

# Responsible Ownership

**A** dog's love is unconditional, and that is why they have been a favorite human companion for hundreds of years. Before you decide to bring a dog into your home, there are many things to know and understand to ensure a positive experience for both you and the animal.

As an owner or possible owner, we tend to only consider the fun and rewards of having a dog, but we also have to consider the lifelong responsibilities. It takes serious dedication of time, money and love.

Your dog should be compatible with your lifestyle in regards to energy level, grooming needs and temperament. That's because if you bite off more than you can chew with a new dog, you may

end up becoming frustrated with the responsibilities of ownership.

If you have children, it is imperative that your dog loves kids, although you should always supervise play with children, especially very small children.

**DOG CARE/HEALTH**  
Dogs depend on us for their welfare

for their entire life. We have to provide basic needs such as proper food, water and shelter from the elements, as well as regular bathing and grooming.

Dogs require regular checkups from their veterinarian for required vaccinations and prevention of flea and heart worm infestations. These can be big expenses for the dog owner, so be sure

to consider your financial flexibility when deciding whether or not to own a dog.

**KEEPING TABS**

**ON YOUR DOG**

Safety and training go hand in hand when it comes to responsible dog ownership. Your dog should wear an identification tag with your name, address and phone number at all times. Permanent microchips and tattoos are options, too.

Consider also keeping a current

picture of your dog on hand. You never know when it could come in handy. All of these steps are important in case your dog gets lost.

Dogs are living creatures that feel pleasure and pain just like a child, and they deserve the best of care. If you think you are not up to the task, delay the decision about buying a dog for a while. Further down the road, your life circumstances might change enough to allow for dog ownership.

If you already have a dog, evaluate how you care for your dog and read-just if necessary.

## Your Dog's Teeth

Taking care of your dog's teeth is part of being a responsible pet owner. Good oral health contributes to your pet's overall wellbeing. Just as in humans, the teeth and gums can be gateways to health issues if not for properly.

If your pet's teeth are not maintained, serious oral issues can develop. According to the Veterinary Oral Health Council, here are a few signs of oral and dental diseases:

- Bad breath;
- Loose teeth or teeth that are discolored or covered in tartar;
- Shying away from you when you touch the mouth area;
- Drooling or dropping food from the mouth;
- Bleeding from the mouth; and
- Loss of appetite or loss of weight.

At the first sign of any of these issues, it is critical that you schedule an appointment with your veterinarian. These professionals are trained to spot these issues and walk you through simple steps for treatment and overall maintenance.

**Home Dog Dental Care**  
How many times have you heard from your dentist that prevention is the best tool against gum disease or rotting teeth? The more you do before issue sets in, the better. Take the same approach with your pooch at home.

Brushing your dog's teeth is the single most effective way to maintain oral health, so try to make this a regular occurrence at home. Use pet-specific and veterinary-approved toothpaste for the best results. You also can find toothbrushes specifically designed for dogs that will do wonders for your pet's overall tooth health and appearance.

**Chew Treats**  
There are many treats on the market that can help improve your dog's oral health, especially if they have important anti-tartar ingredients. Along with helping puppies learn to chew and swallow safely, these products made from rawhide and other safe substances can help keep teeth and gums clean. Check with your veterinarian for a list of items approved for your specific breed. Don't forget to always monitor your dog when it is chewing on a new treat to prevent any choking hazards.



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