



**Animal House**  
Veterinary surgery

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## **I WANT A DOG**

There are lots of things to consider before acquiring a new animal to share your life. Forewarned is forearmed as many pets need lots of attention to live successfully with us, sometimes more work than anticipated. If you have already had a similar pet it is wise to consider how that breed-type may have changed over the years and if your requirements have changed. If you are taking on an animal that you have not had experience of before, it can be a journey into the unknown. Have you already thought what to do with your pet if you visit friends for an overnight stay, for example? We have listed some pointers to help you make your choice about different types of animals and where to find them.

If you want details of strengths and weaknesses of specific breeds' ask a question on our web site or call into the surgery and ask in person.

Dogs come in toy, small, medium, and large, male and female, pedigree or crossbreed. All dogs need exercise, a suitable diet, attention, vaccinating, parasite control, grooming, a place to sleep and they need love.

They will cost you money on vets' fees- expect to visit your vet at least twice annually, food, lead and collar, I.D. tag, bedding, grooming brush, kennelling fees or similar if you take holidays. We estimate a healthy medium sized dog to cost you **£15,500** during its lifetime

If you choose to have a specific breed, a pedigree, then there is a degree of predictability about their nature, potential size, and possible susceptibility certain health problems.

### **WHAT IS GOOD ABOUT DOGS**

They are affectionate and companionable. They are successful pets for lots of people, especially if the house is not empty of humans for a lot of the day. It is not suitable to have a small puppy and a toddler. Have an older dog or wait until the child is a little older as mutual accidents can happen. Cats and dogs can live happily together and be companions for each other. The emotional connection between a dog and a person is unique. Dogs and humans have mutually supported each other since pre-historic times and dogs can still be our friend and guardian. They can be a great excuse for us to get some exercise, they can alert us to dangers and cheer us up when we feel fed-up. Recent statistics show that people who own dogs are happier and 20% less likely to have a heart attack than people without a dog.

### **Male or female**

Some people have preferences but it doesn't really make much essential difference. With specific breeds it is said that some females are more loyal than the males but this is all down to interpretation. It costs more to have a female bitch neutered than a male. If you choose not to have your dog neutered then females come into season twice a year and some people find the mess of this unpleasant. Males can have domineering behaviour affected positively by having them neutered where this is not so prominent with females. If you wish to breed then as the female has the pups you have the responsibility for the offspring. Essentially we would say go with your personal preference and just find a dog to love be it male or female.

## **Puppies**

Once you have got your puppy home it will need house-training, playing with, attention, puppy food and a health check from the vet. Its vaccinations will probably have been begun but may be of an age to need its 2<sup>nd</sup> part vaccination. He /she is not protected fully from diseases vaccinated against until a week after the second dose. Do not walk you dog on the street or common exercise area or have it in contact with other dogs who may not be vaccinated during this period. If you do not intend to breed it will need neutering at the age of around 6 months. Puppies need a specific worming protocol. This can all be discussed and arranged around you pups specific needs at the surgery. For your pup to grow up into a well-rounded nice dog you need to set house rules that you stick to and train it. This can be formal training at a club but can be done at home. Expose your pup to new experiences and use praise as a reward for good behaviour. Never hit your puppy or 'rub his nose in it' It does not work and will teach the pup to be afraid of you. Aggressive dogs have commonly been hit by people. It is normal for a puppy to mouth especially whilst teething. Encourage mouthing but if the pup begins to hurt say 'no' firmly and leave him for a moment or two. This is how they learn not to bite and is an extension of what they have learned in the litter. There are many good dog whispering type books to buy that can help you with training. A puppy needs attention and cannot be left alone for long periods. Never have one over the Christmas holidays as they need to join you during your normal life routine. Puppies are delightful but full-on work. If you are doubting the practicalities of owning a puppy then consider an older dog.

## **Older dogs**

An older dog can be an advantage. As most dogs live for around 10-14 years a 2 year old dog has a lot of time still to give you. You will find dogs available at any age. Rescues have puppies to geriatrics and breeders often like to re-home older dogs when they have finished their breeding career. A six-month old dog is still really a pup. They may however already be vaccinated, neutered and housetrained. You can still train them to your own ways as they will be fresh, young and eager to learn. An older dog will have these advantages too but may need no training to fit in with you. A very old dog may just want to have his or her final years in love and comfort needing no training and minimal exercise. In November 2005 a retired couple with mobility problems took on a 9 year old Yorkshire Terrier whose previous owner could no longer keep him. They were delighted with this little dog as he suited them with his personality. He needed comfort, attention and very minimal exercise that they could cope with. He fitted in immediately and they did not have to train him. A young dog would have been too much for them to cope with.

Some dogs have problems, emotional and /or medical. If you want to take on a dog with problems we can advise you on how to re-train them. This is perfectly possible but depending on the specific problems straightforward or downright demanding. Some people love a challenge and it is hugely rewarding to turn a dog around. For example we would suggest that if you have young children it is not safe to take on a dog that has a track record of biting people. If you are planning to leave you dog home alone it may be too frustrating to take on a dog with separation anxiety. We can advise you on suitability for your circumstances if you are not sure.

