

## 12 Factors to Consider Before Choosing a Dog

Puppies can be hard to resist, but they come with more than their share of work to become well-adjusted dogs. Choosing a dog based on her looks and physical characteristics can also be a big mistake. Carefully considering these 12 factors can help ensure you choose the right dog.

**Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker**

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- If you're considering adopting a new dog, it's important to look beyond the animal's physical characteristics
- Honestly consider your lifestyle and how your new pet will fit into it, as well as the personality and breed characteristics of the animal you're considering
- While puppies are hard to resist, they require months of training and socialization in order to develop into well-adjusted adult dogs; would you prefer an older dog who's already well-behaved?
- When visiting an animal shelter, remember that it's a stressful environment for pets, so their real personality may not come out until they've settled into a home where they feel safe
- To get prepared for a shelter visit, make a list of the qualities you want in a pet, then share them with the shelter workers, who may be able to direct you to a dog that's a good match

Adding a dog to your family is an exciting decision that will add years of unconditional love and joy to your life. But choosing the right dog for you is a decision that shouldn't be taken lightly. The most common reason why dogs end up in animal shelters — instead of staying in their forever homes — is unfulfilled expectations, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA).<sup>1</sup>

To avoid disappointment, for you and your potential new dog, take care to consider the following factors when choosing a pet.

### Don't Base Your Decision on Looks

Most new pet owners choose their new furry family member based largely on looks.<sup>2</sup> But if you're considering adopting a new dog, it's important to look beyond the animal's physical characteristics. While you may have a picture in your head of the type of dog you're looking for, keep an open mind, and be aware that how a dog looks may also influence its health and more.

A dog's size, for instance, may influence its lifespan, with small dogs typically living longer than large dogs. Dogs with long hair require more intense grooming than dogs with short hair, while dogs with flat faces, like pugs, French bulldogs and English bulldogs (brachycephalic breeds), may face breathing problems. Some breeds shed, some don't, and mixed breeds are everywhere in between.

Remember most dog breeds were created for a purpose; sports/hunting/swimming, herding, digging, sniffing, running, guarding, etc., and that DNA will be expressed in the animal you adopt, so investigating what breed traits (or blended traits, in the case of mutts) works with your lifestyle (and don't), prior to adoption, is a wise first step.

## What Dog Is Best for Your Lifestyle?

Next, honestly consider your lifestyle and how your new pet will fit into it. While you may love dogs that are athletic or a working breed, are you willing and able to provide the daily exercise and mental stimulation that an active working dog requires?

Does your living environment have the space for a large, active dog, or would a small cuddly lap dog be better (while all dogs need daily activity, some require/tolerate less than others)? Do you love huskies but live in Phoenix? Realize you and your future dog's long-term wellbeing both matter.

If you live in a townhome or apartment, there may be restrictions on the type or number of pets you can have. Likewise, while puppies are hard to resist, they require twelve months of intensive training and socialization in order to develop into well-adjusted adult dogs.

Are you up for the commitment of more frequent feeding, potty breaks and supervision that a puppy requires, or would you prefer to adopt an older pet with an established personality that already knows basic commands and is housetrained from day one? And if you have other pets in your home, how will they react to new puppy energy in the home? Have you made a plan?

AVMA recommends thinking about the following factors when determining what type of dog may be best for your lifestyle:<sup>3</sup>

- Do you have the time to provide the care and attention a dog needs?
- Do you rent or do you own your home?
- Do you live in an apartment or single-family home? Do you have easy access to areas where a dog can exercise?
- Who will care for your dog(s) in your absence?
- What future changes might occur in your living situation that would affect your ability to keep your dog in years to come?
- What are you looking for in a dog (e.g., jogging or hiking companion, cuddly lap dog, or high energy companion)?
- Do you live in the city, suburbs, or country?
- Are there any restrictions on number or types of pets where you live (building, town, or state ordinances)?
- How long is your work day? Do you frequently have obligations after work?
- Do you have other pets? Will your new dog get along with your existing pets?
- Are you prepared to provide appropriate veterinary care throughout your dog's life to help prevent and treat illness or injury?
- What traits might you need to avoid in a dog (e.g., boisterous, noisy, requiring intensive grooming)?

## Practical Considerations — Finances and Where to Get Your Dog

It's essential to consider your finances, as owning a dog has considerable costs involved. If you choose a purebred dog from a reputable breeder, the initial expense can be high, but the bulk of the expenses of pet ownership are related to food, veterinary care, training, grooming, pet sitters and more.

While you can adopt a dog from an animal shelter or rescue for a minimal fee, be sure you're ready to invest in the long-term expenses that come with having a pet, regardless of where you acquired him/her. When deciding between a breeder or a shelter, keep in mind that even purebred dogs are often looking for homes at rescues.

It's estimated that 25% of dogs in U.S. animal shelters are purebred.<sup>4</sup> Adoptions from pet shelters and rescues are on the rise, such that it has become the No. 1 method of acquiring a new pet in the U.S.<sup>5</sup>

Most importantly, if you decide you want a purebred animal not from a shelter or breed-specific rescue, you must make a firm commitment to never support puppy mills (or be duped into thinking you're buying from a reputable breeder when you aren't). These days, puppy brokers and online purebred puppy delivery services are wildly popular, delivering adorable non-DNA tested, genetically damaged/inbred, sick puppies to unsuspecting owners, worldwide.

How do you determine a viable heritage/functional breeder from the rest? Ask every single one of **these questions** to the prospective breeder you are contemplating purchasing a puppy from and call all their references. Do not buy animals from people who don't provide DNA test results prior to purchase or refuse to give a list of references you can check.

When visiting an animal shelter, remember that it's a stressful environment for pets, so their real personality may not come out until they've settled into a home where they feel safe. Often, animal shelter employees or volunteers are familiar with the dogs in their care, however, and can help direct you to a dog that may be a good match.

To get prepared for a shelter visit, make a list of the qualities you want in a pet, then share them with the shelter workers. The good news is many rescues have a "dating period" where you can foster your fuzzy friend before committing for the long term. Making several trips to multiple shelters may also be helpful as you search for the right dog for you.

Take your time meeting different animals, including those that may not initially look like the dog you had in your mind. If their personality and needs match with what you're looking for, it just might be a perfect match.

### Sources and References

<sup>1,3</sup> [American Veterinary Medical Association \(AVMA\), Selecting a Pet Dog](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Packaged Facts August 26, 2019](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Humane Society of the United States, Pets by the numbers](#)

<sup>5</sup> [PR Newswire September 4, 2019](#)

---