

All About PETS

May 23, 2025

CHECK OUT WHAT'S INSIDE...

- HOW TO PROTECT PETS BOTH INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE HOME
- 5 TIPS FOR NEW PET OWNERS



A SPECIAL SECTION OF THE DERRICK. / THE NEWS-HERALD

The power of pets

Health benefits of human-animal interactions

Nothing compares to the joy of coming home to a loyal companion. The unconditional love of a pet can do more than keep you company. Pets may also decrease stress, improve heart health, and even help children with their emotional and social skills.

An estimated 68% of U.S. households have a pet. But who benefits from an animal? And which type of pet brings health benefits?

Over the past 10 years, NIH has partnered with the Mars Corporation's WALTHAM Centre for Pet Nutrition to answer questions like these by funding research studies.

Scientists are looking at what the potential physical and mental health benefits are for different animals—from fish to guinea pigs to dogs and cats.

Possible health effects

Research on human-animal interactions is still relatively new. Some studies have shown positive health effects, but the results have been mixed.

Interacting with animals has been shown to decrease levels of cortisol (a stress-related hormone) and lower blood pressure. Other studies have found that animals can reduce loneliness, increase feelings of social support, and boost your mood.

The NIH/Mars Partnership is funding a range of studies focused on the relationships we have with animals. For example, researchers are looking into how animals might influence child development. They're studying animal interactions with kids who have autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and other conditions.

"There's not one answer about how a pet can help somebody with a specific



condition," explains Dr. Layla Esposito, who oversees NIH's Human-Animal Interaction Research Program. "Is your goal to increase physical activity? Then you might benefit from owning a dog. You have to walk a dog several times a day and you're going to increase physical activity. If your goal is reducing stress, sometimes watching fish swim can result in a feeling of calmness. So there's no one type fits all."

NIH is funding large-scale surveys to find out the range of pets people live with and how their relationships with their pets relate to health.

"We're trying to tap into the subjective quality of the relationship with the animal—that part of the bond that people feel with animals—and how that translates into some of the health benefits," explains Dr. James Griffin, a child development expert at NIH.

Animals helping people

Animals can serve as a source of comfort and support. Therapy dogs are especially good at this. They're sometimes

brought into hospitals or nursing homes to help reduce patients' stress and anxiety.

"Dogs are very present. If someone is struggling with something, they know how to sit there and be loving," says Dr. Ann Berger, a physician and researcher at the NIH Clinical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. "Their attention is focused on the person all the time."

Berger works with people who have cancer and terminal illnesses. She teaches them about mindfulness to help decrease stress and manage pain.

"The foundations of mindfulness include attention, intention, compassion, and awareness," Berger says. "All of those things are things that animals bring to the table. People kind of have to learn it. Animals do this innately."

Researchers are studying the safety of bringing animals into hospital settings because animals may expose people to more germs. A current study is looking at the safety of bringing dogs to visit children with cancer, Esposito says. Scientists will be testing the children's hands to see if there are dangerous levels of germs transferred from the dog after the visit.

Dogs may also aid in the classroom. One study found that dogs can help children with ADHD focus their attention. Researchers enrolled two groups of children diagnosed with ADHD into 12-week group therapy sessions. The first group of kids read to a therapy dog once a week for 30 minutes. The second group read to puppets that looked like dogs.

Kids who read to the real animals showed better social skills and more sharing, cooperation, and volunteering. They also had fewer behavioral problems.

Another study found that children with autism spectrum disorder were calmer while playing with guinea pigs in the classroom. When the children spent 10 minutes in a supervised group

playtime with guinea pigs, their anxiety levels dropped. The children also had better social interactions and were more engaged with their peers. The researchers suggest that the animals offered unconditional acceptance, making them a calm comfort to the children.

"Animals can become a way of building a bridge for those social interactions," Griffin says. He adds that researchers are trying to better understand these effects and who they might help.

Animals may help you in other unexpected ways. A recent study showed that caring for fish helped teens with diabetes better manage their disease. Researchers had a group of teens with type 1 diabetes care for a pet fish twice a day by feeding and checking water levels. The caretaking routine also included changing the tank water each week. This was paired with the children reviewing their blood glucose (blood sugar) logs with parents.

Researchers tracked how consistently these teens checked their blood glucose. Compared with teens who weren't given a fish to care for, fish-keeping teens were more disciplined about checking their own blood glucose levels, which is essential for maintaining their health.

While pets may bring a wide range of health benefits, an animal may not work for everyone. Recent studies suggest that early exposure to pets may help protect young children from developing allergies and asthma. But for people who are allergic to certain animals, having pets in the home can do more harm than good.

Helping each other

Pets also bring new responsibilities. Knowing how to care for and feed an animal is part of owning a pet. NIH/Mars funds studies looking into the effects of human-animal interactions for both the pet and the person.

