Welcome Home
How to introduce new pets to existing pets

Kitten Care
Tips to raise healthy and happy kittens

Curing the Cough
How to recognize and treat kennel cough
Tips for a healthy and happy kitten

New pets can make life at home more exciting. Cats are popular pets because of their curiosity, playfulness and size, which makes them great pets in private homes and apartments big and small. Many people prefer cats because they tend to require less maintenance than dogs and felines are relatively self-sufficient. According to a 2014 survey from Alberta Agriculture and Forestry, 37 percent of Canadian households included one or more cats. In the United States, the American Pet Products Association says that 30 to 37 percent of households have a cat, and more than 35 percent of cats are acquired as strays.

Kittens can be soft, fluffy and adorable to have around. However, to maintain a peaceful household and provide a safe environment for new felines, it’s important for pet owners to follow some key tips.

Kittens should not be separated from their mother or siblings until they’re at least 10 to 12 weeks of age, provided the litter has had significant human contact, offers Blue Buffalo Pet Food’s animal experts. If the kittens have not had much contact, it may be possible to bring them home earlier. The earlier cats are socialized, the easier the kitten-owner relationship and the less skittish the cat may be.

Cats require some necessities from the start. These include feeding bowls, litter boxes or trays, toys, and scratching posts. Washable cat beds with warm blankets are also helpful. Position the litter tray in a corner away from food and water. The International Cat Care group says that a new home can be intimidating, so it’s best to introduce cats slowly to their new environments. Choose a room that’s quiet where the kitten can adjust. Outfit the room with toys and a place to snuggle or hide, and remove any hazards or breakable items.

Gradually give the kitten time to venture out into the main living area to explore, watching how it behaves. If the cat dashes nervously, it may need more time to acclimate. Some kittens take up to two weeks to fully relax in a home. People should be introduced one at a time.

The animal guidance group VetStreet says handling and playing with kittens at least once per day will help owners form strong emotional bonds with their cats. Children should be monitored upon introduction to the new kitten to make sure it’s a positive experience for both the kitten and child.

Veterinarians can offer a wealth of information for new cat owners. Ask many questions, including which foods to feed them and how often; illnesses to watch out for; suggestions on how to introduce the kitten to other pets; and guidelines for making litter box training easier. Remember to discuss having the kitten spayed or neutered right away to help combat cat overpopulation.

Kittens can be playful members of the family. Treat them right from the start and they can make loving and excellent pets.

13 quirky facts about companion animals

Think you know everything there is to know about your favorite furry, finned or feathered friend? Chances are there are some interesting facts that even the most ardent animal lover may be surprised to learn.

1. Tough tongue: Cats’ tongues are covered with little structures called “tongue papillae,” which are like tiny hooks pointing toward the throat. These hook-like structures help hold food while a cat is eating. The papillae also help with grooming. Humans can feel these barbs when licked by cats.

2. Seeing spots: Dalmatians are born all white. Their spots will develop within the first few weeks of life and can be black, brown or liver colored.

3. Sleepy time: Cats are born loungers and will spend on average 16 hours of the day snoozing. Only sloths spend more time asleep.

4. Send a message: Fish do not have vocal chords, but they can use low-pitched moans, grunts, hisses, and wails to communicate with one another.

5. Watch the eyes: Pet birds can communicate feelings through their pupils. If pupils are dilated, the bird is calm. Pinprick-sized pupils mean birds are agitated and may bite.

6. Meeeoowwww: Cats only meow to communicate with humans, not amongst themselves.

7. Seeing colors: Dogs are not color blind as once presumed. They can see colors, just not as vividly as humans.

8. Kindle … not just for reading: A group of kittens is called a “kindle,” while a group of cats is a “clowder.”

9. Almost wild: Dogs are so genetically similar to wolves that they can interbreed.

10. Noseprints: Cats’ and dogs’ noses are unique, just like human fingerprints.

11. Fishy growth rings: Fish do not add new scales as they grow. The scales increase in size and form growth rings that can reveal the age of the fish.

12. Not domesticated: Birds are not domesticated. They’re still rather wild and must be taught acceptable pet behavior.

13. Barkless: Many dogs do not actively bark. One dog that rarely ever barks is the Basenji, due to a narrow larynx. It can yodel, however!
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6 ways to ensure pet birds are happy and healthy

Houses across the country include companion birds. Their sweet music and vividly colored plumage make birds beloved pets.

Well-socialized birds who are accustomed to human interaction can make for wonderful pets. However, unlike dogs and cats, some birds may not prefer or receive the same amount of daily attention from their owners as other pets.

Birds can suffer from depression and anxiety if their living conditions are not optimal. Birds can become irritable thanks to illness, boredom, cage position, and many other factors. Unhappy birds may engage in self-destructive behaviors, such as plucking out their feathers. Bird owners concerned that their birds may be unhappy or unhealthy should take the bird to the veterinarian for an examination, taking steps to improve the birds’ quality of life if necessary.

