

Is a dog the right animal for you?

- Can you provide companionship for your dog – and not leave him/her alone for too long?
- Can you afford anything between £6–£10 a week (or possibly more) on dog food?



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- Can you take your dog for regular walks?
- Can you provide an escape-proof garden where your dog can play?
- Can you afford the cost of vaccinations and other veterinary bills? Vaccinations for distemper, canine parvovirus and kennel cough will cost you about £300 during your dog's life.
- Can you afford the cost of neutering your pet? It costs in the region of £100–£150 for a bitch and £60–£90 for a dog.
- Can you afford to board your dog when you go on holiday or do you have reliable and caring friends who will look after your pet for you?

If you can answer a definite YES to all these questions then a dog could be the right pet for you.

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Dogs and puppies

Know what your pet needs



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DOG CARE

Finding a healthy dog or puppy

Always see puppies with their mother – this will give you a good idea of background, health and temperament. NEVER buy a puppy from someone at a car boot sale or car park and avoid buying puppies from a pet shop.

Look out for...

● A nicely rounded animal

Puppies must be at least eight weeks old before they leave their mother. Avoid skinny dogs or puppies. Also avoid puppies with pot bellies as they are quite likely to have intestinal worms.

● Bright clear eyes

Never be tempted to take puppies with runny eyes, runny noses or a cough.

● A dry, clean tail

Make sure the puppy's bottom is clean without any signs of diarrhoea or soreness.

● A healthy coat

Do a quick check for fleas and other parasites – many puppies have them. A few can be dealt with quite easily – your veterinary surgeon will advise. Also watch out for sores, lumps and bald patches.

● Clean ears

Brown or yellow deposits in the ears are one sign of ear mites. As with fleas, they can be treated by your veterinary surgeon.

● Strong teeth

Teeth should be clean and white. Gums should be pink and not smelly.



Caring for a dog is great fun but a huge responsibility. All pets need a regular routine and lots of love and attention. But, most important of all, pets need owners who are going to stay interested in them and committed to them all their lives.

If you have a dog, you have a responsibility to meet his/her basic welfare needs. You need to provide a proper diet, shelter, and companionship, allowing your dog to express normal behaviour. You will also need to seek advice or veterinary treatment if your dog is sick or injured.

The right choice

● Puppy or dog?

Puppies look cute and cuddly, but they may not be the best choice for all dog owners-to-be. Dogs and puppies need house training, can be very destructive and may not be ideal for families which have elderly people or very young children about. Puppies may make an elderly person trip or fall or could be handled roughly or trodden on by a young child. An adult dog may be the best choice for people in these situations.

● Male or female?

The sex of your dog is up to you but always keep neutering in mind when choosing your new pet. Neutering reduces the large number of unwanted puppies which come into the world and have to be destroyed, and also makes your dog far easier to live with.

● Neutering is best

Unneutered males may try to mate females (called bitches) they meet, wander off in search of them and spray urine to mark their territory. An unneutered bitch will be in season for about three weeks once or twice a year, so don't be surprised if she is trailed by local dogs at this time. Sexual frustration can result in bitches getting over-excited and dogs becoming aggressive. Neutering bitches also has positive health advantages – especially in later life.

● Neutering is best continued

Neutering is a simple operation carried out under a general anaesthetic. Bitches are 'spayed' – this involves removing the womb and the ovaries. In a male dog the testicles are removed – this is called castration. A veterinary surgeon should always be consulted regarding the best age to neuter an animal according to individual circumstances.

Making a good home



Dogs and puppies spend a lot of time sleeping and need a warm, dry comfortable place to snooze in. The ideal spot for a bed is in a quiet corner of a room, well away from draughts.

Always look out for a bed that is easy to clean and big enough to allow the dog to go through its natural routine of turning around before sleeping. For puppies, remember they will chew their beds to bits, given the chance.

