

Adopting a Shelter Dog

The Official Guidebook

2019 EDITION



VET CERTIFIED



DR. SARAH J. WOOTEN, DVM
RENOWNED VETERINARIAN

PET EXPERT SERIES

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Dr. Sarah J. Wooten, DVM

Adopting a Shelter Book

All the information in this book is based on experience and expert opinion of **Dr. Sarah J. Wooten, DVM** and is shared on the understanding that you take complete responsibility. In particular, the outcomes of any animal training activities are unpredictable and are not guaranteed in any shape or form. For best results consult an experience dog trainer to supervise any training program, and an experienced veterinarian for any health related matters.

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About The Author

Dr. Sarah Wooten attended Wheaton College in Norton, Massachusetts, earning a Bachelor's in Biology with departmental honors. After college, she went straight into veterinary school, and graduated from UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine in 2002. She has 12 years of experience in private and non-profit small animal practice. Dr. Wooten divides her professional time between private practice at Sheep Draw Veterinary Hospital in Greeley, Colorado, and writing articles and filming video content for a veterinary health blog for Life's Abundance, [dvm360](#), [vetstreet.com](#), and various other media outlets. In addition to her adventures in veterinary medicine, she also owns a tea tavern. She enjoys good wine, camping with her family, skiing, SCUBA, and running.

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Introduction

If you are reading this book, then you are considering the adventure of adopting a dog from a rescue or shelter - so congratulations and kudos to you for wanting to be informed before starting this rewarding journey! There is so much information available about adopting dogs out there that trying to know what to do can become an overwhelming obstacle. This book is designed to be a quick and easy-to-read primer on must-know

information for anyone adopting a new shelter pet: I know you don't have time for a lengthy read! After reading this book, you should have the confidence in choosing the right pet for your family, know what to expect and have resources to help guide you and your new furry friend on your journey together. Throughout this eBook you will see links: most are to videos that will give you more information on the topic highlighted.



Click the links if you want to learn more about the topics.

Shelters have lovable dogs of all shapes, sizes and ages. Your chances of finding a wonderful companion who matches your lifestyle and family are excellent! About 25% of shelter dogs are purebred. The rest make up the best selection anywhere of unique, one-of-a-kind mixed breeds, many of whom have already lived with families and have the basic social skills they need to become an enjoyable part of your household.

One of the best parts of adopting a shelter dog are that you are giving a deserving animal a new home and you are saving a life. It feels really good to help an animal in need,



but there's more: your adoption fee benefits other animals as well! By adopting a shelter dog, you are supporting the shelter's good work in your community and helping to care for many homeless pets. Having a dog has scientifically proven health benefits, like lowering anxiety, warding off depression and lowering blood pressure.

A dog can also make you more active and maybe even get you a date!

The first step in considering this adoption is exactly what you are doing right now.

Gathering information

Before you even go to the shelter or rescue, spend some time writing down a list of reasons why you want to add a dog to your family. Ask yourself, in an ideal world, what would my life look like with a dog? How would my life be better? What would we do? Do I want an active dog? A couch potato? Long hair? Short hair? A mutt or a purebred? An older dog or a puppy? A jogging or hiking companion? A lap dog? Do other people admire my dog? Is my dog a status symbol? Are we participating in agility events or fly ball or obedience training? Did my dog get certified as a therapy dog or canine good citizen? Do we travel together, or do I board my dog?

Unless you live on a farm or ranch, most dogs should be considered furry family members, and they should eventually fit into your life like a missing puzzle piece. There are many factors to consider before adopting a dog.



After you make your ideal life-with-a-dog wish list, sit down with a journal and ask yourself the following questions, and be brutally honest with yourself.

1. How much time per day do I have to devote to a dog?
2. Does my housing allow pets?
3. Do I have a secure outdoor area? If not, do I have the time to walk a dog twice daily, or money to pay a dog walker?
4. Does anyone in my household have allergies to dogs?
5. Do I have the monthly budget to pay for food, toys, treats, supplements, equipment, day care, boarding, and routine veterinary care?
 - a. What about a monthly health insurance premium?
 - b. Do I have an emergency fund set aside for veterinary emergencies or a dedicated care credit account or credit card account?
 - c. Bottom line: Am I financially ready?