The organization Born Free USA does not advocate for keeping birds in captivity, but does agree that if birds are cage-kept, their conditions should be made as ideal as possible. Here are some suggestions to keep birds healthy and happy, courtesy of Born Free USA and other animal welfare and healthcare resources.

1. Feed birds nutritious diets. BeautyofBirds.com states that seed-only diets are the most common cause of premature death in companion birds. Birds need more variety to prevent nutrient deficiencies. Fruits, vegetables (including leafy greens) and sprouted seeds should account for between 20 and 25 percent of a bird’s diet.

2. Offer the largest enclosure possible. While it may not be possible to devote an entire room to a companion bird, shop for the largest cage available. This will give the bird more room to exercise and spread its wings.

3. Keep sunlight flowing. Birds need access to unfiltered sunlight and/or full-spectrum lighting so they can synthesize vitamin D. Window glass blocks necessary UV rays. On nice days, take birds outside to enjoy time outdoors with fresh air and plenty of sunlight.

4. Provide enrichment activities. Birds can become bored, so stave off boredom with activities that enable them to use their brains. Birds might enjoy foraging for treats or playing treasure hunt games. Offer a variety of toys to keep them stimulated.

5. Provide time to spend outside of the cage. Birds may benefit from a change of scenery to improve their moods. Let the bird out of its cage so it can safely explore its surroundings. Make sure there are no breakable items, close drapes so the bird will not fly into window glass, and be certain ceiling fans are turned off.

6. Provide natural perches. Offer living branches that will be more comfortable on birds’ feet than other perches. Birds need a variety of textures and sizes in their perches to keep them healthy.

Birds’ happiness as companion animals is strongest when their needs are met. Employing various strategies that promote their health and provide mental stimulation can improve birds’ quality of life.

Finding a lost hamster or small pet

Small animals like gerbils and hamsters make great first pets for animal-loving youngsters. Such pets are relatively easy to care for and don’t take up much space. A cage, food and some entertainment is often all that’s needed to keep these furry critters content.

Small animals often provide the experience children need to grow acquainted with the responsibilities of caring for larger, more needy pets. But sometimes things may go awry. Children may overfeed a pet or forget to clean out the cage. Leaving a cage door open and unintentionally allowing pets to escape is a common problem when kids care for small pets.

Finding a missing gerbil, rat, hamster, or mouse can be challenging, but it’s something that should be done promptly to prevent injury to the pet and damage to a home. These rodents can chew, burrow and hide out, and parents do not want pets chewing on electrical cords or making holes in sheetrock walls. These tips can make the process of locating missing pets a little easier.

Work in the evening. These small pets tend to be most active at night and rest during the day. Therefore, it’s best to begin searching after the sun has gone down. If that’s not working, draw the blinds and curtains to make a home darker in an attempt to draw the pets out.

Start in the room with the cage. Close the door of the room where the cage is located once the pet goes missing. The pet may have not ventured too far if you are lucky. Close the other doors in the home to help contain the animal if he or she got into a different space.

Block off any exits. Look for exits the pet may use to escape. This may include open vents, gaps in the molding, cracks in the floors, or any other areas that offer holes large enough to squeeze through.

Think like a small animal. The pet is likely frightened and will want to hide away. Check obvious places like behind and beneath furniture. Look for cozy crevices, such as in shoes or under clothing. Bags, backpacks and open drawers also can be great hiding spots.

Listen closely. The sense of sound is often more helpful than sight when trying to find missing gerbils, hamsters and other rodents. Listen for sounds of scratching or chewing. Very often these noises will lead you to pets’ hiding spots.

Leave foods stations. When all else fails, place a few food dishes around the house to draw out the animal. Monitor the dishes for activity. Try not to startle the pet if you get a chance to retrieve it. Place the cage by the dish being used and wait. A humane live trap also can help catch a lost pet.

Small pets can get lost in a home from time to time. Patient pet parents can often return animals safely to their cages relatively quickly.
How to introduce new pets to existing pets

Many people are excited by the prospect of introducing a new pet into their homes. In the midst of such excitement, it can be easy to overlook the potential feelings existing pets may have about sharing their homes with new animals.

Unfortunately, pets don’t get to know one another with a handshake and a “hello.” In addition, pet owners cannot force companion animals to like one another. What they can do is make the introduction process as positive as possible.

According to Healthy Paws Pet Insurance, 42 percent of American households are multiple-pet families, so peaceful cohabitation is possible. Whether the introduction involves animals of the same species or a hopeful friendship between cat and dog, follow these tips to increase the chances for a successful first meeting.

