



Getting a New Puppy or Kitten - Part 2



I hope you enjoyed part 1 of this two part series on getting a new puppy or kitten. In part 2, we shall cover neutering, insurance, and training and socialisation.

Neutering

Unless you are going to breed from your puppy or kitten, it is always best to get them neutered. This helps avoid unwanted pregnancies, behavioural issues such as demonstrating 'sex' behaviours and aggression, and health problems such as mammary and uterine tumours, pyometra (infection of the uterus), testicular tumours and prostatic disease.

The age at which we neuter dogs and cats varies, and will be dealt with on a case by case basis. However, as a general rule, dogs can be neutered from 6 months, and cats from 5 months.

In the case of bitches, there is controversy on whether they should be spayed before or after their first season, and some people feel very strongly about it. The question remains open to debate, and it is best you discuss this with your vet if you have any questions or concerns. It is important, however, that if your bitch comes into season, you wait 3 months before you get her spayed - this helps reduce the risk of bleeding during surgery and other post-op complications.

Insurance

Owning a pet costs money, and health care and vet bills are a significant contributor to that. Many medical conditions are lifelong, and over time, can cost a lot of money. In addition, many surgeries can be very expensive, especially advanced surgeries done at referral hospitals. Some pets can go a lifetime with very little veterinary input, but when something does go wrong, it can be very costly and you may be limited with what veterinary care you can afford.



Although some insurance companies may have a bit of a reputation, and you may pay what seems like a large monthly premium, it can be very reassuring to have that financial 'back-up' should it be needed. An alternative is to provide your own 'insurance' and set aside a small amount of money each month starting when you first pick your puppy and kitten up.



One important factor to appreciate is that the 'cheapest' insurance is not necessarily the best value. Make sure you read the small print and fully understand what is, and is not, covered.

Socialisation and Training



I cannot emphasise enough the importance of socialisation and training at an early age. The age at which you pick up your puppy and kitten is an influential time in their development. Even if you have been advised not to let your puppy or kitten socialise with animals of unknown health status until they have had their full vaccinations, try to expose them to as much as possible. Take puppies to meet healthy, vaccinated dogs of friends and family, expose them to noises such as buses and alarms, take them out

in the car, and touch their paws, mouths and ears as much as possible. The same applies to kittens - expose them early to any other cats or pets you own, start grooming them as soon as possible, and, again, get them used to having their paws, mouths, and ears touched.

If you are introducing a new puppy or kitten to a current pet, bear in mind it can be more stressful for the current pet than the puppy or kitten, so do this with care and under close supervision. However, although I am not a trainer, or an animal behaviourist, I do believe animals can communicate with each other better than we can communicate with them. This means it is important not to 'over-supervise', and containing an animal in a cage, or keeping them constantly on the lead, can prevent them from behaving freely, leading to stress, confusion and potentially future behavioural issues. Puppy classes can be very helpful for socialisation, but remember this is a somewhat artificial environment.



Kittens should be kept in the house until at least 2 weeks after their 'second' vaccination. However, most owners choose to keep them in until they have been neutered. It is always best to let

them out for the first time when they are hungry, as they are more likely to come back looking for food.

Training both puppies and kittens can be very rewarding, and again starting this as soon as possible is helpful. There is variation in the techniques used (eg. clicker training), and there are a number of experienced trainers and behaviourists available to help. Both puppies and kittens love learning tricks, and many young dogs, of whatever breed, would love the opportunity to learn gun dog training, agility or fly ball even if they are not going to take it seriously or competitively.

Feeding

I am intentionally not covering feeding here as it is a very broad topic, and it would require an article on its own to cover it fully. There are numerous food types and brands available, and what you feed your puppy and kitten, and how much, will depend on what they have been fed so far, their breed, body weight, body condition, age, and lifestyle. Please get in touch if you have any questions about this, or we can discuss it with you when you come in for their 'first' or 'second' vaccinations.

I hope you have enjoyed the last couple of articles on getting a new puppy or kitten. If you have any questions on anything I have covered, please do get in touch. In the next couple of articles, we will be looking again at some of the common conditions we see, and have a look at some 'immune-mediated' diseases in dogs and cats.