Remember that animals can feel stressed and fatigued, too. It's important for kids to be able to recognize signs of stress in their pet and know when not to approach. Animal bites can cause serious harm.

"Dog bite prevention is certainly an issue parents need to consider, especially for young children who don't always know the boundaries of what's appropriate to do with a dog," Esposito explains.

Researchers will continue to explore the many health effects of having a pet. "We're trying to find out what's working, what's not working, and what's safe—for both the humans and the animals," Esposito says.

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Protect pets both inside and outside the home

Newly adopted pets waste little time becoming beloved members of a household. But much like young children, pets are a significant responsibility, and they rely on their human caretakers to ensure their safety.

Pets are susceptible to illness and injury just like their human companions. The Pet Poison Hotline reported a 51 percent increase in the volume of calls between 2020 and 2021. Banfield Pet Hospitals also saw about half a million more pet visits in 2020 than in 2019. Furthermore, Dogster reports that 47 percent of pet owners had to deal with a serious medical issue or took their pets to emergency care in 2021.

Keeping cherished pets safe in and around a home is no small task. But with some diligence, it is possible to ensure health and happiness for companion animals. Follow these tips, courtesy of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Old Farm Veterinary Hospital and Security.org.

Consider an indoor and outdoor security camera system. Having eyes on pets while you're away from home enables a quick response should something happen.

Avoid leaving pet food outdoors overnight. Dog and cat foods can attract other animals, such as bears, raccoons, foxes, and opossums, depending on where you live. Wild animals grow accustomed to receiving easy meals and this could decrease their trepidation about being around a home or yard. Run-ins between your pets and wild animals should be avoided at all costs.

Skip the retractable leash. Walking a pet on a non-retractable leash allows better

control of the pet in the event of an encounter with a person or another animal.

Be cautious with chemicals. Carefully consider any chemicals you use in your yard, including pesticides and weed killers, as well as any cleaning products used indoors. Pets can ingest or inhale these products and get sick.

Pick up potential choking hazards. String, small pieces of toys, rawhide bone fragments, and other items can be choking hazards to pets. Be diligent about removing these items from the floor so that pets will not swallow them.

Tap on your car hood. Families who allow their cats outdoor access should thump on the car hood when it is cold outside, as sometimes cats take shelter near a warm engine block. Cats can become injured if you start the car while they are under the hood.

Stay up-to-date on vaccinations. Whether pets never step outdoors or have free rein, always vaccinate companion animals against common parasites and other pests.

Microchip your pets. Microchips not only protect pets should they get lost, but they also can help track down animals that may have been stolen. Remember to keep microchip data current to ensure a swift recovery.

Keep foods and medicines out of reach. Many human foods can be toxic to pets, as can medications that are kept in a home. Pets can be curious and easy access to these items may make them quite ill.

Pets need their owners to take key steps to safeguard their well-being.

Benefits of spaying and neutering

Each year millions of dogs and cats are euthanized in shelters because of overpopulation. Just a few years ago, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, shelters were emptied out as pet adoptions reached all-time highs. Now that offices have reopened and people have returned to work and other activities, pets increasingly are being surrendered to shelters again, once more leading to overtaxed shelters and other facilities.

Overburdened shelters also are made worse by litters of animals born to unsterilized parents. The American Veterinary Medical Association says spaying and neutering are important tools for preventing unplanned or unwanted litters, and reducing pet overpopulation. Most experts agree there is little benefit to leaving pets' reproductive systems intact. Even family pets can get loose and mate unintentionally. The following are six notable benefits to spaying or neutering a pet.

1. Prevent the conception and birth of unwanted animals.

2. The ASPCA says spaying prevents uterine infections and decreases the incidence of breast tumors, which are malignant or cancerous in about 50 percent of dogs and 90 percent of cats. Spaying a pet before the first heat offers the best measure of protection.

3. Neutering male animals prevents testicular cancer if done before six months of age.

4. Neutered animals are less likely to roam and become nuisances. Female cats can go into heat four to five days every three weeks during breeding season. While in heat they will yowl and urinate frequently. Males will be on the prowl for females and can get into fights. Spaying and neutering reduces these tendencies.

5. Neutering and spaying is a lot less costly than having and caring for a litter. It also prevents medical treatment from being needed in the event a pet gets into a fight over mating.

6. Although the surgery will reduce some undesirable behaviors, it is not a magic fix for all behavioral problems, including bad habits.

The ASPCA says the traditional age to sterilize dogs is between six and nine months. Healthy puppies as young as eight weeks can undergo a spaying or neutering surgery. For cats, it is generally considered safe for kittens as young as eight weeks old. To avoid the start of urine spraying, neuter or spay a cat before the animal reaches five months of age.

Spaying and neutering is important for animal health and helps to reduce pet overpopulation.