Employ sense of smell. Some dogs and cats will “posture” if they make eye contact with a new animal, according to PetMD. Submissive or dominant responses can cause stress to the animals and may create a negative first meeting. Sometimes it’s best if pets meet through scent instead of sight. Separate the pets in different rooms or cages, allowing them to grow accustomed to the smell of the other animal before actually meeting it. Exchange blankets with each pets’ scent between the cages.

Contain and release. Let the new pet have roam of the house for a little while before containing it to a room or cage. This allows the animal to start leaving its scent around the house. Follow the same technique with the other pet. Eventually the animals will grow a deeper bond through scent articles and grow accustomed to the sounds and smells of each other.

Introduce dogs or cats on neutral territory. Existing pets may feel the need to defend their territory or protect their owners if they meet a new animal inside of the house. When the time comes for a face-to-face meeting, introduce the two animals outside of the home in a neutral area, such as in a neighbor’s yard or in a park, offers The Humane Society of America. Reward positive behavior during this initial encounter with treats.

Have new toys and items available. Dogs and cats can both be territorial. Even if they accept the new animal, they may not want to share their toys, food bowls or other baubles. Make sure there are items for both of the pets so there will be no bickering or actual fights.

The introduction process is not something pet owners should rush. Such a process can take a few days, weeks or even longer. Pet owners who remain patient and encouraging may find that their pets ultimately learn to live together peacefully.
Caring for pets is no small task. Pets require shelter, nourishment, water, and socialization, and when they become ill, pets need veterinary care.

One illness that can befall pets is kennel cough. Kennel cough affects dogs, and very often is prevalent among shelter dogs or dogs that are boarded because of the close confines they share with infected canines.

**What is kennel cough?**

Kennel cough is similar to bronchitis in humans and, similar to bronchitis, it is highly contagious. The American Kennel Club says kennel cough is often referred to as “canine infectious tracheobronchitis.” However, the ASPCA adds that kennel cough may be used to refer to any complex respiratory condition, be it viral or bacterial, that causes inflammation of a dog’s voice box.

One common cause of kennel cough is a bacterium known as Bordetella bronchiseptica (kennel cough is often referred to as “Bordetella”).

Kennel cough is not often a serious ailment. However, puppies younger than six months of age or immunocompromised dogs may have more severe infections. Veterinarians urge pet owners to bring all coughing issues to the attention of their family vet because more serious diseases, such as distemper and canine influenza, both start off with symptoms identical to kennel cough.

**Symptoms of kennel cough**

The most recognizable symptom of kennel cough is a persistent, forceful cough. This cough can sound like a honking horn or a goose honk. Some dogs may also exhibit other symptoms, including eye discharge, sneezing and a runny nose. The sneezing should not be confused with reverse sneezes that can be normal among certain breeds.

**Reducing kennel cough risks**

Dogs commonly catch kennel cough when they share close quarters with other dogs that are affected. In such instances, dogs inhale bacteria or virus particles that are spread by other coughing dogs.

Reducing crowding and poorly ventilated conditions can help slow down the spread of kennel cough in boarding facilities or shelters. Keeping temperatures warm also may help. Pet owners should reduce their dogs’ exposure to dust or cigarette smoke, which can compromise the protection of mucus in the respiratory tract. Reducing animal stress also may boost natural immune system responses.

Another way to reduce risk is to have the dog vaccinated. The Bordetella vaccine is recommended for dogs who are frequently boarded or those that often spend time among large numbers of dogs.

**Treatment options**

Veterinarians often prescribe an antibiotic and cough medicine to ease the symptoms of kennel cough. Rest is also a good idea. A nebulizer or vaporizer may be suggested.

The AKC says to use a harness when walking a dog with kennel cough so as not to further irritate the trachea with a neck collar.

Kennel cough is a common, contagious disease that is easily transferred between dogs. Learning to recognize its symptoms can help dogs and reduce the spread of the disease.

**Did you know?**

Prospective dog owners have many different breeds to choose from. Dogs vary with regard to temperament, coat type, looks, and even size, giving would-be dog owners many options to find the breeds that may suit their lifestyles. Small dogs tend to be favorites among those who live in apartments or do not have the space or time for the long exercise larger breeds may need. Diminutive breeds also travel more easily than large pooches. Keep in mind, however, that many toy breeds are too delicate to be handled by boisterous children and may require serene home environments. For those searching for a small breed, consider this list, courtesy of the American Kennel Club:

- Brussels Griffon
- Cavalier King Charles Spaniel
- Chihuahua
- Dachshund
- Havanese
- Japanese Chin
- Maltese
- Miniature Pinscher
- Norfolk Terrier
- Pomeranian
- Pug
- Poodle
- Yorkshire Terrier
Dogs and water safety

Dogs have solidified their places in many families. Nowadays, more and more dogs accompany their pet parents on trips to the store, vacations and various recreational pursuits — including trips to the beach or the backyard pool. Many people assume all dogs can swim and swim well. But WebMD advises that not all dogs are natural-born swimmers, and some may be more skillful than others. Unfortunately, there's no way to gauge a dog's swimming prowess until the animal is introduced to water. That's one reason why dog owners must make water safety a priority when taking their pets near water.

