

WILL YOU BE GETTING A NEW PET? A CHECKLIST TO CONSIDER...

by T. J. Dunn, Jr. DVM

Ever wonder how to choose the right dog, puppy, cat or kitten? Is this the year to expand your family to include the pet you've always wanted? Where do you begin in the decision making process? The secret to a happy, healthy zoofamily (a family that considers its pets to be real family members!) is "Responsibility." That's the key word to keep in mind throughout this brief discussion about acquiring a pet. If you decide to bring a pet into your life, you will be responsible for that pet for all of ITS life!



In addition to the emotional attachments that form between the pet owner and pet, there are physical aspects of the relationship that need some careful thought. How will you handle the costs of owning and caring for a pet? Do you have the required space to properly house the pet? Will you be able to take time from your daily activities and devote attention, every day, to your pet pal?

Pet owning can be one of the most gratifying experiences anyone will ever have. People speak of the "Human-Animal Bond" that occurs between the owner and their pet and it will happen to you, too, if you make the proper decisions prior to selecting that special friend.

Below is a simple but helpful checklist of "Things To Know" before you make that decision. Go through the checklist below and use it as an objective approach to deciding IF a pet should be a part of your life. And if you do decide to commit to a pet, you need to be aware that the right **kind** of pet is an equally important decision.

CHECKLIST FOR PET OWNERS

IS IT THE RIGHT TIME AND PLACE?

What are your living conditions right now? If you are thinking of getting a horse for your teenage daughter, will she (or you) have the time to feed, groom and exercise the horse every day? Can you fence in that pasture or will you have to board the horse away from your home? How about getting a dog for the kids? Are they involved in Scouting, the swim team, student council or other school activities that will take up their spare time and energy? If you live in a tightly structured neighborhood or in an apartment should you even be considering a dog as a pet? Is winter a good time to be trying to house train a new puppy?



Many people who live alone consider the cat to be the purr... excuse me, *perfect* pet for a quiet, indoor environment. If you don't care for a cat as a companion why not consider aquarium fish or even small "pocket pets" such as Guinea pigs or hamsters? What are your job responsibilities and travel obligations? Your pets will miss you when you are gone and if you need to board them your costs could be substantial. If you live in an apartment a Great Dane may not be the best match for your living arrangements; you and the dog may be better off waiting until you make that move

to the country before a big Dane complements your life! Read about how to choose just the right breed of dog [here](#).

At this stage in your life do you have the time freedom and space required for the type of pet that you are considering?

IS IT THE RIGHT TIME AND PLACE?

YES..... NO..... UNDECIDED.....

IS IT THE RIGHT MATCH?



Many times in my practice I have witnessed the unhappy sight of an elderly person risking their health trying to manage a dog that was much too big and energetic for the owner to control. Getting knocked down or pulled by the leash down the sidewalk can be hazardous to an elderly person's health! There have been times, too, where I've seen young children mishandling kittens simply because the toddler has no concept of what "gentle" means. If you have allergies to pet fur or dander, better find a pet with scales or feathers instead! A pet ferret may not be the best choice for you if you have fine Hummels or valuable hanging plants that really do make great ferret toys. However, someone who must be confined indoors for health reasons may discover a parakeet or Cockatiel makes great company. Be cautious that the *kind* of pet you choose is a good match for your lifestyle and environment.

For an in-depth look at selecting the right DOG for your lifestyle, read [this](#) article.

IS IT THE RIGHT MATCH?

YES..... NO..... UNDECIDED.....

AM I READY FOR THE COMMITMENT?

Keeping in mind that our pets truly depend on us for their very existence, we must be ready to make that long-term commitment to their well being. Rabbits live for about six years; parrots can live to be forty! Dogs and cats commonly live into their late teens. Someone will need to care for these living creatures every day of their lives; if you can't do that, you must find someone who can. Boarding facilities and pet sitters exist just for this purpose but are intended as short-term substitutes for the owner. Do you have other commitments of employment, parenting or human care giving that would interfere with proper pet care giving?



