



# Pet Care

# Does your Pet Need a Diet?

We love our furry, feathered and scaly friends, and want only the best for them. But how do we know when they're getting maybe a little too much love? Keep reading to find out.

## DOGS

Dogs are overweight when you can't feel their ribs without a thick layer of fat over them. Her chest should be wider than her abdomen, with a noticeable upward slant from chest to stomach (waist). You may also notice your dog panting when walking, moving around a little slower and napping a lot.

## CATS

If you can run your hands over your feline friend and can't feel their ribs with a thin layer of fat over them, he might be overweight. Next, look at his abdomen for a swinging layer of low hanging fat. He should also have a distinct waist, just like a dog, and you should be able to feel his back bones as well.

## BIRDS

It may be a little more difficult to tell if your bird buddy is a little tubby. First, run your hands over your bird. If you can feel her pectoral muscles. If the muscles are bulging out on either side of the keel



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bone, she may be overweight. Also feel or look for a fatty layer that's yellow in color all over the bird. This is a condition called lipomatosis, and means the bird is overweight.

## HAMSTERS

It can be difficult to know if these pudgy little guys are overweight. Some keys are to see if they feel heavier when you handle them and to look

for fat or loose skin anywhere else but their cheek pouches. But the real tell is when you weigh them. A fully grown golden hamster, for instance, should weigh between 5 and 7 ounces and dwarf hamsters between  $\frac{3}{4}$  to  $1\frac{3}{4}$  ounces. To weigh your hamster, put him in a small container with a couple of treats. Weigh the container, then subtract the weight of the empty contain-

er and treats from the total.

## GUINEA PIGS

Like hamsters, the only real way to tell if a guinea pig is too heavy is to weigh them on a gram scale. Males can weigh from 900 to 1,200 grams and females 700 to 900 grams. A hefty guinea pig will also be slower and more lethargic than he used to be.

If you suspect your pet is

getting too heavy for their good health, consult with your veterinarian for an appropriate diet and weight loss program. Too much weight can lead to chronic health conditions like lipomas and diabetes in many species. Remember that really loving your pets doesn't mean showering them in treats. It means giving them a long, happy life.

# Bird Care 101

If you're thinking that a feathered friend might be in your future, we've got you covered. Here are some tips for taking care of your new buddy.

## LIFESPAN

Some birds have very long lives. Budgies and cockatiels can live for up to 20 years in captivity, while larger parrots can live for nearly 100 years. Getting a bird is truly a life-time commitment that you should be ready for.

## HOUSING

If your new friend will be spending most of his time caged, you should get the largest cage that can fit in your home, the Association of Avian Veterinarians said. The cage must be strong enough to resist any bending or break-out attempts and needs to be designed for bird safety and ease of cleaning. The cage should accommodate the bird with wings extended and for the entire height of the bird, from the top of its head to the tip of the tail.

The cage should also have perches made of clean, pesticide-free natural wood branches. Be prepared to replace them frequently; they can become worn and soiled fairly fast. You should also provide bowls for food and water. A wide bowl may show



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the food off more and encourage the bird to try new things. Put the food and water bowls opposite of each other so that the bird can get some exercise walking between the two.

## TOYS

Birds are active, intelligent creatures. Fill their cage with plenty of toys to encourage exercise and beak maintenance. Choose chewable toys

like branches, pine cones, rawhide chews, natural fiber rope and soft white pine. You can also offer paper and cardboard for the bird to shred or a piece of corn on the cob or pomegranate as a treat.

## SECURITY

Most birds also appreciate some privacy. Offer a paper bag, a towel or a nest box to get them away from prying

eyes. If, however, the bird starts to nest, then try arranging some leaves or other blockages around the cage for the bird to hide in.

## GROOMING

Routine bird grooming includes nail and wing trims. Wing clipping should be carefully talked over with your veterinarian. Clipped wings mean the bird can't fly free

and may make training easier. Free-flying birds, however, need to spread their wings in a carefully bird-proofed area that's safe for them to fly in.

Many birds also enjoy a daily bath. They may bathe in a water dish or bowl, but some prefer a shower or water faucet. You can also try offering the bird a handful of wet lettuce leaves or a mist with clean water.