Introducing water

Make dogs feel comfortable in the water by gradually introducing them to it. Start in an area that can be controlled, such as a kiddie swimming pool. That's shallow enough to help dogs if they struggle. Show the dog that the water can be enjoyable. Get in with the dog and let him or her get acclimated to the feeling of water on its paws. Let your pet set the pace, being certain not to force the issue. If you're at the beach or lakeside, throw a stick progressively further from the shore. This can help the dog incrementally adapt to the feeling of deeper water. Tossing your dog into the water or submerging his head can be traumatic.

Recognizing poor swimmers

Dogs that have large bodies and short legs often do not swim for fun. American Bulldogs, for example, may not be as skilled or as enthusiastic about swimming as Labradors. If your dog gives you a hard time about swimming or struggles to stay afloat, you may not be able to share laps together. Instead, watch him or her carefully around the water to prevent accidents should your pet wander in.

Watching for currents

At the beach, the same currents and rip tides that can pose a threat to humans can threaten dogs. Even strong swimmers can be affected in rough surf, and dogs may not have the intellect to escape currents, so it's best to avoid the situation.

Washed-up fish and seawater also can be threatening to dogs. Dogs may be enticed by the smell of dead fish, but become ill if they consume decomposing marine life. The same is said for drinking seawater. Bring fresh water along to quench the dog's thirst so he or she will not be tempted to lap up the saltwater.

Life preservers

Dogs riding in boats should be fitted with canine life preservers. These will help dogs stay afloat should they fall in the water, while also making dogs more visible in the water.

Water and dogs may seem like a natural fit, but individuals should test their dogs' swimming abilities and exercise precaution whenever their pets are around water.

Foods that cats and dogs should never eat

Nutritious diets are essential to long-term pet health. Many well-intentioned pet owners feed their pets foods they believe are nutritious, only to learn that certain foods, even those deemed healthy for humans, can be quite dangerous to dogs and cats.

Cats and dogs metabolize foods and other substances differently from humans. WebMD reports that each year, there are more than 100,000 cases of pet poisoning in the United States. Many of these instances were caused by household substances that may seem perfectly harmless. Medications, cleaning products and certain foods can poison pets. Dogs tend to be at higher risk for food poisoning, particularly because they are less discriminatory with regard to food.

Before caving into the temptation to share snacks with their pets, pet owners should recognize the common foods the ASPCA and other pet welfare organizations list as the most likely to contribute to pet poisonings worldwide.

Chocolate: Chocolate is accountable for roughly one-quarter of all toxic exposures. Chocolate contains methylxanthines, which are found in cacao seeds. When ingested by pets, methylxanthines can cause excessive thirst and urination, panting, vomiting, diarrhea, abnormal heart rhythm, and seizures. Serious cases can be fatal. Dark chocolate and baking chocolate are especially dangerous for pets.

Grapes/raisins: Grapes, raisins, sultanas, and currants, whether raw or cooked, can cause kidney failure in dogs. Not all dogs are affected. However, these fruits should be avoided. Symptoms include lethargy, diarrhea and vomiting within 24 hours of consumption.

Hops: Commonly used for brewing beer, hops have become a greater risk for pets now that home brewing as a hobby or side business has become popular. When ingested, hops can cause a rapid heart rate, anxiety, vomiting, and other abdominal symptoms. Essential oils and tannins in hops also can cause high fever when pets ingest them.

Macadamia nuts: These nuts can cause depression, vomiting, tremors, and hyperthermia in dogs.

Milk and dairy: Do not give dogs and cats milk to lap up, and avoid giving them high amounts of cheese and other dairy foods. Pets do not possess significant amounts of lactase, the enzyme that breaks down lactose in milk. Therefore, diarrhea and digestive upset is likely to occur when pets consume dairy.

Onions/garlic: These aromatic ingredients are not a good idea for pets, particularly cats. Onions contain an ingredient called thiou sulphate, which is toxic to cats and dogs. The ingestion of onions and onion-related foods can cause a condition called hemolytic anemia. This is damage to red blood cells that causes the cells circulating throughout the pet's body to burst.

Xylitol: Keep pets away from sugarless gums and candies that contain Xylitol, which also may be used in toothpaste. The substance causes insulin to release in most species, which can lead to liver failure.

Pet owners should be aware that the foods they eat regularly may not be safe for their pets. Always consult with a veterinarian before giving pets foods commonly eaten by humans.
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