Rescues also make a charge for taking on a dog or suggest you make a donation. This usually just covers what they spend on treatments and the cost varies from rescue to rescue. It is always more cost-effective than buying from a breeder.

## **How many dogs?**

As many as you like!

Most people choose one or two due to cost, space and manageability. When you have 3 or more the pack behaviour is plain to see and the dogs may be more dog focused than human focused. This means that its more difficult to get their attention as they look to each other rather than you for direction. Some people have multiple dogs but the more you have the more of a full-time job it becomes. Another consideration, once when we had 3 dogs and 4 cats it cost more in

kennelling fees than we spent on our holiday. It is more affordable in every respect to have fewer pets.

It can be an advantage to have two dogs. If you need to leave a dog at home whilst you work, for example, two dogs keep each other company. They can also teach each other bad habits. If one is afraid of thunder and the other isn't, it won't be long before the second has learned to be afraid too, so they can be double trouble. Dogs are good playmates for each other but it is advisable to match their ages in most cases as a young dog can be a pest for an old dog as one will want to play as the other will want to sleep. It is not a good idea to keep litter mates. If they are brother and sister they could breed together if not neutered as they do not have any concept of our human sensibilities. Any offspring could be expected to have problems. Litter mates are designed to leave their mother when old enough and live in a larger dog pack. When we have a pet we have to incorporate the dog pack mentality without actually being a pack of dogs. To just have two siblings is therefore confusing for the dogs and they can get along very badly with each other. Getting along with another dog that is not from the same litter often works better. Rescues often have dogs who need homes that have come in as a pair. This can be an obvious choice as you know they already get along and they are probably quite dependent on each other.

### **Rescues**

Rescue centres up and down the country are full of all types and age of dog. Usually where someone has one, can't cope with the demands and gives them up. There are other common reasons for rescuing. Some people have to re-locate and cannot take their pet, or maybe their owner has died. Some are strays and some are cruelty cases where they have been taken from their previous owner. Visit the Dogs Trust or RSPCA and they are guaranteed to have animals who need a home. Crossbreeds are generally healthier than pedigrees as they have not been interbred. Generally, rescues centres have pedigrees and crossbreeds to offer. They monitor these dogs closely and have a wealth of knowledge about them. They can tell you about their temperament and what type of home will suit them to check that the dog meets your needs and vice versa. They will want you to return the dog if you give it a trial and it does not work out for any reason. You could volunteer to help the Dogs Trust as a foster carer as a good way to have a dog on a temporary basis until a permanent home is found. They also like volunteer dog walkers. This is a good way to interact with dogs if you have a lifestyle that makes it difficult for you to have a dog at home.

### **What you may like to ask a rescue**

Is this animal housetrained? Good with children, and other animals. Any health problems or phobias, i.e. is afraid of traffic, hates the postman etc. Have they ever bitten anyone? Were they mistreated? Have they been neutered/vaccinated/de-wormed and de-fleaed. Did they live in a house or were they kept outside? Are there any foibles or peculiarities? Rescues will usually give you a home visit before they will give you one of their animals.

### **Breeders**

We do not keep a list of breeders as there are very many and we personally cannot check them all out to see who is good and who is awful. If you know someone who has a dog that you think is good then ask if they acquired it from a breeder. Personal recommendation is a good start. To check out a breeder you need to visit them.

The best breeders only breed when they have a list of approved people waiting to give their puppies a home. They will home check you just like the rescues. Meet the bitch who will be the mother. See that she has a good temperament and is healthy. Ask how many times she has been used for breeding and at what age the breeder intends to retire her. See the male dog and check that he is emotionally and physically healthy. If you think either of these dogs is aggressive or nasty then do not buy from these people. The puppies will inherit characteristics from their parents. Check that the bitch and sire have been vaccinated and had parasite control. This is

important as the puppies inherit a degree of resistance from the mother. If she is not vaccinated then the puppies will be more vulnerable to disease. Puppies learn from their mother and their litter-mates. The optimum age behaviourally for a puppy to leave its mum is 16 weeks. If it leaves before then it will not have learned enough about good behaviour from its mum and peers so you will have to become mum and mentor. It is unacceptable to be given a puppy younger than 8 weeks old. There is the odd circumstance where this is possible but these are the puppies with a high incidence of behavioural problems. Check that the breeder will take the animal back if you have a problem at any time.

Breeders charge money. Different breeds command different sums. Expect to pay from hundreds to thousands of pounds for a puppy. This should include vaccination and worming but check to make sure. The sum is usually an indication of the rarity of the breed.

### **DOG TIPS**

Start as you mean to go on. Follow these basic rules to optimise the dog seeing you as boss which will make your dog more obedient to you. Do not let your dog sleep on a human bed or sleep upstairs. Always feed your dog after the people have finished eating. Do not leave dog toys on the floor, always return them to a box out of reach of the dog. Never play Tug of War as it is a dominance challenge as far as your dog is concerned. When you leave the house never fuss the dog and the same on your return. These measures will make your dog feel comfortable and secure. Never walk your dog immediately after it has eaten a meal to avoid gastric dilation and gastric torsion.

You could consider having a cat and a dog! Look at **I Want A Cat**