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Lifesaving CPR tips for dogs and cats

By LAURA WILLIAMSON

American Heart Association News (TNS)

Watching a beloved pet fall seriously ill can be heart-wrenching, especially if Fluffy or Fido becomes unresponsive. But did you know you might be able to save your dog's or cat's life by administering CPR?

"When pet owners or bystanders initiate life support, we have seen successful outcomes and the pet may go back home with a good quality of life," said Dr. Jamie Burkitt, an associate professor of clinical small animal emergency and critical care at the University of California, Davis.

Burkitt is co-chair of the Reassessment Campaign on Veterinary Resuscitation, or RECOVER, Initiative, which published new guidelines in 2024 for administering CPR to dogs and cats. The guidelines for veterinary health professionals are based on a review of more than 1,370 studies and outline how to deliver chest compressions and "mouth to snout" resuscitation if the animal's heart has stopped.

The RECOVER Initiative also offers online classes to pet owners who want to learn how to administer lifesaving care to their fur babies.

Dr. Manuel Boller, a critical care specialist at Central Victoria Veterinary Hospital in Victoria, Canada, and co-chair of the RECOVER Initiative, said the reasons a pet's heart would stop differ from the heart-related conditions that lead a human's heart to stop, but the techniques for restoring breathing and a heartbeat are similar.

How do you know if your dog or cat needs CPR?

The human heart can stop suddenly and without warning, Burkitt said. But with pets, "most of the time, you have some indication the animal is ill before its heart stops."

Signs that an animal is in medical distress include difficulty breathing, rapid breathing, lethargy, loss of appetite or excessive vomiting. Or "if a cat is breathing with its mouth open, ever," she said. "These are things we'd be very worried about" and may lead the animal's heart to stop. As with humans, the animal will become unresponsive.

What should you do if a dog or cat becomes unresponsive?

Do not call 911, Boller said. Instead,

begin CPR and have someone call the nearest veterinary hospital to tell them you are coming. Make sure to know the location and phone number of the veterinary hospital ahead of time.

Chest compressions and rescue breaths can be performed in the car, he said, but only if someone else is available to drive while a second person delivers the care while wearing a seat belt.

"Driving safely is the most important thing," Boller said. "But if there are ample people to provide chest compressions while someone else is driving, delivering continuous compressions is very important for a dog or cat, just like it is with people."

How do you give CPR to a dog or cat?

Chest compressions are given to most dogs and cats while they are lying on their sides, but dogs with wide chests, such as English bulldogs, can be lying on their backs.

The location of compressions differs based on the dog's breed. For round-chested dogs, such as retrievers, give compressions at the widest part of the chest. For wide-chested dogs on their backs, give compressions in the middle of the breastbone.

For medium and giant dog breeds, the person performing compressions should lock their elbows with arms extended, overlap the hands and place the heel of the bottom hand on the animal's chest. Shoulders should be vertically positioned over the wrists, and fingers should be interlaced and not fanned out.

With small dogs and cats, overlapping, two-handed compressions are not recommended. Instead, Burkitt said, the hands are wrapped around the animal's chest, using the thumbs to give compressions.

A one-handed technique may also be used for cats or small dogs. In one version, the non-dominant hand braces the animal while the dominant hand wraps around the animal's chest using the thumb and flat fingers to compress the heart. Or, the heel of the dominant hand may be used for compressions.

If the animal is lying on the floor, the person giving compressions should be beside it on their knees. It's important to push hard and fast on the animal's chest, Boller said.

Compressions on dogs and cats should be given at a rate of 100 to 120 compressions per minute, with two rescue breaths given after every 30 compressions. That's also what the American Heart Association recommends for humans in cardiac arrest.

Ideally, breaths that deliver oxygen to the organs are given along with the chest compressions that get blood to the

organs, Boller said. To deliver mouth-to-snout ventilation, "encircle the nostrils of the animal with your lips to make a tight seal and deliver a breath," he said.

For people, call 911 and start CPR, with or without breaths. Place the heel of one hand in the center of the chest at the nipple line, place the other hand on top and interlock the fingers. Send someone to retrieve an automated external defibrillator, or AED, if one is nearby. It's a device that can shock a heart back into rhythm.

Is it safe to give CPR to a dog or cat?

Burkitt said there is little risk involved in administering CPR to a pet, which could include breaking its ribs or being bitten. "The potential for benefit is so much greater than the potential for harm to either party," she said.

Hands-only CPR may be delivered if there is a risk that the animal is carrying an infectious disease or if the person feels unsafe delivering breaths.

Can CPR be done on other pets?

While resuscitation techniques may be used on other household pets, such as bunnies, there is little evidence showing how effective this might be, Burkitt said.

The RECOVER Initiative is, however, developing CPR guidelines for larger animals, such as horses, said Burkitt, who expects guidelines for rabbits and other non-domestic pets within the next five years.

