

Owner's Manual for New Pets

Most pets do not come with an owner's manual so here is one you can use to get started. First and most important is to find and meet your potential veterinarian. Interviewing different veterinarians is necessary so that you find someone you feel you can trust and respect. Your pet should then be evaluated within the first 2 weeks of obtaining.

The first visit will include a thorough physical exam. Your vet will look for signs of underlying medical problems, such as poor conformation, skin problems, body condition (weight), upper respiratory illnesses or congenital problems, such as heart defects. If your pet was obtained from a breeder or shelter, there may be a clause in the contract that states you must take your new pet to the vet within a specific period of time. Otherwise, they are not liable for any medical issues discovered after that time frame. Since puppies and kittens do not have fully functioning immune systems, illnesses can progress very quickly.

If you have obtained a new kitten, it is extremely important to have them tested for feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and feline leukemia (FeLV). FIV and FeLV are viruses that attack the cat's immune system, causing them to be more vulnerable to infections. These viruses can affect your kitten's health and lifespan and are contagious to other cats.

Your vet will also perform a fecal exam to check for intestinal parasites. Puppies and kittens commonly carry intestinal parasites, such as roundworms, hookworms, tapeworms, giardia, and coccidia. Puppies and kittens with these parasites may have no signs, or may have diarrhea and vomiting. Some of these parasites can be transmitted to other pets in the household, as well as humans, so testing and deworming is very important.

After the physical exam, your vet will then determine a vaccination plan for your new pet. Most vets recommend that they receive a series of vaccines depending on their age. Many serious illnesses are preventable with proper vaccinations. Puppies and kittens should begin vaccinations at 6-8 weeks old. Vaccines purchased from feed stores or pet catalogs may not have the same shipping specifications/temperature control, therefore may not offer adequate immunity. In addition, vaccinations without examination can be risky if there is an underlying issue.

Depending on your pet's age and weight, they should begin heartworm and flea preventative. Fleas from your new puppy or kitten can easily lead to an infestation in your household. Both dogs and cats can get heartworms, so we recommend that both are started on heartworm preventative when they reach the age and weight requirements.

Additionally, your vet should be your referral source for proper and adequate nutrition tailored specifically for your pet. Other topics to discuss with your vet include spaying/neutering, house training, behavioral issues, and pet insurance. It is very important to make sure that your pet gets a good and healthy start to his/her new life!