

How to Take Care of Your Pet



Having a pet is rewarding, but it can be hard work as well. If you are well prepared, do your research, and love your pet unconditionally, caring for a pet doesn't have to be back-breaking. Read on to get some tips for supporting any animal addition to your family.

Part 1

Preparing for a Pet

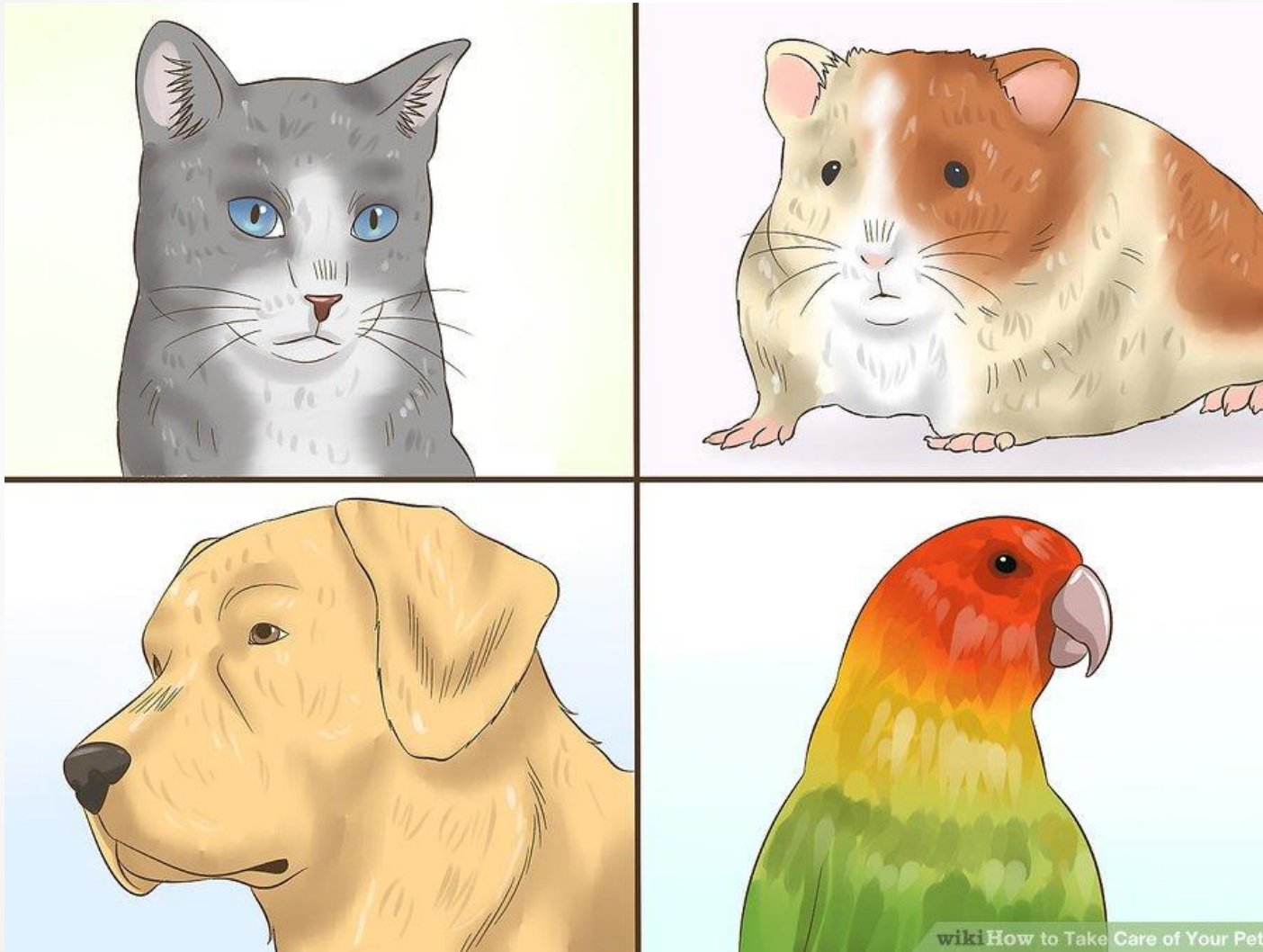


1. Determine if you can adequately care for a pet



While pets are loving additions to your home, they are not always easy to manage. All pets require time, money, and love in addition to the specific needs of each animal and breed. You need to be sure you want a pet not just that day but in the long-term. Most pets require attention and maintenance during the day, so make sure you'll be home enough to take care of your pet. If you have kids, consider what pets will be kid-friendly. Hamsters and fish, for example, make great early pets. If you plan on moving or making large lifestyle changes you shouldn't consider a pet until you are more stable.

