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## What to Consider Before 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 Labrador mix whose tails seems to be wagging just for you. You take one look, and the next thing you know, you're walking down the pet food aisle at the supermarket.

If you're like 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 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 from an animal shelter means you're a responsible and caring person. But *before* you make that decision to bring a furry friend into your life, take a moment to think over these questions:

- **Why do you want a pet?** It's 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 big 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're tired or busy. They require food, water, exercise, care, and companionship every day of every year. Many animals in the shelter are there because their owners didn't realize how much time it took to care for them.
- **Can you afford a pet?** The 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 that a pet can cause?** Flea infestations, scratched-up furniture, accidents from animals that aren't yet housetrained, 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 restrictions. Make sure you know what they are *before* you bring a companion animal home.
- **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. Pet ownership requires children who are mature enough to be responsible. If you're a student, in the military, or travel frequently as part of your work, waiting until you settle down is wise.
- **Are your living arrangements suitable for the animal you have in mind?** Animal size is not the only variable to think about here. For example, some small dogs such as terriers are very active—they require a great deal of exercise to be calm, and they often bark at any noise. On the other hand, some big dogs are laid back and quite content to lie on a couch all day. Before adopting a pet, do some research.

That way, you'll ensure you choose an animal that will fit into your lifestyle and your living arrangements.

- **Do you know who will care for your pet while you're away on vacation?** You'll need either reliable friends and 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 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 for 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 an animal shelter will help you understand why answering them *before* you adopt is so important.

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

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're willing to make the necessary commitments of time, money, responsibility, and love—for the life of the pet.

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