

Are You Ready for a Pet?

Have you purchased your first home and decided it's time for a new pet? Have you just moved into your first apartment and yearn for a dog or cat? Are you a recently single retiree who sold the family house and moved into a smaller home, condo or apartment and long for companionship? There are many reasons to consider a pet, but none more important than the uncompromising love they can give you.

Pets have been shown to decrease people's blood pressure, increase lifespan and bring immeasurable happiness and joy – but only if it's the right pet. There are key questions that you must ask yourself before diving into pet ownership. The answers will direct you toward the right pet. Conversely, they may help you realize that it may not be the right time to bring in a new family member.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Am I ready to make a commitment to a pet and how long will I commit?
- Can my lifestyle accommodate the needs of a pet?
- Can I afford veterinary care for a pet?
- Do I plan on moving any time in the foreseeable future?
- Do I travel frequently?

Selection and Commitment

If you adopt a kitten – let's call him Tigger – you may have up to 20 years of joy with him. If you are in college, imagine how many life changes you'll experience over two decades. Will you be able to care for Tigger during all of the ups and downs of your life?

Perhaps you have a distinguished career as a photojournalist and you want Tigger for a pet. Will your time away from home impact Tigger's care and well-being? Can you afford to have someone care for him whenever you're on assignment?

If your answers tell you that Tigger is best suited for someone else, you should consider adopting a pet that presents fewer dilemmas with people and housing. Canaries, for example, are lovely pets. They sing magnificently and are very interactive. Few if any, housing institutions forbid birds and people are rarely allergic. They often live for 8-12 years and can accommodate life changes easily.

Dogs demand and deserve your time. All breeds need food, shelter and love. Certain breeds require grooming and exercise. It is imperative that you are aware that your life and schedule will be significantly impacted by the needs of your dog. Accommodating those needs can be a sacrifice, but you should not consider a dog unless you are willing to rearrange your days to care for him or her. When you determine the time you are willing to commit, consider the prevailing traits of each breed. Border collies, for example, are very bright and very active and require a lot of time and attention. Bulldogs, on the other hand, are more subdued and don't need a lot of activities to keep them happy. (The dominant breed in a mixed-breed dog needs to be considered when selecting a dog that is not a purebred.)

Larger dogs and certain breeds, Rottweilers for example, are not allowed by some homeowner associations or rental properties. Remember: moving is not an acceptable reason for dropping off your dog at the local animal control facility. If you have a dog, you should look for housing that will accept you both.

Compared to dogs, cats are much less demanding as pets. Food, water and clean litter are basic necessities but they do not need walks and can easily entertain themselves. If your lifestyle takes you away from home for more than 12 hours a day, consider a cat as a pet rather than a dog. Both you and the cat will be happier!