When you acquire a pet it is your responsibility to be committed to that pet for its entire life. Pounds and shelters are full of pets whose owners were unable to make that long-term commitment. Emotionally, many former pet owners harbor lingering guilt feelings after severing a commitment to a pet.

AM I READY FOR THE COMMITMENT?

YES..... NO..... UNDECIDED.....

CAN I HANDLE THE FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS?

Whether you purchase an expensive European bred AKC Registered champion show dog or adopt a free kitten from the shelter, the costs of caretaking the pet are just beginning! Reasonable medical care includes occasional physical exams and vaccinations and also taking care of unexpected health problems such as a broken leg, dental difficulties or infections. The cost of repairing a fractured femur in a large breed of dog may run over a thousand dollars. Routine surgery such as spaying and neutering are one-time costs but try to think of the reoccurring costs that may drain your reserves such as the costs of feeding the pet every day!



Aquarium fish and birds are almost a non-factor when considering the costs of their “daily bread”... but a horse or a large breed of dog like a Mastiff or Irish Wolfhound could have substantial impact on your finances!

Then there are the toys, leashes and collars, brushes, and grooming expenses. If costs of keeping a pet are a critical concern, pocket pets and birds may be a good choice for you; but remember they will need to be housed in an environment appropriate for their species.

CAN I HANDLE THE FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES?

YES..... NO..... UNDECIDED.....

WILL THE NEW PET INTERACT WELL WITH MY PRESENT PETS?



Not only do you need to consider whether or not the new pet will match well with you and your environment, but also you need to consider if the pets you now own will be adversely or beneficially affected by the new addition. Inject an unknown factor into the harmonious housepet equation and you may end up with an incompatibility.

It should be obvious that if you have parakeets, the thought of a cute little kitten being added to the home environment may not be in the best interests of the birds! And that 14-year-old Cocker Spaniel may have some real difficulty psychologically and physically with the addition to the family of a rambunctious Golden Retriever pup. The Old Dog-New Dog scenario may be an excellent enhancement for both dogs but there are variables you should discuss with your veterinarian prior to making the decision to interject a new individual to your home “pack”.

WILL THE NEW PET INTERACT WELL WITH MY PRESENT PETS?

YES..... NO..... UNDECIDED.....

AM I READY FOR THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF A NEW PET?



Plan on *something* happening to you emotionally when you pick out your new pet. You will be different; your life will be different. And that sense of being different will become more a part of you, more established, as the years with your pet go by. Expect to have a life-changing emotional experience when you make that commitment to a new pet. Your thoughts, actions and daily activities will be forever changed. Let’s take a closer look at this very important topic of the emotional aspects of pet owning and outline a few impressions you might experience...

A Great Experience Would Provide...	A Difficult Experience May Promote...
<p><i>The feeling of an invisible bond between you and your pet.</i></p> <p><i>The emotional outlet experienced by relating closely with your pet.</i></p> <p><i>The feeling that your pets are just like children to you.</i></p> <p><i>Strong intangible memories and very tangible photo albums.</i></p> <p><i>The sense that your friends associate your persona with the inclusion of your pets.</i></p> <p><i>Satisfaction from watching your family and friends interact with happy and playful pets.</i></p>	<p><i>Thoughts of the eventual "final days" with your pet.</i></p> <p><i>The agony of living without a lost pet and wondering every day about its fate.</i></p> <p><i>The havoc and conflict a dangerous or vicious pet can produce within a family.</i></p> <p><i>The guilt so often felt when it is time to euthanize a pet.</i></p> <p><i>The emotional impact of having to give a pet away to another owner.</i></p> <p><i>The effects on children of an unfortunate or unhappy experience with a pet.</i></p>

AM I READY FOR THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF A NEW PET?

YES..... NO..... UNDECIDED.....

WHAT COURSE OF ACTION SHOULD YOU TAKE?

Look over your responses to the questions. If you have checked even one “NO” answer, think very carefully about the advisability of introducing a new pet into your life. Right now may not be the best time; in fact, it may be the WORST time!

