

PEOPLE & PETS

Getting On The Right Track With A New Pet

(NAPSA)—When a family first welcomes a pet into its home, there's plenty of love and cuddling. But there's also a lot of responsibility, including feeding, walks (for dogs), changing the litter (for cats) and, perhaps most importantly, veterinary bills. A serious accident or illness could strike a pet at any time during its life, and many pet owners aren't fiscally prepared for unexpected veterinary costs.

"As a new pet owner, it is essential to select a veterinarian as soon as possible," says Dr. Carol McConnell of Veterinary Pet Insurance (VPI). "Ask friends, neighbors or co-workers to recommend a local veterinary clinic. A clean clinic and a professional staff are good indicators. Don't be afraid to ask the clinic's staff members questions you might have that can assist you in making the smartest provider choice."

Regardless of which veterinarian you choose, they will recommend taking early preventive action to ensure a long and healthy life for your pet. New puppies and kittens should be examined within 48 hours of bringing the new pet home. It is important to adhere to the vaccinations, health screenings and routine care that your veterinarian recommends. Be sure you understand your pet's vaccination protocol before leaving your first veterinarian visit. In most scenarios, the veterinarian will ask you to return for the pet to receive additional "booster" vaccines in only three to four weeks.



Pet health insurance can help lessen the financial burden of caring for a family pet.

Canine vaccines include immunization against distemper, hepatitis, leptospirosis, parainfluenza, parvovirus, coronavirus, bordetella, rabies and Lyme disease. Vaccinations for cats include feline panleukopenia (distemper), feline bordetella, rabies, feline rhinotracheitis, calicivirus, chlamydia, feline leukemia, and FIP. Preventive care, such as annual vaccinations and boosters, is critical to the long-term health of a pet, so be sure to include these annual preventive care expenses in your family's budget.

Another important health matter for pet owners is the animal's diet; pet health experts frown on feeding pets table scraps. High-fat "human foods" can cause your pet to develop gastrointestinal problems and may lead to other problems such as pancreatitis. According to VPI claims data, ailments such as these can cost several hundreds of dollars to treat.

"Consult your veterinarian regarding a new pet's diet," explains Dr. McConnell. "Your pet's size and anticipated growth rate are variables your veterinarian will consider when recommending food, meal portions and feeding intervals."

Keeping Costs Down

For pet owners looking for methods to lessen the brunt of veterinary costs related to preventive care and the unexpected injuries and illnesses associated with a new pet, Dr. McConnell recommends enrolling a new dog, cat, bird or exotic pet into a pet insurance plan.

"People form an immediate bond with a new pet as soon as it's brought into the home," she says. "A pet insurance policy is a practical way to preserve that bond, as it defrays the costs that might otherwise interfere with pet owners pursuing the necessary treatment for that animal."

VPI Pet Insurance plans reimburse for the testing and treatment associated with conditions related to accidents and illnesses; everything from cuts to cancer is typically eligible for coverage. In addition, a well care option helps pay for routine procedures such as the aforementioned vaccinations, spaying and neutering, teeth cleanings and more. Monthly insurance premiums are often less than a cable television bill.

New and existing pet owners interested in finding out more about pet health insurance can call (866) 823-5595 or visit VPI on the Web at petinsurance.com.