



All puppies are cute and it is very tempting to acquire one almost by accident. Taking on a puppy is a big responsibility - remember it will not stay a puppy for long. Within a year you will have an adult dog which may be expected to live for 10 years or more. Before getting a puppy think about whether you are able to make a long-term commitment and, if you are, what kind of dog will best suit your lifestyle.

Where should I get a puppy from?

There are a huge variety of pedigree dogs and if you decide to get a pedigree puppy you should contact a breeder for further advice. The breeder will be able to provide you with more information about your chosen breed and whether it is really the right kind of dog for you. Listen carefully to them and take their advice - think again if they suggest that you have made the wrong choice. Do not buy puppies from dealers however tempting it may be. Always ask to see a puppy with its mother and preferably in a home environment. If you have children you should ideally get a puppy brought up in a household with children.

Animal welfare charities and rescue centres are always looking for good homes for puppies and mature dogs. It may be more appropriate for you to have an adult dog that is already trained. Always be wary of adult dogs in rescue centres if their previous history is unclear - ask yourself 'why did someone else get rid of this dog?'

How can I tell if a puppy is healthy?

If you get a puppy that is already carrying a disease it may never recover to full health. A healthy puppy should have bright clear eyes and a clean shiny coat. Avoid taking on a puppy with a large pot-belly or a dull scurfy coat. Take the puppy to your own vet for a check as soon as possible. Your vet can tell you if the puppy looks healthy and may be able to detect problems that the puppy was born with which might cause problems in later life.

What are the signs of a good nature?

A normal puppy should be active, interested and playful. It is a bad sign if the puppy is very nervous or appears sleepy all the time. However, normal puppies do sleep for long periods, so it is worth watching the puppy for a while or visiting on several occasions before making a final decision. Early experiences are important to produce a happy and well-adjusted dog, so ideally choose a puppy from a household which is similar to your own. If you have children or a cat your puppy is more likely to adjust well to these if it has grown up with them from an early age.

What should I ask the breeder?

Puppies normally leave their mothers between 8 and 12 weeks. Before you take the puppy home ask about the kind of care it was getting. Try to feed the same type of food for at least a few days and introduce any new diet gradually. Find out if the puppy has had any vaccinations and if it has, you should be given a certificate signed by a vet. All puppies have worms and so regular worm treatment (usually every 2 weeks at first) is vitally important in the first year of life. Find out when your puppy was last treated for worms and ask your vet for advice about continuing treatment in your home.

What equipment do I need?

Make sure you have all the things you will need before you bring the puppy home. Food and water bowls, food, a warm bed, a collar with name and address tag and grooming equipment are all essential. Toys are also a good idea.

What if I have other pets?

Until your puppy has completed his course of vaccinations (around 12-14 weeks) he should only be allowed to mix with other fully vaccinated animals. If you have other pets, introduce them gradually to the puppy and never leave them alone together at first. It is very important for a puppy to meet a variety of other animals and people as soon as possible. Once his vaccination course is finished try to get out and about with your puppy - there are also puppy 'socialisation classes' where your pup can meet others of the same age for fun and frolics. Think about attending puppy training classes - bad habits learned early are hard to break!



What else do I need to do?

Register your puppy with a vet as soon as possible and ask for a health check. Regular, daily grooming will help keep your pet in top condition. Starting this as soon as possible will get your puppy used to the idea of being groomed and he will soon come to look forward to the attention. Dental disease is common in dogs and this can be avoided, just as in humans, by daily tooth brushing. If you start a routine of tooth brushing as soon as you get your puppy it will be much easier to continue throughout his later years. Special brushes and doggy toothpastes are available. Do not use human toothpaste as this will foam up in your puppy's mouth and he will not like the taste.

Do I need to get my puppy vaccinated?

There are a number of highly infectious (and potentially fatal diseases) that can affect your dog. There is no treatment for many of these diseases and young puppies that catch them often die. However, for many of these conditions there is a simple protection in the form of vaccination. Ensure that your dog completes an initial course of vaccinations and then receives regular booster jabs if you want to keep your dog fit and healthy.

When can I get my puppy neutered?

Puppies can be neutered from a young age. You should discuss this with your vet at the time of vaccination if you are not planning to let your pet have puppies.

A well trained dog is an asset to his owner. Whilst owning a dog is a long term commitment it will bring you many rewards.

If you want any other information on health issues concerning your dog please contact The Veterinary Hospital, Plymouth on 01752 702646 and we will be happy to advise you.