If you have checked a number of responses “UNDECIDED”, get some advice. Talk it over with friends and family, think about your TRUE motivation for acquiring a pet – especially if you are getting a pet *for someone else*. If you do choose a pet for someone else, remember that they don’t even have the opportunity to take this quiz! Thoughtful introspection coupled with good complementary advice will move those “UNDECIDED” answers one way or another.



If you have answered “YES” to all these questions . . . GREAT! Now is the time for acquiring that special new member of your family. You’ve prepared yourself and your home for something truly unique. Unlike most Christmas gifts of material objects, you will be welcoming a living, sensing being into your life. That puts pets into a category of their own – totally unlike a lifeless computer game or clothing or a new watch. Pets really do sense pain, discomfort, security, fear, and companionship... treat them with respect and you will be greatly rewarded in return.

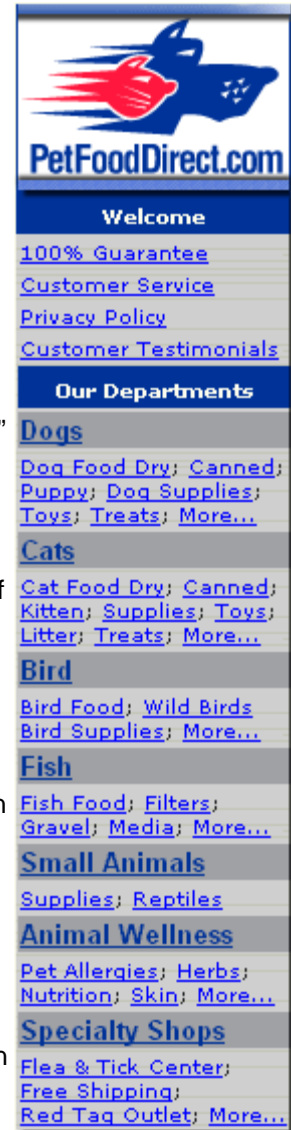
Here is an important note: If you are choosing a dog or cat or horse, remember that different breeds have quite specific genetic tendencies regarding behavior as well as “looks”. Siberian Huskies are beautiful animals and have been bred through the ages TO RUN. It may not be a good idea to confine this breed in an apartment setting. German Shorthaired Pointers have inherited tendencies to run and follow scent trails; this breed may not be the best choice as a companion for small children. Himalayan cats have been bred such that they have long and prolific hair growth; this breed may not be the best choice for someone with a fastidious nature who can’t stand to see “all that cat hair everywhere!” Obviously a Thoroughbred horse may not be just right for the kids to have for pleasure riding.

So be aware that your decision to welcome a pet into your home should not be based upon looks alone. Breed specific behavioral tendencies are a very important consideration that must be included in the decision making process.

Through careful and intelligent analysis of your personal responsibilities, financial capabilities and lifestyle, you will be well prepared to make the right decision. And by that decision you will be changed for the better... and so will some well-deserving and very lucky pet!

For your information, here is [another article](#) that will help you decide which kind of pet will be best for your lifestyle.

Be sure to tell other pet lovers about [ThePetCenter.com](#)



The screenshot shows the PetFoodDirect.com website navigation menu. At the top is the logo for PetFoodDirect.com, featuring a stylized dog head in blue and red. Below the logo is a blue header with the text "Welcome". The main menu is organized into several sections: "100% Guarantee", "Customer Service", "Privacy Policy", and "Customer Testimonials". The "Our Departments" section lists "Dogs", "Cats", "Bird", and "Fish". Each department has a list of sub-links: Dogs (Dog Food Dry; Canned; Puppy; Dog Supplies; Toys; Treats; More...), Cats (Cat Food Dry; Canned; Kitten; Supplies; Toys; Litter; Treats; More...), Bird (Bird Food; Wild Birds; Bird Supplies; More...), and Fish (Fish Food; Filters; Gravel; Media; More...). The "Small Animals" section lists "Supplies; Reptiles". The "Animal Wellness" section lists "Pet Allergies; Herbs; Nutrition; Skin; More...". The "Specialty Shops" section lists "Flea & Tick Center; Free Shipping; Red Tag Outlet; More...".

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