

Preparing to bring home a new pet:

Before you bring your new friend home, it's best to be prepared to prevent unnecessary confusion and stress.

Establish the rules. Decide who's responsible for what: grooming, feeding, exercising, cleaning, play-time, and so on. Also establish whether or not there will be areas that are "off-limits" for your new pet. For example, you may not want your pet to sleep on the bed.

Have all the necessary supplies ready. Examples are food, food and water bowls, leash or harness, collar and identification, brush, and so on. Take a look at the cat budget or the dog budget for more information.

Pet-proof your home. Some things you may want to consider include:

- Lock away household chemicals, such as cleansers, insecticide, antifreeze, and others. Animals are especially attracted to antifreeze; be sure to clean up spills immediately and keep the rest out of reach as even a small amount can be fatal.
- Place houseplants out of reach. Many houseplants are poisonous.
- Have separate areas for your new pet and any existing pets. Pets need to be introduced to one another slowly; be sure you have an extra room or a kennel so that your pets can be separated until they have grown accustomed to each other.
- Tie electrical cords out of the way, if you can. Dogs and cats can chew on electrical cords - or even catch them while walking (or running!) around, causing lamps, TVs, radios, etc. to fall.
- Keep doors closed - this includes the doors to your washer and dryer, your closets, the cupboards ... inquisitive little animals can sneak in just about anywhere!
- Keep household trinkets out of your pet's reach. Stuff like garbage, medicine, pins, elastics, thread, needles, and so on should be placed out of the way.

Make sure everyone knows how to properly handle your pet. Everyone should know how to safely pick up your pet. Also emphasize certain rules such as your pet should never be disturbed while eating.

Keep other pets away at first. Your new pet may be nervous ... help him or her feel more comfortable by keeping your other pets confined until you are ready to slowly introduce them.

Introducing pets to each other:

Whether or not your pets get along depend on their personalities. Your current pet may view a new pet as a threat; there may be a few scuffles as each animal establishes his "place in the pack". Do not interrupt them if there is no danger of injury, and provided they are supervised at all times.

Some pets will merely tolerate each other. Others will become great companions (like my own two dogs and cat). Here are a few tips for introducing a new pet into your home.

- Always supervise your pets until you are absolutely sure they get along. Until then, separate your pets by confining at least one of them to its own room. Only allow them to interact with each other with your supervision. It may take them hours, days, weeks, or even months for your pets to adjust fully to one another.
- Introduce your pets indoors in controlled situations. Keep your dogs on a leash and do not tolerate any aggressive behavior. If you are introducing a cat to a dog, do not allow the dog to chase or corner the cat - even if it's out of playfulness or curiosity.
- When introducing a cat to a dog, do NOT hold the cat in your arms. A frightened or nervous cat may scratch.
- Allow your new pet to familiarize itself with its new home. Temporarily confine existing pets to a room to give your new pet a chance to feel more comfortable with its surroundings.
- Give your pets separate food and water bowls. If you are introducing cats, also provide separate litter boxes. Feed your new and existing pets in different locations.
- Be especially careful when introducing dogs or cats to caged animals. Dogs and cats can live in harmony with rabbits, guinea pigs, birds, etc... but please introduce them under strictly controlled supervision. Keep in mind that cats are very agile, so placing a cage high up on a shelf doesn't necessarily protect the caged pet. Don't take any chances - one mistake could be fatal to your caged pet.

Give them time. Do not try to force your pets together; allow them to adjust at their own pace. Give all your pets - particularly the new one - time to gain confidence and decide when to face his or her new housemates.

Pet identification options: Bringing your pet home safely:

Both dogs and cats need identification. Even if your cat is a 100% indoor cat, she still needs ID - scared or excited pets can slip out the door before you can stop them.

Check with your city for any licensing or identification requirements for your pet. Here are three choices. A combination of them is best just in case one form of ID fails.

- License tag. Usually purchased from the city, your pet is assigned a number which is tracked in a computer database. Tags are attached to your pet's collar. If your pet is found, the animal control officer can check the tag number, pull up your address, and call you to let you know they have your pet.
- The disadvantages to using a tag are: the tag can fall off and get lost; it might not be readable; your pet may not always be wearing its collar; your pet may slip out of or lose its collar.
- Tattoo. Tattoos are commonly etched into one of your pet's ears during spay/neuter surgery (pets must be under anesthetic for this procedure). Tattoos are a visible and somewhat permanent method of identification.
- Unlike tags, tattoos are not reliant on your pet wearing its collar. However tattoos usually fade over time, making them illegible. They can be retraced ... but since pets must be under anesthetic and there is always a risk with

anesthetic, retracing a tattoo should be done at the same time your pet is undergoing another procedure anyways.

- **Microchip.** A microchip is a small, electronic chip (approximately the size of a grain of rice) that is implanted just under your pet's skin. It is administered quickly and painlessly by a simple injection.