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How to protect your pet's dental health

(Family Features) Like humans, pets' oral hygiene plays an important role in their overall health and quality of life. Common conditions like plaque buildup, tartar and bad breath can escalate to serious health conditions if untreated.

In fact, by the age of 3, 80% of pets experience some form of dental health issue, and the risk only increases as they age. However, for many pet owners, taking care of their four-legged friends' oral health is a more difficult habit to maintain than their own daily brushing and flossing routine.

Many veterinarians recommend regular brushing for pets, and a wide array of treats and meal additives complement brushing to help support your pet's oral health.

Protecting your pet's oral health begins by talking with your veterinarian, who can provide recommendations tailored to your pet's specific needs. With that guidance, you can start comparison shopping and reading labels so you can identify quality products. Remember you're likely to find the greatest success by introducing oral health products as part of your pet's daily routine early on.

Certifications for trust and quality

Products that meet high standards are eligible for certifications that assure consumers about their quality and efficacy. For example, the VOHC (Veterinary Oral Health Council) is an independent organization that evaluates pet dental products. Their Seal of Acceptance is awarded to products that meet strict standards for controlling plaque and tartar. You can find the seal on packaging as an easy visual indication of the product's quality standards.

Natural, effective ingredients

Look for products that prioritize safety

Sustainable Practices

Another detail you can gather from the product's packaging is whether a product manufacturer adheres to environmentally friendly practices and safe ingredient sourcing, which means the product is not only good for pets but also for the planet. This may be evident in certifications or special icons on the packaging, through information about sustainably harvested ingredients or with packaging that itself is environmentally responsible.

Tailoring to individual pets

Different pets have different needs



and health by offering natural, clinically proven ingredients and no artificial additives or chemicals. Seaweed (or kelp) is a preferred ingredient because it contains minerals and enzymes that help reduce plaque and prevent bacteria.

based on age, size, breed and oral health status. Selecting the right product may also be complicated by your pet's allergies or picky eating habits. You can find a variety of ingestible options, including powders, chews or bones, to use in conjunction with daily brushing.

Powder: Ideal for a seamless addition to your pet's diet, this is the most economical choice, particularly for long-term use. It's especially suitable for younger pets as a preventive measure, given its longevity and cost-effectiveness.

Chews: For those looking for an easy-to-administer option that doubles as

a reward, chews are the way to go. Additionally, for older pets or those with missing teeth, soft chews can offer a gentle yet effective way to maintain oral health. They're a convenient choice for pet owners to give as a daily dose without the need for measuring or mixing.

Bones: Designed not only to satisfy your dog's natural chewing instincts but also to aid in dental care, bones are a perfect option for pet parents whose dogs prefer a longer-lasting treat. Bones come in a variety of flavors and sizes, catering to both large and small breeds, making them a versatile way to help keep your dog's teeth clean and their breath fresh.

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Essential tips for responsible horse ownership

Are you bringing an equine friend into your family, or looking to brush up on your horse care skills? Read on for tips to keep your horse healthy and happy.

Nutritional needs

A horse's digestive system is designed to digest frequent, small meals of roughage throughout the day. The basic diet for most horses should be grass and good-quality hay, free of dust and mold. Clean, unfrozen water should be available at all times along with a trace mineral/salt block.

How much food is enough?

Ideally, a horse will have constant access to high-quality forage in the form of fresh grass or hay. An empty stomach lends itself to a higher risk of ulcers and other digestive issues. How much to feed depends on various factors such as condition and activity level, but most horses should eat between 2% and 2.5% of their body weight in pounds of hay and supplemented feeds daily. It is important to watch your horse and make sure he is maintaining an appropriate weight. Your veterinarian can help you decide how to feed to keep your horse fit and healthy.

A word on grains: The bulk of the diet should almost always be roughage, but grain can be a useful supplement to hay to ensure you are meeting your horse's caloric and nutritional needs. Less is often more and most horses, even active ones, only need several pounds of grain a day. Grains digest quickly, leaving the stomach empty and gasses in the intestines. Foals fed "high energy" diets can develop bone and joint problems. Some adult horses with certain muscle disorders can



have their symptoms exacerbated by the high carbohydrates found in grain.

Any changes to your horse's diet should be made gradually to avoid colic (abdominal pain usually associated with intestinal disease) or laminitis (painful inflammation in the hoof associated with separation of the hoof bone from the hoof wall), either of which can be catastrophic. A horse or pony breaking into the grain bin or being allowed to gorge on green pasture for the first time since the fall could be headed for disaster. If you travel with your horse, bring his food along to avoid changes.

Vaccinations and deworming

All horses need vaccinations and regular deworming. Vaccination recommen-

dations vary based on age, the amount the horse travels and location, so it is best to consult with your veterinarian. To get a general idea of what vaccines you should expect to give your horse, visit the American Association of Equine Practitioner's vaccination guidelines.