So, choose a rigid plastic bed or, for a cheaper alternative, use a cardboard box with an opening cut into it. Bean bags also make very good beds for adult dogs.

Bedding should be aired every day and washed or replaced once a week.

If your dog is to become a well-balanced pet it will need some time to itself each day. The RSPCA recommends that you don't usually leave your dog alone for more than four hours during the day – dogs need company to stop them getting bored and frustrated.

● Taking the lead

It's important to take the time to give your dog some basic obedience training. An untrained dog can be a danger to you, itself and the public. Learning to sit, lie down, stay at heel or come when called – these and a few other simple commands will make life easier for you and your dog. The command 'leave' is also important in avoiding eating things he/she should not eat!

The basic principles of dog training are very simple. Give your dog brief and regular training sessions – rewards always work best. Remember that rewards must be given immediately if they are to be successful. If you're new to dog owning, it's an excellent idea to join a dog training class.

● Toilet training

House training is the first lesson every dog or puppy needs to learn. The best plan of action is to take your pet outside regularly, especially after a meal and when it wakes up. As soon as your dog urinates or defecates outside, make a big fuss of him/her – immediate praise is essential. If your dog has an 'accident' then take it outside at once.

Remember, some puppies are far easier to toilet train than others. So be patient!

Feeding well



Regular feeding and a balanced diet are essential ingredients for a happy, healthy dog. Dogs need lots of high quality protein, fat and carbohydrates.

Protein comes from meat, fish, and occasionally cheese and eggs. Carbohydrate is found in cereal foods such as biscuits. Fat may be associated with meat and some fish, and is also found in milk and other dairy products, as well as many prepared foods.

● Fresh food

Any fresh meat and fish should be cooked to eliminate the possibility of bacterial/parasitic infection.

● Prepared food

There is a wide range of products now available. Some of them are all-meat foods which require you to give extra biscuit or cereal. Others provide for all a dog's nutritional needs. Complete dried foods are excellent, but should be supplemented from time to time with fresh meat and other foods. If you choose a dried food, remember it can make your dog very thirsty so make sure plenty of fresh water is available. Whatever prepared food you choose, always read the manufacturer's instructions.

● Prepared food continued

Dogs don't need a varied diet, so once you've found a balanced diet which suits your dog, then stick to it. Changing diets can lead to upset stomachs.

Feed about the same time every day, but leave time for the dog to digest food before exercise. Most adult dogs are happy with one main meal a day. But small dogs, extra-large dogs and elderly dogs may prefer two meals a day.

Be careful:

- **Vegetarian** – if you want to put your dog on a non-meat diet, always get veterinary advice first as dogs are primarily meat-eaters. Otherwise your dog may miss out on essential proteins and vitamins.
- **Weight watch** – make sure that your dog maintains a good, healthy weight. If it starts gaining or losing weight rapidly, you must consult your veterinary surgeon immediately.
- **Bones** – give a dog a bone, but avoid cooked bones and small bones which may splinter.

● Puppy feeding

Young puppies (between two and four months old) need their own special feeding regime. They need food which is easy to digest, such as minced meat, flaked fish, cereals such as cooked rice and porridge. There are also many prepared balanced puppy foods available. But just like adult dogs, puppies still need constant access to fresh water.

At this age, a puppy needs about four meals a day. A good suggested schedule is: 8am, 12 noon, 4pm and 8pm.

When a puppy is between four and six months old, the number of meals can be gradually reduced and the amount of food given increased. Stop providing one of the meals at four months then drop the other at six months.

● Drink up

Dogs and puppies need to have a bowl of fresh water at hand at all times. Make sure your dog gets regular water stops if you go on a long journey.

Exercise time



It is essential that dogs get enough exercise and you should take your dog for a walk at least once a day. Some breeds need restricted exercise in the first year of life while their skeleton matures. How much exercise they need depends very much on the breed and the individual dog's habits.