6. Am I ready for a 10-15 year commitment? (Dogs, on average, are living longer, better quality lives?)
7. What are my other daily time commitments? (Children, elderly parents, job, etc.)
8. Would a dog enhance my life or make it more stressful? (i.e. one more thing to take care of)
9. Am I financially and mentally prepared to take care of a dog if there are physical challenges?
10. Do I have time and interest to train and socialize a dog?
11. Is everybody in the household in agreement about having a dog?

12. Am I ready for the mess of a dog? Dogs have HAIR and it can shed everywhere. Dogs track in dirt and love dirty, smelly things that just might end up in your house. Some dogs need potty training - are you ready for the mess that comes with accidents?

These questions, if answered honestly, will help you assess where you are on the continuum of dog readiness. When you finish, line up the two lists side by side. If the cons outweigh the pros, then now may not be the right time. If there are some critical points missing from list two: housing, finances, time being the big ones, then those also point to now being less than optimal for you and your dog to have a good experience. Ultimately, the decision is up to you, but doing your research beforehand and doing an honest self-inventory can help manage expectations and prevent heartache.

If you decide adoption is not for you but you still want a puppy, I recommend going through a reputable breeder. I do not recommend purchasing a puppy from a pet store. If you buy a puppy from a pet shop, you are not only supporting the cruel puppy mill industry, but you also run the risk of taking home a sick animal. Puppies sold in pet stores may suffer from a range of illnesses and



conditions, ranging from respiratory infections including pneumonia, to hereditary defects like hip dysplasia and severe allergies. Maybe you are in a different category: all answers point to yes, you ARE ready to adopt a shelter pet. That's great! Let's go over what to expect when you are expecting a shelter dog.

Shelter Dogs are not Free

Some people are under the misconception that adopting a dog from a shelter or rescue is cheaper than purchasing a puppy from a breeder.

True: the adoption fee charged by the shelter might be lower than the purchase price of a purebred puppy. Shelter dogs are spayed, neutered, vaccinated, dewormed and often temperament tested before they are adopted. You can also get them micro chipped through the shelter: I recommend having done because it raises the likelihood that in the event your dog is ever lost or stolen, he or she will be reunited with you. When you think of all the services you get with the adoption fee, it's actually quite a steal! However, while sometimes the up-front costs may be lower, the cost of care remains the same, and sometimes shelter dogs come with

behavioral or medical conditions that require time and money to correct. While older shelter pets can be great companions from the start, I have found that pet parents are often shocked when they come see me for the initial veterinary visit, and I uncover a medical problem such as heart or dental disease, that requires immediate care. According to the 2015-2016 survey by APPA, the average dog owner can expect to spend over \$1,600 a year on their pet, which means budgeting \$136 a month for pet related expenses.

Shelter Dogs are an Adventure!

Adopting a dog from a shelter saves a life, and I know many shelter dogs adopted as an adult that made fabulous, life-long companions. Most shelters will temperament test dogs, which gives you a great starting point in regards to his or her personality, but some issues might not be apparent until you get the dog home. For example: a male dog that was neutered later in life might have a habit of urine marking. A dog might have a firework phobia that is only apparent around the fourth of July, or, as mentioned above, there may be in undiagnosed medical problems. Most of these issues can be trained or resolved with therapy, but it is important to expect the unexpected. Speaking of the unexpected, when you purchase a puppy from a breeder, you usually know everything you should expect from that dog. When getting a dog from a shelter: all bets are off! I have been surprised



many times by the puppy that I thought would top out at 30 pounds coming in full grown at 60 pounds. When it comes to adopting shelter dogs, I find flexibility, patience, and a sense of humor to be invaluable tools to a long and fulfilling dog-human relationship.

What type of dog should you get?