Worms can cause weight loss, poor coat and colic. It is best to have your veterinarian perform a fecal egg count test and advise you on which dewormers to use throughout the year. It is equally important to minimize your horse's exposure to parasites. Proper management entails not putting too many horses on too little land, rotating pastures if possible, and removing manure regularly.

Housing, rest and exercise

Horses are social animals who are physiologically most sound when they have the ability to roam and interact with other horses. Of course, not all horses thrive in 24/7 turnout and not all horse owners have access to large areas of land. If your horse is stalled, be mindful of providing him socialization and enrichment opportunities, and provide daily turnout if possible. If your horse does live outside, make sure he has access to a safe shelter at all times.

Horses can go into a light sleep with their legs "locked" so that it takes very little effort to remain standing. In order to achieve deep (REM or "dreaming") sleep, a horse must lie flat. It is not known how much or how often a horse needs to do this, but do take note of any changes in your horse's sleeping patterns.

Horses were born to move. In the wild they may walk many miles in a day, sometimes trot, but rarely gallop unless they have to. Daily opportunity to exercise is a must, but if you are building up your horse's strength and conditioning, follow a sensible plan and do it gradually.

Extreme weather precautions

Unless it is very wet and windy, horses tolerate cold much better than heat and humidity. On hot and humid days, it is important to provide your horse with plenty of fresh water, minerals and access to adequate shade. In extreme heat, use caution and limit forced exercise. Likewise, during extreme cold weather, make sure your horse has access to shelter and the ability to protect himself from moisture and wind. Some horses may require a waterproof blanket for additional warmth.

Hoof care

Hooves should be trimmed every six to eight weeks. Depending on your horse's activity level, the environment and his body type, your horse may need shoes. Your farrier will be able to recommend the best course of action to keep your horse's hooves strong and well-balanced.

Teeth

Horses' teeth grow continuously. Uneven wear can lead to sharp points and edges that cause pain and difficulty chewing. A horse's teeth should be checked once or twice a year and "float-ed" (filed to make them smoother) by a veterinarian. Dental problems, from painful points to rotting teeth, may cause difficulty chewing or "quidding," which occurs when food falls out of the mouth. Other signs of dental disease may include foul breath, undigested hay in the stools or discomfort from the bit or noseband. Dental disease can lead to choke (esophageal blockage), colic and weight loss.

Equine poison prevention

Experts at the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center have compiled a list of toxic plants for horses. Check out the following list for a few of the more common toxic plants you might encounter.

- Wilted red maple leaves
- Black walnut (e.g., as shavings in bedding)
- Oak (especially new-growth leaves in the springtime)
- Taxus species (yew, Japanese yew, American yew, English yew, western yew, oleander and rose laurel)
- Rhododendron and azalea
- White snakeroot, richweed, white sanicle, jimmy weed, rayless goldenrod, burrow weed
- Yellow star thistle, St. Barnaby's thistle, Russian napweed
- Blister beetles, which can sometimes be found in alfalfa hay, especially in the Midwest and Southwest

If you suspect that your animal has ingested a poisonous substance, please call your veterinarian or the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center's 24-hour hotline at (888) 426-4435.

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Making an informed decision about reptile pets

Pets are an important part of the American household. Your pet-owning experience will be most enjoyable if you carefully consider which pet best suits your family, home, and lifestyle. Unrealized expectations are the leading cause of pet relinquishment, so make an informed decision. Take time, involve your family, and give careful consideration to the following questions.

What's special about reptiles?

Reptiles include some of the most ancient species on Earth. They are interesting in appearance and behavior, and some are brightly colored. They live in many different environments and have developed fascinating adaptations to survive in water and on land. Some reptiles (e.g., many types of snakes) only eat once a week, making it easier to care for them when you are away. In general, reptiles require less daily care and exercise than other pets such as cats and dogs, however they require special skills to care for properly and can suffer serious health consequences from improper diets, handling, or habitats.

What choices do you have?

There are many options for choosing a reptile as a pet, including varieties of lizards, snakes, and turtles. Some species live mostly in the water, others mostly on land and many live in both. Depending on the species, reptiles can be herbivores (plant-eating), insectivores (insect-eating), or carnivores (meat-eating). Many benefit from having more than one type of diet and may even change from one diet to another in different phases of their life.

What are the special needs of reptiles?

Reptile needs vary with the species. In

general, reptiles cannot control their own body temperature, and must be housed in an environment with a specific range of temperatures that are known to be best for that species. Humidity ranges are often just as important as temperature, and can be more difficult for many people to duplicate (especially during winter in cold climates). Proper type and amount of lighting is important for a reptile's wellbeing, as is proper housing, since many reptiles outgrow their initial tanks as they mature.