For example, Labradors, collies or German Shepherds will need loads of exercise throughout their lives, while the smallest breeds may be happy enough with the run of the garden combined with a daily walk. Of course, if your dog is to be allowed to roam in your garden, you need to make it escape-proof.

Lack of exercise can end up in a dog becoming both fat and bored.

Puppies shouldn't mix with other dogs until their vaccination jabs have had time to work – that's around 12 weeks old. But they should get plenty of chances to play in the garden.

A dog must get used to walking on a lead. In towns, a lead will protect your dog from traffic and keep him/her from places where young children play – dog faeces can be a health hazard.

In the countryside, no matter how placid the dog, use a lead when walking near livestock which can often be the targets of attack by dogs. But try to find a safe area where you can let your dog off the lead and let it have a good run around.

Short-nosed and toy breeds may be more comfortable in a harness than a collar and lead. Check chains – sometimes called choke chains – are used by some people to train big dogs. Take care – without careful use they really can choke. The 'Halti' collar is a safe alternative for training purposes.

When it comes to play time, train your dog to play by your rules through understanding his/her natural needs. Choose games that are appropriate for the dog's size, weight, age, and mental status. For example, avoid tug-of-war if you have a naturally dominant dog!

On the move



If you get your dog used to car travel when young, he/she will probably end up enjoying trips out. Make allowance for regular stops for water, exercise and toilet and keep the car well ventilated. If your dog just doesn't travel well and ends up feeling over-anxious or car sick, ask your veterinary surgeon for advice.

● Holiday time

Most dog owners, at some time or other, will need to find a boarding kennel for their pets when they go on holiday. Think well ahead and book your pet into a kennel as soon as you know when you will be away. Check out the kennel yourself to make sure your pet will be comfortable, and leave your vet's details with the kennel.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- is an up-to-date vaccination certificate requested
- is the kennel well staffed
- do the staff have a good attitude
- is the kennel clean and well maintained
- is the dogs' accommodation warm, roomy and clean
- are dogs given plenty of supervised exercise?

● The Pet Travel Scheme

The Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) allows pet animals travelling from western European countries and a number of long-haul rabies-free countries to return to the UK without quarantine, as long as they meet certain conditions.

Contact your vet for further information.

● Hot dogs

In warm or sunny weather, NEVER leave a dog alone in a car.

Even in the shade or with a window partly open, temperatures can soon soar. Each year, the RSPCA deals with cases of dogs which have died after being literally cooked alive inside a car.



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Finding a veterinary surgeon



Even the very best kept and healthiest animals need veterinary attention. Never let the thought of having to pay for veterinary treatment stop you from making sure a sick or injured animal has the best of care.

To find a vet ask your friends for recommendations or look in your local Yellow Pages which will have the addresses of all local veterinary practices.

If you really can't cover the full cost of veterinary treatment in one payment, be honest with your vet as s/he may be able to suggest a way to help.

Your local RSPCA branch (call the Society's cruelty and advice line on 0870 55 55 999 for details) may also be able to help cover costs.

● Insurance – the best policy

It is recommended that you take out insurance for any accident or illness that could happen to your dog. The RSPCA's pet insurance scheme offers high quality cover at a competitive price – telephone 0800 032 5952 for further information.

Care for coats



All dogs benefit from a daily groom. It's not only a chance to remove dust and other debris but it's also a chance for an owner to do a check for lumps, bumps, parasites or skin problems. Check ears for ear mites and check pads and between the toes for foreign bodies which may cause irritation.

If your dog is a long-haired breed then it needs to be groomed thoroughly every day, using a brush and comb. Otherwise it may end up with matted hair or skin irritation. Some breeds may need to have their coats clipped regularly – this should only be done by a skilled groomer.

It's fine to bath a dirty or smelly dog, but avoid doing this too often as it may make the coat rather dry. Bathing isn't recommended for puppies under the age of six months, unless essential.