You've decided adoption of a shelter dog is perfect for you. Now what dog should you get? Let's consider the factors:

Age of Dog

For simplification purposes, let's consider three broad categories: puppy, young adult, mature. Puppies are great: they are cute, have lots of energy, haven't been affected by negative experiences and if you have a lot of time, energy, and patience, then a puppy might be for you. Depending on the age: they require potty training, constant monitoring, and basic obedience. If your life is pretty busy already, then a puppy may not be for you. FYI: most shelters will not



adopt out dogs unless they are spayed/neutered, including puppies. There is mounting scientific evidence that early spay/neuter can cause bone and joint problems in large breed dogs and urinary incontinence in female dogs. If this concerns you, consider speaking with your local shelter representative. Young dogs are great: they are often potty trained already, have lots of energy, and are lower maintenance than a puppy. They may have some basic training or still require it. Have your veterinarian double check the age for you: I've had several patients that were assigned an age by the shelter only turn out to be much older or younger.

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There are often senior citizens at the shelter that need loving homes: these dogs are also great! They are often house training, obedience trained, mellower, and fit right in with their new family. Sometimes they may have medical or behavioral issues that need to be addressed right away, and they may have ongoing medical expenses, such as pain medication or supplements.

Size of Dog

How big of a dog do you want? A large breed? A lap dog? Somewhere in between? The size of your home and yard come into account with the bigger dogs: these dogs need space. Be aware that everything with bigger dogs cost more:



they eat more, medications and veterinary care is more, and beds and toys are all more expensive. Big dogs tend to have more problems with arthritis, small dogs tend to have more problems with dental disease and heart disease. Large dogs tend to do better in homes that have yards or owners that can take them on several walks a day. Do you live in an apartment or other small space? Medium and small dogs tolerate apartment living much better than large or giant breeds, but all dogs will need exercise daily, regardless of their size.

Hair Coat

There is more to consider than long hair or short hair. Some dogs shed twice a year, some dog's hair never stops growing. Smooth coat or curly? Feathers? Does anyone in your family have a hair or dander allergy? Spend some time with the dog and see if your allergies are set off.

Personality is Everything

Do you want an active dog? Do you want a companion that is content to sleep on the couch next to you? Do you have children and will you need a tolerant canine? Do you have other dogs, cats or other pets in the household that the dog will need to get along with? A growing number of shelters have an ASPCA® adoption program called Meet Your



Match® Canine-ality™ and Puppy-ality™. This program is designed to help shelters make successful and permanent adoptions by matching adopters with the most compatible dogs. It not only makes adopting a shelter dog more fun, but it also helps adopters go home with the kind of dog they dream of having.

The Meet Your Match program has two key parts

- **Assessment** Individual dogs' behavioral tendencies are assessed with the Canine-ality and Puppy-ality "personality" tests. The dogs are then categorized into one of nine different personality types, such as the Life of the Party, the Busy Bee and the Constant Companion.
- **Adopter survey** Adopters fill out surveys so that shelter staff can learn about their expectations for a new dog and the role they want him to play in their lives. Then the staff uses the survey to help adopters make the best match possible.

If a shelter you plan on visiting doesn't use the Meet Your Match program, you can find the adopter survey online. Before visiting the shelter, fill out the survey to get a better idea of the kind of dog you'd like. Once you have answered all these questions, give the information to the shelter staff. He or she should be able to match you up with the perfect companion. Walk around with the staff and meet the dogs, and take note of the ones that meet your canine companion wish list. Here are some additional tips from the ASPCA:

- Walk through the entire kennel area at least once to find some dogs who appeal to you. Stand a few feet away from the ones you like and watch how they react



to other people. Then spend a few minutes greeting the dogs you've chosen through their kennel doors.

- Look for signs of friendliness, like pawing, wagging, wiggling, an eager approach and pressing against the front of the kennel. For more information on canine body language, visit this [ASPCA](#).
- If you have a family with young children or an active lifestyle, you may want to steer clear of dogs who hang back in their kennels, too afraid to greet you or others. Some fearful dogs take a lot of work, may not adapt well to your home and may snap or bite if they feel threatened.



- If you don't have children, don't rule out a dog you're interested in just because he's shy. Keep in mind that you're seeing him in a very stressful environment and that most dogs behave better in a home than they do in a shelter. Perhaps the shy dog just arrived at the shelter and is upset by all the commotion. Ask to visit with him outside of the kennel area so you can get a better idea of who he really is.
- Like dogs who retreat to the back of their kennel, a dog who's jumping, barking or spinning like a maniac in his kennel may just be reacting to the stress of shelter life. It's a good idea to visit with such a dog in a calmer area. While you're interacting with him, note whether

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the dog seems calmer and friendlier once out of the kennel area.

