, kitty litter, and other expenses add up quickly.

Are you prepared to deal with special problems only a pet can cause? Flea infestations scratched up furniture, accidents from pets that aren't yet house-trained 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 some restrictions. Make sure you know what they are before you bring home a companion animal.

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 companion. Problem free pet ownership requires children who are mature enough to be responsible. If you are a student, in the military, or travel frequently because of work, waiting until you settle down is a good choice.

Are your living arrangements suitable for the animal you have in mind? Adopting a large or energetic dog to share your small apartment, for example, is not a good idea. He won't have enough room to move around in, and giving him enough exercise will require a bit of activity on your part. Choose an animal who will be comfortable in your surroundings.

Do you know who will care for your pet while you are away on vacation? You'll need either reliable friends or neighbors, or money to pay for a boarding kennel or pet-sitting service.

Will you be a responsible pet owner? Having your pet spayed or neutered, obeying community leash and licensing laws, and keeping identification tags on your pets are all part of being a responsible pet owner. 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 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.

Get an animal for life

Sure, it's a long list of questions. But a quick stroll through the animal shelter will help you understand why answering them before you adopt a pet is so important.

Many of the shelter's homeless animals are puppies and kittens, victims of irresponsible people who are allowed their pets to breed. But there are at least as many cats and dogs at the shelter who are more than a year old, animals who were first obtained by people who didn't think through the responsibilities of pet ownership before they got a pet.

Please, don't make the same mistake. Think before you adopt. Sharing your life with a companion animal can bring incredible rewards, but only if you are willing to make the necessary commitments of time, money, responsibility, and love for the rest of the pet's life.

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