Accidental pregnancy



The RSPCA strongly recommends that both male and female dogs be neutered to prevent unwanted puppies coming into the world.

If you think your bitch may be pregnant and are uncertain about finding good homes for her puppies – a large animal may have a litter of 12 – seek advice from your veterinary surgeon. S/he will tell you if it's possible to spay her.

If you decide that your bitch should go through with the pregnancy make sure you treat her even more gently than usual – her abdomen is particularly sensitive at this time.

In the last four weeks of pregnancy – which lasts a total of 60–70 days – she will want an extra diet of meat as well as a mineral/vitamin supplement. Don't be surprised if she eats

three times her normal diet. In the last couple of weeks before whelping (giving birth), keep her away from other dogs. Encourage her to use her whelping bed which should be placed in a quiet part of the house.

Most bitches can give birth without any special help – puppies are born at intervals of several minutes to one hour. Call your veterinary surgeon immediately if a bitch strains for 45 minutes without a pup appearing; has no contractions; and if she seems to take little interest in trying to give birth.

Puppies should be checked by a veterinary surgeon after about 24 hours. They should not leave the bitch before they are at least eight weeks old.

Diseases and other complaints



Parasites

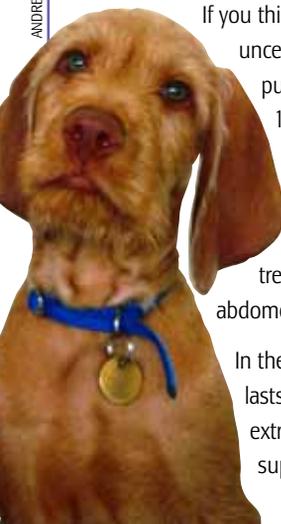
Sooner or later, all dogs will suffer from parasites. If you see any warning signs, consult your veterinary surgeon immediately – it's kinder to your dog to get rid of the problem as soon as possible.

Fleas

Fleas cause dogs a lot of irritation and can also be an intermediary host for tapeworms. Treatments for your dog can be bought from your local veterinary surgeon – simply follow the manufacturer's instructions. You must also make sure that any flea eggs have been destroyed. Do this by burning or washing your dog's bedding and treating any other likely breeding areas with specialised flea treatments.

Worms

Your dog will need to be wormed regularly to protect it against the many types of worms which can cause harm. Some worms can also be harmful to humans and may even cause blindness in children. For this reason, faeces should always be cleared up if children are nearby. Children should also wash their hands after playing with dogs. Consult your vet.



● Lice

Lice can cause a dog severe irritation and even anaemia. Check for tell-tale signs of white eggs in your dog's fur. Consult your vet.

● Mange mites

There are two types of mange: demodectic and sarcoptic.

- **Demodectic:** For symptoms of demodectic mange, look out for inflamed skin and bald patches, especially around the eyes and the front legs. If you don't pick up on the symptoms early enough, your dog may become permanently bald.
- **Sarcoptic:** Sarcoptic mange causes skin irritation and scabs, especially around the ear edges. It is also contagious in both dogs and humans so early treatment by your vet is also essential.

● Ticks

Ticks are blood suckers which feed off your dog for several days before dropping off. If you see a tick, only pull it off using a proper tick removing tool or consult your vet – otherwise the head may still remain embedded in the skin and cause an abscess.

● Ear mites

Ear mites can cause permanent ear damage to your dog. You may notice your dog shaking his/her head a lot, losing balance or holding his/her head in a different way. You may also see a discharge. Consult your vet.

● Ringworm

In spite of the name, ringworm is not a worm but a fungal infection – look out for round, bare encrusted patches. Take care because humans can get it too.

● Vaccinate

Vaccinations are vital for dogs to protect them against infectious diseases such as distemper, canine hepatitis, leptospirosis, canine parvovirus, and kennel cough. Puppies will initially need to be injected twice but bear in mind that regular boosters are needed for adult dogs at intervals of one or two years. If you go on holiday, any reputable boarding kennel will want to see proof of up-to-date vaccinations.