- If a dog freezes, stares at you stiffly, growls or raises his hackles, move on. These are all signs of an unfriendly and possibly aggressive dog. Ideally, choose a dog that approaches you and appears friendly. I recommend avoiding any dogs that act aggressive or

Body Language of Fear in Dogs



Slight Cowering



Major Cowering

More Subtle Signs of Fear & Anxiety



Licking Lips
when no food nearby



Panting
when not hot or thirsty



Brow Furrowed, Ears to Side



Moving in Slow Motion
walking slow on floor



Acting Sleepy or Yawning
when they shouldn't be tired



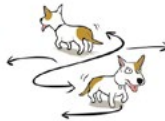
Hypervigilant
looking in many directions



Suddenly Won't Eat
but was hungry earlier



Moving Away



Pacing



overly shy: timidity and aggression are both behavioral disorders that can be overcome, but can require a significant investment of time and money. The next page has a diagram of different fear behaviors in dogs that you can use as a reference.

- After you choose a dog or two, spend some time with each dog individually, and ask the shelter for all the information they have on him or her. How long has the dog been there? Why is the dog in the shelter? How is the dog around children or other pets? Does the dog act aggressive around food? Has the dog been abused? The staff in well- run shelters may not have all this in-



formation, but they spend time with the dogs and will know their personalities and quirks pretty well.

- Some shelters let you walk the dogs around the grounds, while others let you meet dogs in their kennels or in a visiting room. Take advantage of every opportunity to interact with the dogs you're considering. As you visit with each dog, think about your list of expectations and needs. A very social dog who persistently seeks out your affection, enjoys lots of attention and seems to adore petting could be a good choice for a family with children. This kind of dog would also be great for someone who wants to do pet therapy and take their dog to visit schools, hospitals or nursing

homes. An older dog who's a little more independent might be a better choice for someone who needs to be away from home for long hours. An energetic dog would be wonderful for someone who does a lot of jogging, hiking or biking.

- Start with quiet time. For your first few minutes with a dog, just sit quietly with him. Don't touch or talk to him, and see what he chooses to do. Shelters are noisy, distracting places—but does he eventually approach you and work to get your attention? Or does he focus on other things instead? After sitting quietly for a few minutes, pet and talk to the dog if he's friendly. Does he seem to like being stroked and touched? If you stop petting him, does he walk away or ask for more? If you're looking for an independent companion, a dog who doesn't seem especially eager to get your attention might suit you well. However, if you're looking for a very social, interactive dog, one who can't get enough of you might be the best fit.
- When you take a dog for a walk, don't worry too much about jumping up and pulling on-leash. Most dogs will do these things if they haven't been trained to behave differently, especially if they've been cooped up in a kennel for days, weeks or months. Just be sure you're able to hang on and gently control the dog. As you walk, take note of his demeanor. Is he eager to greet people you encounter? Does he seem to take outdoor sights and sounds in stride? If he barks, lunges, growls, cowers, freezes in terror or trembles uncontrollably when he sees people, other dogs or cars that pass, he



may not have been thoroughly socialized as a puppy. Be warned: it will take considerable time and effort to retrain and socialize this kind of dog—and there's no guarantee that his behavior will improve.

- Try to engage the dog in a game of tug-of-war, chase or fetch. Play for several minutes, letting the dog get excited and energized. Then abruptly stop playing and put the toy away. Observe how long it takes the dog to calm back down and resume socializing with you. Ideally, the dog will calm down within a couple of minutes. If he takes much longer than that, you may have a sports champion on your hands but perhaps not the most easygoing house pet. (source: ASPCA)

If you already have a dog or dogs, try to introduce the new dog and your pets on neutral territory, i.e. at the shelter if possible. Spending time together there will be less threatening to your dogs. We will go over how to introduce them at home in later chapters.