Since each reptile species is unique, thoroughly research the animal you want as a pet before you obtain one. Learn what is known about the reptile's natural habitat (e.g., diet, environmental conditions) as well as how experienced reptile owners have cared for that species. Someone who has successfully bred the reptile in captivity can often provide good advice as will veterinarians whose special interest is reptiles.

It is important to provide the correct environment for your pet. Some reptiles are climbers and require vertical caging and branches, whereas others prefer to live on flat surfaces with hiding spaces. Some like to burrow, while others spend most of their lives in water. Many reptiles are stressed or can be damaged by handling and are best appreciated by observing unobtrusively. Providing an ideal environment for a reptile so that it is physically healthy and shows its natural behaviors can be very satisfying. This involves knowing when to avoid disturbing the reptile such as during hibernation or skin shedding.

Make sure you are able to feed the reptile you select an appropriate diet; for example, you should not get a carnivorous snake if you know you will not be comfortable feeding it meat such as mice or rats. Also, while reptiles are often considered predators, there are

species of animals that prey on reptiles. Many people fail to consider this source of stress for their pet reptile.

Who will care for your reptile?

While families should involve their children in caring for their pet reptile, children need the help of an adult who is willing, able, and available to supervise a reptile's daily care. If you travel, your reptile will generally do better if left home in its own environment and cared for by friends or a service.

There is also a human health risk to consider when housing a reptile. Since many reptiles can carry the Salmonella bacteria that can cause illness in people, good hygiene must be followed when handling reptiles. Children may be at higher risk of infection unless they are adequately supervised and taught to follow good cleanliness practices around their pet.

Does a reptile fit your lifestyle?

Reptiles can be excellent alternatives for people who are allergic to furred or feathered animals. While some reptiles appear to enjoy human handling and interaction others, even of the same species, prefer to be left alone and observed in their habitat. Research the animal you select to learn about its general care, lifespan, and how large it may grow. As they grow, many reptiles' needs for caging and care change and these changes will impact how suitable that animal is for your lifestyle.

Most reptiles depend on the sun to keep them warm and to help regulate their metabolic functions, such as their immune system and calcium levels. When caring for a pet reptile, this can be achieved through sun exposure in an outdoor environment if local climate allows or by providing artificial light in the spectrum appropriate for that species.

Many reptiles will bite and some are venomous. Some reptiles, although attractive and unique, are inappropriate pets because they are dangerous. Permits may be required to keep certain reptiles and some species are prohibited as pets in various states and municipalities and under some housing rules.

Can you afford a reptile?

Prices of reptiles vary greatly with species, rarity, age, size, and coloration. Often, supplies for their housing and ongoing care are more expensive than the reptile itself as many species require larger enclosures as they mature and grow. Some will require lighting fixtures with special bulbs that need to be replaced every 6 to 12 months. In addition, while many reptiles need fresh vegetables daily, others must be fed live insects (such as worms or crickets) and carnivores require the regular purchase of feeder mice, rats, chicks, or rabbits for their food. Since reptiles, like other pets, may become ill and require surgery or other veterinary care during their lifetime, routine veterinary visits are important.

Where can you get a reptile?

Most people obtain reptiles at pet stores, reptile shows, or, occasionally, from shelters or rescue groups. Most common pet reptiles are bred in captivity, but some are illegally taken from their environment and sold as pets. You should inquire about and research this prior to purchase so you don't encourage illegal or irresponsible trade practices.

How can you select a healthy reptile?

Reptiles bred and raised in captivity as future pets are likely to be healthier and live longer than those captured in the wild, and their purchase supports responsible reptile breeding and management.

Many reptiles are best kept as solo specimens and prefer not to share their habitat. Become familiar with the normal weight, coloration, and activities of the species you want prior to purchase. Carefully look over the animal you are considering buying. You should not see any external parasites, such as mites or ticks, and the reptile's eyes should be clear. Ask about its diet and if the reptile has been eating (if not, there may be a health problem). The skin sheen and color varies greatly by species, age, and time until shed.

What must you do to prepare for your reptile?

Not only is your veterinarian (especially one with special knowledge about reptiles) best qualified to evaluate the health of your new companion, but they can advise you about proper nutrition, parasite control, socialization, housing, grooming and other care that your new pet. Schedule an initial wellness exam so your veterinarian can evaluate the general health of your new pet reptile and check for external parasites (as well as internal parasites through a fecal sample). Since new animals should be quarantined for at least a month and kept away from other reptiles in the household, your veterinarian can determine when it is safe to introduce the new reptile.

If you find your reptile is no longer an appropriate pet for your family, contact your veterinarian, reptile specialist, or local animal control office for help in finding it a new home. Never release the reptile into the outdoors where it will not survive and could present a health risk to people or other animals.