# All About Pet Adoption

You've no doubt heard the slogan "adopt, don't shop." If you're considering a new pet, take a look at adopting.

Many shelters offer more than just dogs and cats. You can also find small animals like ferrets, hamsters and rabbits in a shelter, as well as larger livestock like pigs, goats and horses. Here's all you need to know about adopting a pet.

## DO YOUR RESEARCH

Before heading to the shelter, carefully research the pets you're considering adopting. Look at lifespan — dogs can live 10-15 years, cats up to 20 and horses up to 40. Are you and your family willing to make a commitment for that long? Also consider your personality and lifestyle. Are you gone a lot? Maybe a dog isn't right for you. Also look into breeds and space restrictions. If you have any questions, ask shelter staff. Most of them are adept at matching animals with the perfect family.

## MAKE A PLAN

When you're adding an animal to your family, you need to have plans for health care, boarding when you travel or go on vacation, and for training. You also need to plan for extra costs, like fees for adoption, food, spaying and neutering, licensing according to local regulations, collars and



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leashes, toys, permanent identification such as microchips, crafts and carriers, and a bed. You should also plan for unexpected expenses like accidents, illnesses and any specialized training the pet may need.

## VISIT A SHELTER

Make a visit to one or more local animal shelters. If you don't see a pet for you right away, consider volunteering so that you can learn about the animals they have. You can also foster, which means you take

care of an animal in your home. This will give you a taste of life with an animal is like. You can even foster-to-adopt the pet you're considering so that you can see how that particular animal will fit in with your family.

## AFTER YOU'VE ADOPTED

Once you've got your new friend home, visit the local pet store and stock up on things you'll need to give it a safe, happy life. The shelter can give you a checklist, or the experts at your pet store can help.

# Hamsters 101

Hamsters are a small rodent sold as house pets. The best-known species of pet hamster is the golden or Syrian hamster.

There are also dwarf hamsters, such as Campbell's dwarf hamster, the winter white dwarf hamster and the Roborovski hamster. If you're thinking these little guys are the perfect pet for you, keep reading.

## HAMSTER HOMES

Hamsters need a comfortable home that's dry, clean and quiet. They enjoy burrowing, so line your hamster's cage with a thick layer of bedding material such as dust-free wood shavings. Make sure the material is free of harmful preservatives or other chemicals. Don't use straw. Hamsters will need a nesting box or shelter for the hamster to keep warm and sleep in. He should also be able to store a hoard of food and move around. Keep the hamster's cage clean and try to avoid disturbing your hamster too much.

## HAMSTER FOOD

Hamsters need a water bottle with a valveless sipper tube. Provide a commercial hamster food and, as a treat, washed fruit and vegetables. Except for grapes and rhubarb; those can be poisonous to hamsters. Place the food directly on the cage floor or in

a flat dish, but don't be surprised if the hamster turns it over and moves the food to its hoard. This is part of the hamster's natural food-gathering behavior.

## HAMSTERS AT PLAY

Give your hamster lots of

things to play with, such as small boxes and tubes. A good running wheel can provide extra exercise.

Choose a large wheel — the biggest you can — because a wheel that's too small can actually give your hamster back problems.

## HAMSTER HEALTH

Keep a regular check on your hamster because their signs of distress or pain are very subtle. Make sure your hamster is moving around, breathing well and has bright eyes and a shiny coat. Regularly check your hamster's front teeth because

they grow continuously. They need to regularly gnaw objects to keep them worn down. Also keep an eye on your hamster's scent glands on their hips. These are used for communication, but if they change in size, bleed or produce an unusual discharge, call the vet.



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# How to Find a Pet Groomer

Long-haired breeds of cats and dogs may need special attention from a pet groomer.

Groomers bathe, clip hair, and trim the nails of your cats and dogs. They can also brush the teeth or offer other services to keep your pet in the best health. If you think you might want to begin taking your pet to a groomer, here's the way to find the best one in your area.