You may find the perfect dog on the first visit, or it may take several visits to find the right fit for your home. Don't rush the process: remember this is a 10-15 year time investment. Do not make a decision on emotion: such as you feel sorry for the dog, you notice that the dog is scared, you can't resist the cute puppy! Remember your requirements and choose based on those facts, and you will have a higher rate of success with your adoption. Remember: we are trying to avoid a dog going back to a shelter because he or she wasn't a good fit for a home.

Prepare the Home

Preparation in your home will vary dependent on the age of dog you bring home. Preparing beforehand will make your new dog's transition a smooth and hopefully enjoyable time for everyone involved. For very young dogs, puppy-proofing is necessary. This means hiding all electrical cords and picking up all the children's toys and all shoes, keeping doors closed to areas you don't want the puppy to access. Unless your puppy is safe in a crate, keeping a close eye on the puppy at all times. Dogs particularly love dirty little kid underwear and socks - a disgusting habit that is hard to break. Make sure your kids are putting their dirty laundry up out of reach of puppy. If you have expensive furniture or rugs, I recommend putting them away or covering them until the puppy has stopped having accidents in the house and is done teething, i.e. wanting to chew on everything. As an aside: puppies chew for several reasons. One reason is because their gums are sore: they are teething and chewing



helps alleviate the pressure. Another reason is because they naturally explore with their mouth: chewing is natural behavior. Chewing on shoes is particularly gratifying because it smells like his favorite people. Keep your puppy entertained with a variety of chew toys that you rotate on a weekly basis and you should be able to save your shoes and furniture. If you aren't using a crate, utilize a baby gate to condone the puppy or dog in the area where you want him to be. Make sure your yard is secure. Check the fence for any weak areas or holes, remove any toxins such as snail or mouse bait from the yard. If you don't have a fence, consider getting an electric dog fence. Certain landscaping materials and certain plants, such as cocoa bean mulch, lilies, oleander,



are highly toxic to dogs, and should be removed from your dog's environment. Finally, get down on all fours and take a look around from your dog's point of view. You may see potential hazards that you overlooked.

Collect supplies for your dog. There is no need to break the bank here: you just need the basics. You will need a leash, collar, ID tags (can be engraved at the pet store), food and water bowls (I recommend stainless steel), a bed, a crate (if you are planning on crate training), a brush, shampoo, a toothbrush and toothpaste (dogs need dental care too!), and high quality food, treats, and chews. When it comes to food, you get what you pay for. Avoid the cheap supermar-

ket brands and choose a high quality diet: we are what we eat. The bag has recommendations for how much to feed: I usually recommend feeding 10-15% less than what is written on the bag. Dog food producers are usually more interested in selling pet food than preventing obesity. You know your dog is at a healthy weight when you can feel ribs but can't see them. All chew toys are also not created equal: some are downright damaging to your dog's teeth! Avoid rawhide and tennis balls.

I don't recommend going ballistic with buying things at the pet store for your dog because you need some cash leftover for health and safety related items, such as flea and tick prevention (depending on your area of the country), heartworm and intestinal parasite prevention (a must!), and any vaccines that your veterinarian recommends that weren't performed at the shelter (such as leptospirosis, canine influenza, or additional boosters of distemper or parvo virus). Is your yard unfenced? Consider getting an electric dog fence. Interested in premium nutrition? All dogs could benefit from a fish oil supplement to enhance joint, skin and coat health.

Before you get your new dog, make an appointment with your veterinarian for a well dog check. This visit will be invaluable: your veterinarian will make additional health recommendations for your pet, will determine the overall health of your dog and help you know what to expect. Take this opportunity to ask your veterinarian any questions you have about care of your new friend.



There are non-essential items that I recommend getting as you can afford, and are dependent on your lifestyle. Do you hike in the mountains? Consider getting dog boots and a pack for hiking. Does your dog misbehave on a leash? Get your dog fitted for a head halter and train your dog to walk on a loose leash. Unless you know that these issues are going to be readily apparent before you bring your dog home, these items can wait.

Hold a meeting with everybody in the home regarding care and training of the dog. Who is going to do what? Will the dog be allowed on the furniture? Eat table scraps? Appoint one person to feed the dog to ensure that he doesn't



starve or get overfed. Reinforcing consistency with training will help your new friend settle in to your home, become a well-mannered family member, and know what to expect from everybody. This meeting may need to be revisited once the dog has been in your home for a week to check in with everyone. It cannot be stated enough: communication is key to successful adoption.