Microchips each have an identification number associated with them. Along with this ID number, your name, address, and phone number are entered into a computer database. If your pet gets lost, animal shelters or city pounds equipped with scanners will be able to scan your pet's body to quickly locate the ID number of the microchip along with the corresponding owner information. Many shelters and pounds these days are equipped to handle microchips.

Why you need to spay or neuter your pet:

Would you kill a happy, healthy, loving pet?

If you answered "no", then spaying or neutering your pet is absolutely essential.

Spaying is the surgical sterilization of a female animal by removing the ovaries, oviduct, and uterus. Neutering is the surgical sterilization of a male animal by removing the testicles.

Both surgeries are safe when done by a qualified veterinarian. And not only are they safe, having your pet spayed or neutered also has [significant health benefits](#).

The other compelling reason to spay or neuter your pet is the very real fact that there are not enough loving homes available to adopt all the needy pets. Humane societies, animal shelters, dog pounds, rescue foundations ... they are all forced to humanely euthanize animals simply because no homes were available.

Others, who are not so fortunate, die in the streets. Their deaths are not so humane: they can die from exposure to the elements - bitter winds, cold temperatures, or extreme heat; a slow starvation, trying but unable to scrounge enough food to survive; a painful disease, slowly weakening them until they can no longer keep going; poisoning, or outright cruelty.

People often balk at having their pet spayed or neutered ... and for various reasons.

- "It's not right to neuter a male. Only females should be sterilized because they're the ones that have litters."
- This view forgets one important point: it takes both a male and a female to produce a litter. In fact, males can father far more young than a female could ever produce in a lifetime.
- And what happens if your intact male escapes the house and mates with an intact female?
- It's both owners' responsibilities to be sure their pets have been spayed or neutered.

"I want my children to see the miracle of birth."

There are other ways of teaching children about birth that do not involve bringing unwanted animals into this world. For example, visits to a farm or a zoo can show them the same thing. Videos and books are also an option.

"Don't worry, we'll find homes for the litter."

Maybe so ... but for every new animal that's brought into this world, there are others waiting to be adopted from humane societies and animal shelters.

"Females should be allowed to have one litter."

There is no reason for a female to have a litter; she will mature properly without it. It will not improve her health or permanently change her personality. In fact, spaying your pet before her first heat will significantly reduce her chances of developing breast cancer later in life.

"Spaying or neutering my pet will make it fat."

Proper exercise and nutrition will keep your pet healthy. If your pet is overweight, cut down the amount you feed and fit in a few more minutes of exercise.

I volunteer at my local humane society. Healthy animals are put down because we simply can't find homes for them - and more and more come in everyday. It is heartbreaking to know that a loving, happy, and healthy animal is to be euthanized the next day.

We must all work together to stop uncontrolled and irresponsible breeding of our pets. We can help to stop the suffering of these innocent creatures by reducing the number of unwanted pets being brought into this world.

Do your part by having your pet spayed or neutered. You'll be saving more than just one life!

Benefits of spaying or neutering your pet:

Spaying and neutering refer to the surgical sterilization of an animal. In other words, spaying and neutering ensures that your pet cannot reproduce.

Most vets will perform this surgery on a pet that is at least 5 or 6 months old. It is best to have this surgery done before your pet reaches sexual maturity. Females should be spayed before their first heat. Note that some vets will also perform pediatric spay/neuter. Please consult with your vet.

We all have a responsibility to prevent unwanted animals from being euthanized everyday, simply because there are no homes for them. Even if your pet has a litter and you find homes for all of them, each of those pets takes a potential home away from other homeless pets waiting in a shelter. But aside from this responsibility, there are also significant health benefits for your pet.

Benefits of Spaying

- Prevents pregnancy and the complications arising from pregnancy and delivery
- Eliminates the heat cycle - you won't have to listen to the sounds of your female in heat, trying to get out and find a mate
- Prevents unwelcome males from trying to seek out your female pet in heat
- Reduces the urge to roam. This makes it less likely that you will lose your pet, which in turn makes your pet less likely to contract a disease, get in a fight, get injured, or become a victim to cruelty, poison, or traffic.
- Eliminates sexual discomfort, distress, or distraction ... making your pet happier and more content.
- Reduces or eliminates the possibility of disease in the reproductive system.

Benefits of Neutering

Reduces the distracting and destructive behavior associated with the male's efforts to get out and find a mate

Reduces the urge to roam. This makes it less likely that you will lose your pet, which in turn makes your pet less likely to contract a disease, get in a fight, get injured, or become a victim to cruelty, poison, or traffic.

Eliminates sexual discomfort, distress, or distraction ... making your pet happier and more content.

Eliminates testicular tumors and reduces prostate gland problems.

In cats, neutering stops or reduces marking behavior (territorial spraying of urine).

Reduces the urge to fight.