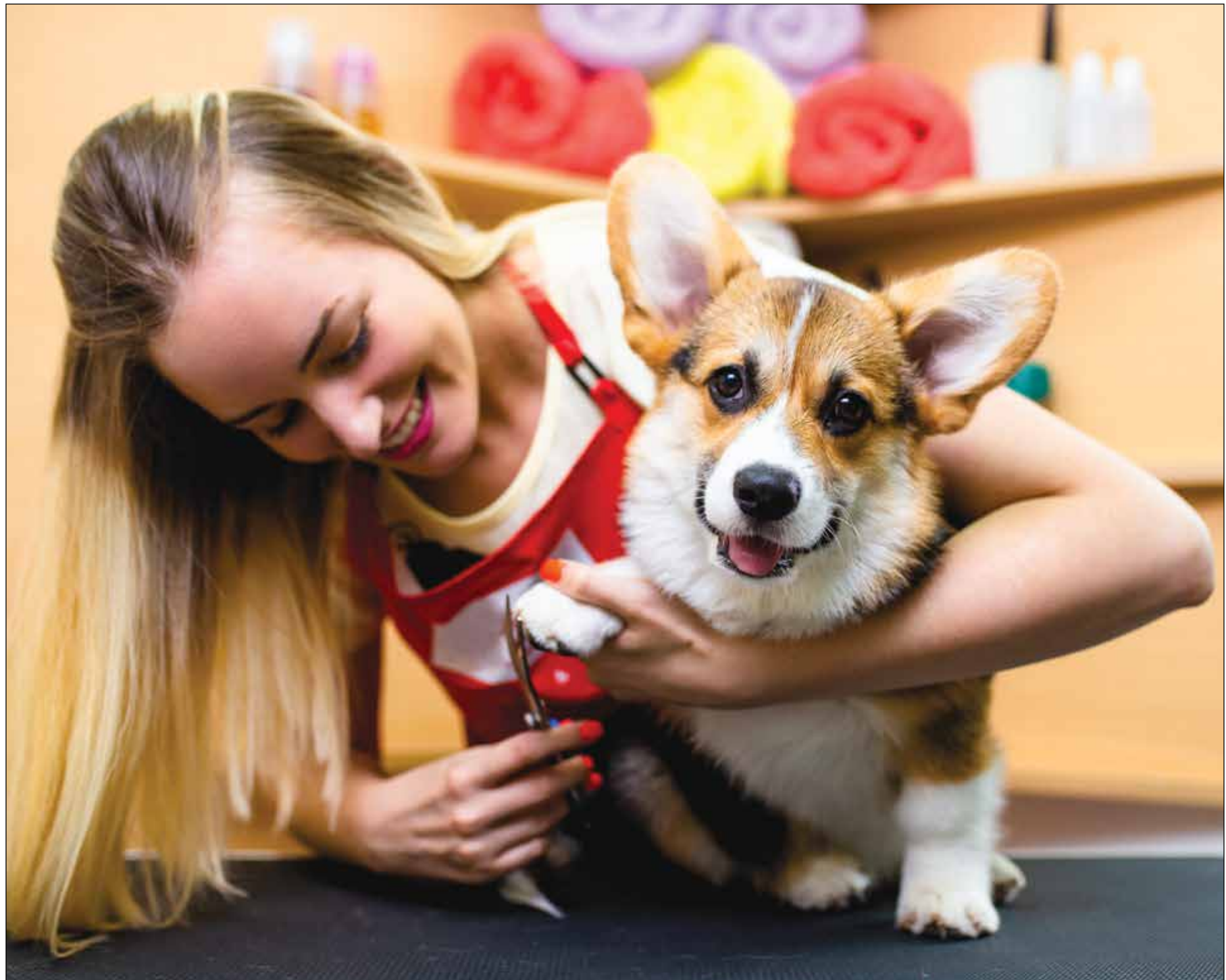
## DO YOUR RESEARCH

Ask friends and family for their recommendations and do online research, but you can also use an online service such as the AKC GroomerFinder or any other online grooming registry. After you've narrowed your options down, have an in-person conversation with your potential groomer. Their answers and the way you discuss her concerns can tell you a lot about the person and the facility.

## ASK QUESTIONS

If you don't have the right questions to ask, try some of these.

1. May I see your facility? Look for a clean salon with no bad odors.
2. Ask about what services they provide.
3. Ask if you can stay and watch while they groom your dog or cat.
4. Do you have any experi-



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ence with my dog or cat's breed?