After you choose a dog, there will be some paperwork and a fee. There may be a home survey: answer the questions as honestly as possible. If the dog is spayed or neutered, you may be able to take the dog right then as long as your home is prepared (see next chapter). If your dog still needs to be

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spayed or neutered, it will take a day or two to get that procedure done, and then you will be able to bring home your new friend. Try to schedule it for when you will be home for a couple of days: it will help your new dog acclimatize.

First Day: Welcome home!

Congratulations! All your hard work has paid off: today you are bringing your newly adopted dog home. As excited as you might be, remember that your dog has no idea what is going on. He or she may have just been through major surgery and in pain (if the shelter does not provide pain medication post-operatively after spay or neuter, talk to your veterinarian about getting some, or take your new dog from the shelter straight to the vet for the checkup and to get pain medication). The dog won't know who you are, where he or she is going, and may be frightened, carsick, or a little of both. Plan to bring your dog home when you can spend a couple of days with him to help reassure him and support him as he gets used to his new digs. I would also recommend postponing any visitors for a couple of days, as more people may just overwhelm the dog.



If your dog is full of nervous energy, leash trained, and not painful from surgery, go for a walk with the dog before taking him into the house. Then, if you already have dogs, bring them outside to meet the new dog again, on neutral territory, both on leash. Not in your home or yard, but out front, or in a park. Then take all the dogs for a walk together and bring them all into the house together. This will send a signal to your dog that this new dog is part of the pack as well. Give both dogs treats, and relax: your dogs will pick up on your tension. It helps to have two people for this task: if there are problems two people can more easily separate the dogs. I recommend feeding the dogs separately to minimize food related competition, at least at the beginning. If you

have any interdog aggression, separate the dogs and consult a behaviorist.

If you have a puppy that is not leash trained, go ahead and bring him into the home without a walk. Once again - if you already have a dog, introduce the puppy to the dog on neutral turf. Most dogs are not threatened by a new puppy, so introductions should go smoothly.

Once inside with your dog, let him explore if he wants (the areas of the house where you allow him to be), but don't let him out of your sight. Take him into the yard and let him sniff around. If he is acting very overwhelmed, hiding, or shaking, let him have a timeout in a crate. Some dogs just need that. Once he feels more comfortable, he will come out and relax.

If you are going to change his food, do so slowly over several days by mixing with the food from the shelter. This will help prevent any stomach upset. Don't be surprised if he doesn't want to eat much for the first 24 hours: dogs can get nervous stomach just like people! I recommend feeding two meals a day, as it aids in digestion. I don't recommend free feeding: it can lead to overeating and obesity. If he has diarrhea or vomiting, make an appointment with your veterinarian and be sure to bring a fecal sample.

When introducing him to new situations or people, have treats always available, and give him lots of treats. This will reinforce the idea that meeting new people and new places means good things will happen.



Even housebroken dogs can have accidents, especially if they are stressed. Don't be surprised if your dog has accidents in the house to start. Don't punish the dog: that can increase the stress. For the first couple of days, you will need to take him outside every 3-4 hours to urinate or defecate, and reward him with a treat when he does. This will reinforce the location where elimination should take place. Don't leave him alone unsupervised in the house until potty training has been reinstated. Most puppies can be housebroken by the age of 12-14 weeks. Tiny puppies and teacup breeds take longer can take longer to potty train because the world is so big to them. Patience!



For the first night, it is a good idea to keep your dog close to you, either tethered in a bed in your room or in a crate. To encourage him to sleep, take him for a long walk before bedtime, and make sure he has urinated before bedding down for the night. If you have a puppy, you will most likely need to get up once during the night to take him for urination or defecation. Whimpers at night are not uncommon, especially when a dog has recently been adopted. Unless your dog needs to go to the bathroom, ignore the whimpering, or tell him ‘shhh’ or ‘it’s ok’. Don’t let him out of his bed or crate: with time he will settle down and go to sleep. Remember: this is all new and strange to him. Having a new dog isn’t unlike having a new baby: the good news is



that dogs will let you sleep at night a lot sooner than a newborn. Upon waking, take your dog straight out to urinate and/or defecate, and reward him with a treat when he does.