Dog identification



Thousands of pets are lost every year – a tragedy which can happen to the most careful owner. Many of these animals are never re-united with their owners.

The RSPCA believes that the best way to avoid losing your pet is to have it implanted with a specially-developed microchip 'tag'. This provides a permanent link between you and your pet.

Microchipping is no more complicated than a normal injection.

The chip's code is held on a national computer network which keeps a record of an owner's name and address. The RSPCA, as well as veterinary surgeons and local authority dog wardens, have scanners which can read the microchip's code.

A tiny microchip – the size of a grain of rice – is painlessly inserted under your pet's skin. The one-off cost can vary but is likely to be around £10–£25. Contact your veterinary surgeon if you decide to have your dog microchipped.

Dogs and the law



It's important for all owners to learn about all the laws which deal with dogs. A conviction for some offences can result in fines, imprisonment and the destruction of your dog.

1. It's the law for a pet dog to wear a collar when in public with the owner's name and address attached.
2. If you find a stray dog, contact your local council. If you have lost your dog, record the details with your local council. Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, your local authority is legally responsible for taking in stray dogs.
3. Local authorities have the power under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 to create 'dog control orders', which ban dogs or dog fouling and keep dogs on leads in certain areas.

4. The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 imposes severe restrictions on ownership of specified types of dog (e.g. the American pit bull terrier) which have been bred for fighting purposes. Regulations require compulsory neutering and microchipping for all such dogs which must be muzzled and kept on a lead in public.
5. Any owner can be prosecuted if a dog is considered to be dangerously out of control in a public place. An owner may be required to properly control the dog or a destruction order for the dog may result.
6. The owner or person in charge of a dog which has been worrying livestock on agricultural land can be detained by a police officer and the owner can be prosecuted and made liable for damages. A control order or destruction order may even be imposed on the dog.
7. A driver must stop if s/he is involved in a road accident with a dog, and must report it to the police within 24 hours. It's a good idea to buy insurance cover in case of an accident – the owner may be liable for damages if the dog is judged to have caused the accident.
8. If you find an animal which has been severely injured as a result of a road traffic accident, phone the police immediately. The police have the authority to call a veterinary surgeon to the scene.

No untrained person should ever put an animal to sleep and it is an offence to kill an animal by improper means. If you have problems getting through to the police, call the RSPCA's cruelty and advice line on 0870 55 55 999.

A kind end



Well cared for dogs can live to a good age – sometimes 18 years or more. But if a dog shows signs of a painful disability, has an incurable illness or severe injury, the time will come when he/she should be gently put to sleep by a qualified veterinary surgeon. This can be a very difficult decision to make and you should always talk to your veterinary surgeon, but it is one of the kindest things that an owner can do for a suffering animal.

Try not to blame yourself for your pet's death. If you gave him/her care and attention throughout his/her life and took him/her to your veterinary surgeon when he/she was ill, then you did all you could. Don't be afraid to show how upset you are in front of your veterinary surgeon – he or she will understand your feelings.

And don't rush into getting another puppy or dog to replace the one you have lost until you really feel ready – give yourself time to grieve.

Recommended reading



- *RSPCA Pet Guide: Care for your puppy.* (HarperCollins, 2005)
- *RSPCA Complete Dog Care Manual.* Dr Bruce Fogel (Dorling Kindersley, 2006).
- *RSPCA New Complete Dog Training Manual.* Dr Bruce Fogel (Dorling Kindersley, 2006).
- *RSPCA What's up with my dog?* Dr Bruce Fogel (Dorling Kindersley, 2002).

The RSPCA also publishes a number of leaflets on pet care – if you would like further information please visit:

- the RSPCA website at www.rspca.org.uk

or write to:

- RSPCA Enquiries Service
Wilberforce Way, Southwater
Horsham, West Sussex RH13 9RS.