5. What kind of training do you have? Does the facility require continuing education for its staff? Do the groomers have any kind of certifications?
6. What kind of products do

you use?

7. How will my dog or cat be housed?
8. Does the staff have any medical and first aid experience? Do you require any proof of vaccination before service? How do you handle

pets with external parasites?

9. Do you carry liability insurance?
10. What do you do in case of emergency?
11. How much will my dog or cat's grooming cost? Remember that no question

is trivial and, if you don't like their answers at any time, go with your gut feeling. You can also find services like mobile grooming, which will come to your home, and smaller salons which offer a more private service if you have a reactive dog.

# Reptiles 101

Lizards, snakes and dragons, oh my! Reptiles may be creepy, but they can also make great house pets.

These temperature-sensitive creatures need a little more care than some other pets, but they can live a long time and make excellent companions in the right home. If you're considering adding a scaly friend to your family, keep reading.

## KNOW THE RULES

Many areas have rules about what kinds of reptiles and amphibians can be kept. Check with local fish and wildlife agencies about what you can and can't keep as a pet in your locality. For instance, common regulations prohibit keeping venomous snakes.

## SIZE MATTERS

When shopping for a reptile, consider how big the mature creature will get. Burmese pythons are common pet store snakes, but they can grow up to 30 feet and weigh up to 200 pounds. Putting it in a small tank won't stunt its growth, either. It'll just mean you'll be less prepared when it does start to grow to gargantuan size.

## ACCOMMODATIONS

Speaking of tanks, remem-



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ber that any home for your new reptile will need to be large enough so that he has plenty of room to move around. It must also be escape proof and have a heat source that can help maintain these cold-blooded creatures' body temperature for them. Your local pet store can advise you about proper heat

sources that are safe for your new pet. You'll also need to closely monitor the humidity in the enclosure. In the wild, reptiles do this by burrowing or moving house to a new climate. Snakes and lizards that get too dry can die, but too much moisture can lead to problems with fungi and bacteria.

Reptile cages should be kept clean as they are susceptible to skin infections. Their feces can also carry diseases like salmonella that can be harmful to humans. The cage and furnishings should be regularly cleaned and you should wash your hands carefully after handling your reptiles.

## NUTRITION

Reptile food blends are commercially available, but many reptile species need fresh foods — and really fresh, as in still alive. Mealworms and mice are popular choices for carnivorous reptiles, while others need lots of fresh food and vegetables. Be prepared to buy fresh food a few times per week.

# Choosing a Veterinarian

With so many pets to choose from, you need a good veterinarian to take care of your furry, scaly, swimming friends.

The American Veterinary Medicine Association recommends choosing a vet the same way you'd choose a doctor or a dentist for yourself.