Within a week you will settle into a routine with your dog, which will be comforting to both of you. After a couple of days of getting used to your home, feel free to take your dog out and get him used to the rest of your life. If you have a puppy, 8-14 weeks is a critical socialization period: the time when the fear centers in the brain are forming. Give your puppy lots of experiences with different people, places, dogs, and sounds, and make them positive with treats and praise. If your puppy hasn't received all his shots, avoid places that

dogs frequent (like pet stores or dog parks) and dogs that you don't know their vaccination history, as your puppy isn't protected from deadly diseases such as parvovirus. Puppy classes are a great way to get your puppy the socialization that he needs.

If you have adopted an older dog, you don't know what kind of experiences he had before adoption. Use this time to see how your dog reacts to different scenarios and people. It could be that your dog is bomb-proof: nothing scares him, he loves everyone and life is happy-go-lucky. It could also be that you uncover some fears: fear of men, loud noises, bicycles, etc. If this is the case, I recommend working with a trainer on desensitization and counter-conditioning: getting your dog used to a stimulus and developing a different emotional response. If the reaction is mild, like your dog just barks at a bike, then you can simply train your dog with high value treats to pay attention to you instead of the bike, and over time, this reaction will abate. What is a high-value treat? Anything that is super tasty and novel is a high value treat: I recommend tiny pieces of hotdog, bacon, or cheese. It has to be good enough that your dog doesn't pay attention to whatever was making him tense before. Spray cheese also works great: you can spray it on a line on the ground that your dog licks up. Make sure that you are training at a distance where your dog doesn't react: if your dog starts growling at the bicycle, for example, then you are too close. Back up, and try again on another day. Another tip: make sure your dog is hungry before starting any training, and always use a handful of high value treats when training a new behavior. It will help cement the behavior in your dog's mind! Taking

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your adult dog to obedience training is another good way to socialize your dog. Even though this sounds like a lot of work, it really isn't, and can make a big difference in the quality of life you enjoy together with your dog.

If the reaction is severe: cowering, aggression, or other severe fear reactions, then your best bet is to work with a behaviorist unless you want to keep your dog from whatever he is afraid of for the rest of his life.

Exercise

How much exercise your dog needs depends on the dog. While most dogs will benefit from a walk or two every day, some dogs are much higher energy. Until they are grown, young dogs need walks and games, but they are not good running partners until their skeletons have stopped growing (usually about 1- 1 ½ years of age depending on the age and breed). If they are super high energy, long distance fetch, dog park time, swimming and agility are good options.

Once they are done growing, if they want to run with you great! Some dogs can be trained to tether to a bicycle, which allows them to run farther and faster than you are able. This activity requires special training and equipment. Dogs are great hiking partners, on or off-leash, and even in the winter!

Don't ever assume that an older dog doesn't want to still walk: unless he is very painful from arthritis or another



condition, old dogs need a walk just as much as young dogs, maybe even more to keep their joints and bone in good health. If your dog is dragging on the walk or doesn't want to walk anymore, it is time to see your veterinarian for an exam.

Dogs also need to exercise their minds. A bored dog is a destructive dog, leading to relinquishment back to a shelter. We want to avoid that! Keep your dog busy with food puzzles, stuffed Kong toys, Buster Cubes, IQ testing, and other fun games: you will have a happier dog, and hopefully less holes in your yard and chewed on personal items.

Health Care

As noted above, depending on the age of your dog, health-care may be one of your largest expenses. If you don't have a veterinarian, ask your friends for a recommendation. Check google for reviews, or ask the shelter for recommendations. If you have the time, visit the clinic beforehand to assess cleanliness, whether the staff appears rushed, and whether the front staff has time to chat with you.

It is the same in dogs as in people: an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. If you keep your pet parasite free (including heartworms, fleas, ticks, and intestinal parasites), vaccinate against infectious disease, feed a high quality diet, brush the teeth at home to prevent dental disease, keep your pet lean and visit your veterinary once a year to detect any problems early, then you dog will have a higher likelihood of living a long and healthy life.