When you acquire a pet

You accept responsibility for the health and welfare of another living thing. You are also responsible for your pet's impact on your family, friends, and community. A pet will be part of your life for many years. Invest the time and effort necessary to make your years together happy ones. When you choose a pet, you are promising to care for it for its entire life. Choose wisely, keep your promise, and enjoy one of life's most rewarding experiences!

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Dog grooming advice to keep pets clean and healthy

(Family Features) Regular grooming can keep your dog looking and smelling his or her best, but it's also important for maintaining health. If you choose to groom at home rather than opting for (often expensive) professional care, it's also an opportunity to examine your pet for potential concerns.

A proper grooming routine starts with the right tools. Consider these suggestions from The Humane Society of the United States:

- Dog-friendly nail clippers
- Rubber-bristled brush
- Dog-friendly toothbrush and toothpaste
- Dog-friendly shampoo and conditioner
- Cotton balls
- Blunt-ended shears or small clippers with guides
- Microfiber towel

Trimming nails

When your dog's nails nearly touch the ground, it's time for a trim, typically every 3-4 weeks. Trimming the part of the nail that turns down helps prevent pain

and damage to paws.

If your dog has white nails, avoid cutting the "quick," the pink part that's visible on white nails, which bleeds when cut. For dark nails, simply trim a bit at a time until evidence of the quick is visible.

Bathing and brushing

Frequency for baths and brushing depends on your dog's coat type — be sure to research optimal grooming schedules based on his or her breed. In general, The Humane Society of the United States recommends these guidelines:

- **Short, smooth or wiry coat:** Brush once a week with a rubber-bristled brush.
- **Long, silky or curly coat:** Brush once a day with a rubber-bristled brush or wire slicker brush. Use a steel comb to prevent tangles or mats, if necessary.
- **Double coat:** Use an undercoat rake or de-shedding tool to gently de-shed once a week in addition to regular brushing routines.

When it's bath time, use a shampoo formulated for

dogs and a damp cloth or cotton ball to clean around the eyes and ears without pushing anything into the eyes or ears. Dry with a microfiber towel or hair dryer on a low setting.

Cutting fur

Be careful and work slowly to avoid mistakes and keep your dog calm and comfortable. Brush, bathe and completely dry prior to cutting fur with blunt-ended shears or small clippers with guide combs. Specifically trim hair covering the eyes and private areas and between your pup's paw pads. It may be helpful to watch a tutorial online to ensure success.

Brushing teeth

You can prevent gum disease and plaque buildup by brushing your dog's teeth with a soft toothbrush and dog-friendly toothpaste. Make sure your pet is comfortable and start slow, staying on the outside surfaces of teeth and gently rubbing back and forth. Focus on the area where the tooth surface meets the gum.

~Carly~
4/25/2025

My sweet girl, I miss you daily. You will be forever in my heart.
Melissa

~Camy~
4/9/2025

You will always be in my heart. I love you forever!
Sadly missed by Bev

~Angel Lynn~
3/18/2025

Forever in our heart!
Sadly missed by Nancy and Butch

~Lucky~
5/14/2024

You left your pawprints on our hearts.
Sadly missed Ed and Darlene

~Ivy~
11/5/2024

Our "gentle giant" and beautiful therapy dog.
Forever in our hearts,
The Chekanowsky Family

Bringing home a pet? Here's how to start off right

(Family Features) Welcoming a new pet is exciting, but preparation is needed to provide a loving home and enjoy the unconditional love.

Prepare your furry friend for a new home with these essential tips for first-time pet owners.

Choose the right pet for your lifestyle

Consider your living situation, work schedule and personal preferences. Research different breeds to find the one that matches your activity level, living space and family dynamics. Also consider any allergies or sensitivities you or your family may have as some pets may trigger allergies or asthma symptoms.

Set up your home

Before bringing your new pet home, create a safe and comfortable environment. Start by pet-proofing your home, removing any hazardous substances and securing loose wires or cords. Make sure to store cleaning supplies, medications and toxic plants out of reach. Provide a designated space that includes a cozy bed or crate, food and water bowls and toys.



Create a routine

Establish a consistent schedule for feeding, exercise and bathroom breaks. Determine the appropriate amount and frequency of meals for your pet's age, size and breed. Spend quality time with your pet daily, providing attention, affection and mental stimulation.

Budget for your pet's needs

Owning a pet comes with financial responsibilities. Consider the costs of food, grooming, veterinary care, vaccinations and preventive medications. Additionally, factor in the cost of toys, bedding, litter and other supplies.

Find a reliable veterinarian

Regular check-ups and open communication with a local veterinarian can help detect any potential health issues early and ensure your pet receives the best possible care. Ask friends, family or neighbors with pets for provider recommendations and read reviews. Visit potential veterinarians' offices to meet the staffs, tour the facilities and ask any questions you may have.

Common cancer symptoms in pets you shouldn't ignore

Researchers have made considerable progress in understanding the spread and development of various forms of cancers. In fact, millions now go on to live long lives after successful treatments, even though much about the disease remains a mystery.