## WHAT TO CONSIDER

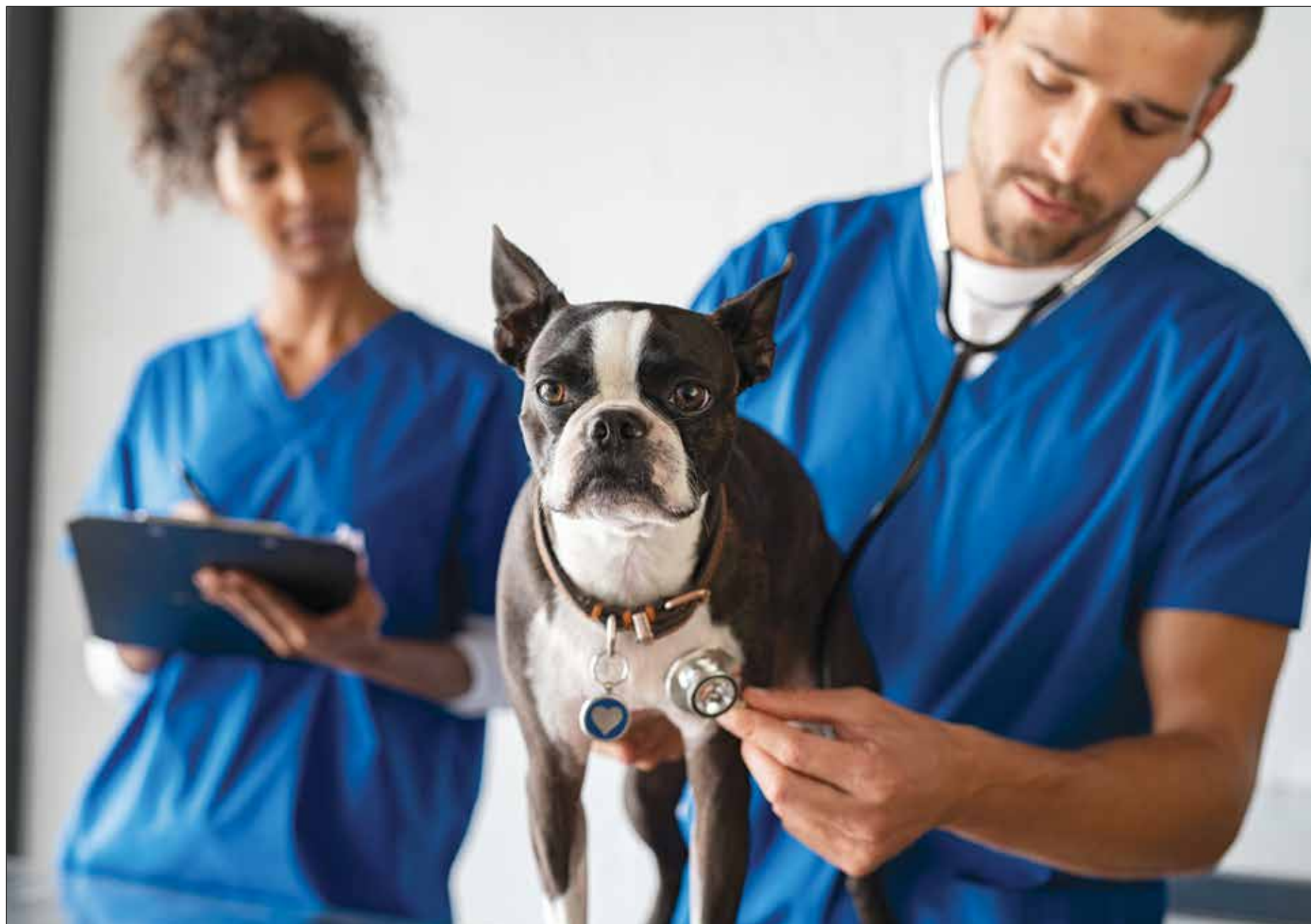
Just like when choosing your own medical providers, you should consider the following:

- Location.
- Office hours.
- Payment options.
- Medical services offered.
- Specialist networks and emergency care.
- Friendliness and commitment of the veterinarian and their staff.

You should be looking to establish a long-term relationship with this office. The veterinarian will keep an ongoing history of your pets, including records about preventative care, illnesses, surgeries and reactions to medications. Your vet will also give you a preventative medications regimen to keep your pet in their best health. They may also be where your pets head to when you're out of town or on vacation.

## HOW TO FIND A VET

Start by asking friends and



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family members who they see. You can also turn to breed clubs and pet groups, as well as local directories or the internet. You should visit each vet to evaluate them for yourself. Ask the vet about fees, services, payment policies and treatment plans. Ask how emergency care is handled and look for professional association memberships and certifications. Ask about con-

tinuing education and non-medical services such as boarding, grooming and training.

Make sure that any potential new vet's office hours are compatible with your schedule. Look, listen and smell for dirt, professional staff behavior and unpleasant odors. You should feel comfortable talking to the vet and their staff.

## IF YOU'RE MOVING

Ask your current vet whether there's someone they can recommend in your new area. Like other medical professionals, vets maintain strong professional networks through conferences, continuing education and association membership. No matter how far away you're going, there's a good chance your vet can help you find at least one

qualified practice to check out in your new home.

Veterinarians should care as much about your pets as you do. Take the time to choose a veterinarian that you're comfortable leaving your new family member with before an emergency accident or illness forces your hand. Make sure the new clinic that offers services you need when you need it.