Most dogs are very anxious when they visit the veterinarian because it is a foreign experience for them. Dog owners can help their pets be less anxious by doing a few easy things.

At home, spend time examining your dog's paws, ears, ears, and teeth. It is really hard for me to examine a dog's teeth when he or she won't sit still.

- Take your dog to urinate or defecate before the veterinary visit, unless your veterinarian has requested a urine sample.
- Bring in a fecal sample: it is much nicer than having to go fish for a sample with a fecal loop (trust me).

- Bring your dog to the vet on an empty stomach. Hopefully your veterinarian utilizes fear free tactics and will give your dog lots of treats during the visit. New science shows that it is difficult if not impossible for a dog to be afraid while eating something delicious.
- Feel free to bring your dog by the clinic any time and have the staff give the dog treats. This will help your dog realize that the veterinarian hospital is a place where delicious things happen.
- Allow the veterinary staff to do their job: they can safely and humanely restrain your dog so that the doctor can examine the pet, and they can safely draw blood or other samples.

Just like people, dogs need maintenance to stay healthy. Yearly exams and vaccinations are a great starting point, but there are new ways to keep your pet healthier for even longer.

Here are some additional tips

I recommend you keep your dog on heartworm prevention year round. Not only are you protecting your dog from a potentially fatal and debilitating infection with heartworms, you are also protecting your dog AND yourself from intestinal parasites. Most forms of heartworm prevention also prevent intestinal parasites, which are transmissible to people, so make sure to stay on heartworm prevention year round.

Adopting a Shelter Dog



Gingivitis:
Plaque and slightly disagreeable mouth odor.



Early periodontal disease:
Gum inflammation, swelling and bad breath.



Moderate periodontal disease:
Pustular discharge, bleeding and moderate bad breath.



Advanced periodontal disease:
Bleeding gums, mobile teeth and very bad breath.

Dental care is another important way to keep your pet healthy. Dental infections lead to bacteria in the bloodstream, which puts additional wear and tear on the internal organs. Keeping teeth and gums healthy with brushing is the best, but you can also utilize dental chews, prescription dental dog foods and dental treats.

Coat care is necessary for healthy skin, and to reduce shedding. A flat bristle brush and a fine tooth comb should be all you need for grooming tools. Bathing your dog can be an adventure: you can bathe at home with a gentle shampoo or utilize the services of a groomer. Make sure your

dog is up-to-date on vaccines before taking him or her to a grooming facility.

You may want to strongly consider getting health insurance for your pet. Veterinary care has advanced in recent years, making it possible to save more pets than ever. Unfortunately, along with the technological advances comes increases in cost. For example, knee injuries are very common, and surgical repair can cost upwards of \$3,000. Health insurance generally have affordable premiums and no deductible, depending on the plan. If you are ever faced with a health crisis, such as broken limbs, surgery, or unexpected dentistry, health insurance can be a life saver for your wallet, and may mean the difference between your dog getting the care he or she needs or not. Many shelter pets will come with a 1 month insurance plan that you can continue if you wish.

Enjoy the Journey

You have embarked on the rewarding journey of life with a shelter dog; things will never be the same, for you or your new pet. Your dog will be devoted to you and want to be your best friend. Remember that dogs are intelligent, sensitive creatures, and in addition to health care, kindness, and basic needs, they need physical and mental stimulation. There are so many fun, unique things you can do with your new pet. Use the following list to get some inspiration:

- Skijoring
- Certified Pet Therapy
- Agility
- Fly Ball
- Stand-up Paddle boarding with your dog
- Hiking
- Running
- Biking



- Canine Good Citizen Certification
- Dog Scouts
- Camping

The options are endless, really. Meetup.com is a great way to get involved with local dog clubs or hobby groups: you may need to try several different sports before you find something that you both enjoy. By cultivating hobbies that you can do with your dog, you will build a lifestyle that supports longevity of your dog-human friendship and wellness for the both of you. Best wishes to you and your new fur friend.

Adopting a Shelter Dog

The Official Guidebook

Dr. Sarah J. Wooten, DVM
Renowned Veterinarian

Pet Expert Series

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