While cancers that affect humans garner substantial attention, the disease also can be diagnosed in pets. Pets can develop neoplasia, which involves the abnormal growth of cells or tissues in the body that form into a neoplasm (tumor). A tumor can be benign or malignant. Malignant neoplasms can be unpredictable and grow

at various rates and spread to other parts of the animals' bodies. When malignant neoplasms are present, then the pet is considered to have cancer, says the American Veterinary Medical Association.

The National Cancer Institute says crude estimates of cancer incidence in pets indicate there are roughly six million new cancer diagnoses made in dogs and a similar number made in cats each year. Although sometimes the signs that an animal is unwell are readily apparent, often cancer may produce only subtle symptoms that are challenging to distinguish



and may overlap with other health issues. Here are some signs to watch out for.

Weight loss: Unless a pet is on a specific weight loss regimen or has increased exercise significantly, a sudden drop in weight could be a sign of cancer.

Appetite changes: If appetite suddenly increases or decreases, that may be a red flag for cancer. Pay attention to the eating habits of your pets.

New growths or bumps: The presence of new growths on a pet's body should be checked by a vet. Not all lumps are cancerous, but pay attention to lumps that grow, don't go away or change in shape.

Behavioral changes: Pet owners get to know the dispositions of their companion animals. When a pet that is normally boisterous becomes lethargic, withdrawn or less playful, that could be a sign of illness.

Bathroom habit changes: Dietary factors or eating a foreign item in the

yard can affect a pet's bowel movements, but so can illness. Pets struggling with urination or defecation or those exhibiting changes in urine or stool may be sick with cancer.

Unusual bleeding or discharge: If abnormal bleeding from the nose, mouth or rectum is present, or if the animal has unusual discharge from the eyes or ears, that could be a warning sign for cancer.

Swollen lymph nodes: Pets' lymph nodes are located beneath the jaw, in front of the shoulders, on each side of the chest, and on the back side of the legs. Swollen lymph nodes may be an indication of an illness like cancer.

The cause of most cancers in pets is not known and, therefore cannot be easily prevented. It is important to keep up with routine well visits for pets so that vets can catch cancer at its earliest stage when it is the most treatable.

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Understanding and boosting your dog's digestive system

(Family Features) When it comes to humans, gut health can be a great indicator of overall health. Often, when illnesses or conditions arise, symptoms are present in the gastrointestinal system. It makes sense that when you're feeling bad or extra stressed, you can feel it in your stomach or your bowels — and the same is true for your pet.

"When my dogs are dealing with stomach issues, they're not themselves — they just seem off," said Kaley Cuoco, co-founder of Oh Norman!, a pet wellness brand. "That's why I became so obsessed with finding a way to boost their digestive health."

Gut health involves several components of the gastrointestinal tract, including the microbiome (bacteria, viruses and fungi) and digestive system, which controls how the body breaks down and absorbs the nutritional components of food.

A healthy gut allows your pet to live comfortably with good overall wellness and a properly functioning immune system. Dogs with healthy guts have a moderate, consistent appetite and maintain a healthy weight. They have adequate energy and even look visibly healthy with a shiny coat. Their stools are firm and regular.

Conversely, dogs with gut health problems may be lethargic and have problems with excess or too little weight. They may experience pain, bad breath, poor skin condition and a variety of gastro symptoms like constipation, gas, vomiting or diarrhea.

If you're concerned about your dog's gut health, consider these tips from the animal-loving experts at Oh Norman!:

Consult with your veterinarian. Problems with gut health can have a dizzying number of sources, so if your dog exhibits signs of a gut health issue that seem severe or don't go away within a day or two, it's a good idea to talk with an expert. The advice you get will be tailored to your pet's specific circumstances and needs so you can help your four-legged friend feel better fast.

Pay attention to your dog's diet. A good gut-health eating plan is fiber-rich and balanced with protein, vegetables and



healthy fats. Foods that contain probiotics support good bacteria while prebiotics help feed good bacteria. Food allergies or intolerances can also trigger gut health problems, so pay attention to ingredients that may be problematic for your pet.

Add supplements to boost the microbiome. If you're concerned, and your veterinarian agrees, it may be useful to supplement your dog's diet to support gut health.

Eliminate external factors. If your dog's gut health issues aren't driven by diet, some environmental adjustments can make a difference. For example, creating a more peaceful, secure living environment can help settle gut problems.

Practice good general care. Providing your pet with consistent loving care can also play a role in gut health. Dogs that feel safe, are well-disciplined, get regular exercise and remain well-hydrated tend to have stronger gut health.

"When my dogs are dealing with stomach issues, they're not themselves — they just seem off, that's why I became so obsessed with finding a way to boost their digestive health."

Kaley Cuoco
Co-founder of Oh Norman!



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