

# Choosing a Veterinarian



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Today's pets are living longer, healthier lives thanks to the availability of high quality veterinary care, preventive care, and pet owners' careful monitoring of their animals for early signs of illness. With so much attention being given by owners to their pets' daily needs, doesn't it make sense to take some time when selecting the veterinarian who will become your pet's health care provider?

When choosing your family's veterinarian, use the same care and criteria that you would in selecting a physician or dentist. Think about what is important to you. Location, office hours, payment options, and the range of medical services provided are all important considerations. For many pet owners the most important factor is the friendliness and commitment of doctors and staff. Your goal should be to find the veterinarian who you believe can best meet your pet's medical needs and with whom you feel comfortable in establishing a long-term veterinarian-client-patient relationship.



The veterinarian you select will maintain an ongoing history of your pet, including health records that detail preventive care (such as immunizations, heartworm test results and preventive medications, deworming treatments, and recording your pet's weight), reactions to medications, illnesses, surgical procedures, behavior traits, etc. He or she will also advise you on the best preventive care program to maintain your pet's health based on your pet's individual needs and risks of disease.

## **Where to look for a veterinarian**

### *Ask a friend*

Animal-owning friends are generally good sources of information. Ask them why they chose their veterinarian. If you believe their expectations of service are similar to yours, you may want to schedule a visit to the facility to evaluate it for yourself.

### *Breed clubs and special interest groups*

If you have a purebred dog or cat, area breed clubs or rescues can be a good source of information. They have often established a strong relationship with a practice that is very familiar with the potential health-related problems for the particular breed. If you have a non-traditional (i.e., not a cat or a dog) pet, special interest groups in your area may be good sources of information about veterinarians who have special interest in and experience with your species of pet.

### *Directories/Internet*

The business pages of a phone book or yellow pages can be sources for contact information on local veterinarians, but the printed books may have fewer resources than online formats.

A reputable online resource is [www.MyVeterinarian.com](http://www.MyVeterinarian.com), where pet owners can search by geography or other important criteria to locate veterinarians in your area. Also check the Internet for listings of veterinary association websites - many state or local veterinary medical associations maintain lists of area practices.

A word of caution about review sites: although online review sites can be valuable for picking out a restaurant, we don't recommend you use them to choose your veterinarian because the reviews may not reflect the average client. Personal references, such as the others we've listed here, are more reliable sources for finding a veterinarian.

### *Your current veterinarian*

If you are relocating to another city or state, ask your current veterinarian if he or she can recommend a practice where you will be living. Many times they

have colleagues in other towns whose practice policies and services are similar to theirs. Your current veterinarian should also give you copies of your pet's medical records to take to the new practice to ensure your pet's medical history is available to the new staff.

## When to look for a veterinarian

It's a good idea to start thinking about selecting a veterinarian before acquiring a new pet. In fact, a veterinarian can assist you in selecting a pet that complements your personality, work schedule, and lifestyle.

If you have recently moved to a new area, locate a veterinarian before your pet actually needs one. Don't wait until your pet becomes ill or requires emergency care — and remember, the Internet can be a great source of information, but it's not a substitute for veterinary care. It's best to have secured a doctor's name and number and become acquainted with the practice and staff before you need to find them during an emergency. Consider scheduling an initial visit soon after arriving at your new home. Your new veterinarian can suggest ways to help your pet become accustomed to its new environment and can inform you of any health risks unique to your area.



## Pay a visit

When deciding on a veterinary practice, first schedule a visit with the veterinarian to discuss your pet and ask questions about fees and services. You may want to visit several practices before making a final selection.

## Considerations when visiting a veterinary practice

Different pet owners have different needs, and their reasons for selecting a veterinarian for their pets will differ widely. The following list includes some considerations for selecting a veterinarian who is a good fit for you and your pet.

### *Office Hours*

- What are the regular office hours? Are they compatible with your schedule?
- Will they accept e-mails or appointments electronically (if that is your preferred scheduling method)?
- Who covers the practice when the doctor is unavailable?
- Do they have after hours emergency coverage or do they refer emergencies to a local emergency clinic?
- What is the average wait time for making a non-emergency appointment?

### *Professional Staff*

- How are telephone calls handled?
- Can you request an appointment with a specific veterinarian?
- Does the staff dress and act professionally?
- Do you feel comfortable talking with the doctor and/or the veterinary technician?
- How do the staff and doctors interact with your pet? Does your pet seem comfortable with the doctor and staff?

### *Fees and Payment*

- What methods of payment are accepted?
- If you have pet insurance or are considering pet insurance, does the hospital accept your pet's insurance plan?
- Are payment plans or financial assistance options available?

## *Services*

- What is the range of medical services that the practice provides, and does it suit your needs and expectations?
- Does the hospital have educational materials for pet-owners on a variety of topics?
- Are there non-medical services such as boarding, grooming, and training classes available?
- If necessary, does the veterinarian have a network of specialists for referrals?

## *Emergency Care*

- How are emergency calls handled during regular office hours and after office hours?
- Is there an emergency facility in your area should you need it?

## *Facility*

- Is the building environment clean and orderly?
- Are there any unpleasant odors?
- Can you take a tour of the non-public areas?

## *Professional Affiliations*

- Are the doctors members of a professional veterinary association such as the American Veterinary Medical Association or a state or local veterinary association?
- What is the hospital policy regarding continuing education for the professional staff?

## **Your responsibility as a pet owner**

In order for your veterinarian to maintain your pet's good health, it's important for you to schedule regular checkups and practice preventive care at home. Preventive care can often save you money in the long run by keeping your pet healthier and less likely to develop illnesses that can become very expensive to treat. In addition, regular checkups can catch many problems before they become more advanced and costly to treat. At each appointment, be sure to communicate clearly your pet's behavior and habits, as well as any changes or problems you've noticed or questions or concerns you may have about your pet's health. Since many signs of illness are subtle, even minor changes in your pet's behavior can give your veterinarian valuable information on what might become a serious health issue.

Remember that veterinarians care as much about you as an owner as they do about your pets. They are available to give you the information and resources you need to take the best possible care of your animals. By taking the time to select the veterinarian that you feel confident can provide for your needs as an owner and the medical needs of your pet, you will establish a satisfying and rewarding partnership.

*For more information, visit,*  
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