2. Choose a pet that fits your lifestyle



Even different types of dogs have different needs, so make sure you pick a pet that suits your means. Before buying a pet do thorough research on the behaviors and needs of various pets you like. Don't go into this decision dead-set on one species or breed - being open-minded can lead to happy surprises and the right pet for your family. Keep in mind some general concerns with different pets:

- Dogs: though dogs vary widely by breed, all dogs need lots of attention, time to exercise, and plenty of room to roam.
- Cats: intelligent and individual, cats will be fine with less supervision, though they still need your love and time to keep from acting out.
- Hamsters, Gerbils, Ferrets, and Rodents: economical and short-living, rodents make good first pets. They often, however, have strong odors.
- Fish: fish need careful monitoring and care to thrive, and won't cuddle anytime soon. Think of having a fish like having a garden.
- Lizards: happy on their own and generally easy to care for, lizards do not offer much affection and can be difficult to diagnose when sick.
- Birds: birds can be incredibly messy and are often loud. They are also expensive and occasionally temperamental, especially bigger birds like parrots.

3. Prepare your house for your incoming pet



Curious, food-driven, and unable to listen to your warnings, pets can get into trouble if you don't create boundaries or safe spaces. Birds may dart out of open windows, lizards can scamper around the house, and dogs or cats may run into the street. Take note of openings your pet could accidentally escape through and make sure you can keep food out of their reach. Remove any harmful objects like knives or poisonous food. If you want your animal to have outside time, consider putting in a fence. Put aside one room that you can designate as the pet's "bedroom." Aim to adopt your pet during a relatively quiet time in your life so that everyone can avoid undue stress while getting used to each other.



4. Buy necessary pet supplies in advance



Talk to the pet store attendants or adoption agencies about things you'll need housing, toys, grooming supplies, etc. and shop before you bring your new pet home. Teach your family members how to use everything so that everyone is on the same page.

If you have young children you can help them prepare for pet care by "feeding" a doll or regularly watering plants.

Part 2

Caring for Pets



1. Budget enough money for adequate care.



Pets are not ultra expensive, but that doesn't mean you won't need to spend money. Below are some annual cost estimates :

Dogs - \$600-\$900, depending on size

Cats - \$600

Rabbit - \$700

Rodents - \$300-\$650, depending on size

Fish - \$40

Small Birds - \$400

Large Birds (Parrots, Macaws) - \$700-\$1,200

Set aside a few hundred dollars in case of emergency veterinary costs.

2. Schedule regular visits to the vet.



Be sure to bring your pet to the vet soon after adopting it as well. Just like humans, pets need regular check-ups to spot problems before they become serious conditions. Use your first visit to discuss how often you should schedule check-ups and your pet's dietary and medical needs. Be sure to schedule shots and vaccinations as soon as you can. Ask your vet what symptoms to look for if your pet gets sick. Spay or neuter dogs and cats to prevent pet over-population. Record your vet's number as well as the number of a veterinary hospital in case of emergencies.

3. Make sure your new "family member" has food that suits their nutritional needs.



The cheapest food you find may not always be the healthiest. Feeding animals table scraps - no matter how cute they are when they beg - is not a good idea since people food often has minerals and items in it that can be harmful to our animal friends. Only feed your pet appropriate foods and give them responsible portions. Research or ask your vet about good food sources and portion sizes. Natural foods, though more expensive, are healthier than dry or processed foods.

4. Give your pet your affection and attention



Though this is certainly true of dogs and cats, even fish and lizards require dedication and love to really thrive. Animals are social beings much like humans, and you need to set aside time to play with your pets so they get exercise and mental stimulation. Give your pet room to roam: the bigger the animal, the more room they'll need. Buy toys and play-sets for you and your pet to use together. Give your pet the occasional treat after good behavior to motivate it and cement good habits.

5. Clean your pet and all of its enclosures



This will keep both you and your pet healthy and happy. Create a regular cleaning schedule, at least once every 2-3 weeks, and stick to it, cleaning your animal and its living spaces to prevent disease and odor. For larger pets like cats and dogs, there are animal cleaning centers with large tubs and hoses. Keep up with regular grooming, such as brushing fur or scrubbing scales, every few days. For dogs and cats, make sure you keep their nails short so they don't break painfully.



6. Do in-depth research about care for your pet



While these steps are general guidelines for pet ownership, each animal is different and you need to adapt accordingly. Ask friends who have similar pets, check out books from the library, and search internet discussion boards about your breed or species. You can never know too much. Be flexible once you bring your pet home. Pets have personalities and will have different wants and needs.