

Will a Puppy Fit Your Lifestyle?

Before you run out and adopt a new member of the family, you need to evaluate your own lifestyle to see whether you have the resources to make a happy, healthy home for both of you.

1. How much time can you commit? You will have to make a conscious commitment to be with your dog every day for the rest of his or her life. If you get a puppy, remember that you'll have to set aside time for training classes and other activities. You should never buy a dog only to relegate him to the loneliness of the backyard; dogs are social creatures and need interaction with your family. Training a puppy is critical, because it will determine how he or she behaves for the rest of his or her life.
2. Do you have medical concerns? The most common question might be about allergies. Does anyone in your household have allergies that could be aggravated by a dog or mean that you must get rid of him or her? No breed of dog is truly hypoallergenic, and people who have serious allergies may not be able to tolerate any dog at all, regardless of what you might read in an ad. Make sure to consult your doctor if you're unsure.
3. Can you afford it? The big costs for owning a puppy are not the initial ones of just buying him or her. You must also buy all the accessories: a leash and collar, and a crate for training your puppy; regular vaccinations and inoculations; obedience classes (which can cost up to one hundred dollars!); regular veterinary visits and unexpected medical emergencies; and food, food, food! Growing puppies, especially big breeds, have BIG appetites.
4. Where will your puppy live? It's not adequate to chain up your dog in your yard with a plastic hut and a bowl of water. Dogs need social interaction and should be a part of your family: keep him inside when you're not home, and take him for regular, ample exercise opportunities. If you can't do this, getting a puppy may not be for you, especially because dogs without adequate social interaction tend to bark more and are often victimized by neighborhood bullies.
5. Will your lifestyle fit? If you and your family are very active, you will want to choose a breed that is suited to this lifestyle; if you are more sedentary, the same principle applies. Collies can tolerate much more exercise than a bulldog, for example. In fact, border collies actually require daily workouts. Do your research and find a breed that will fit your lifestyle, and make sure to use several different sources. Another thing to remember is that size and energy/exercise requirements don't always "match up"!
6. Can you groom your puppy? Dogs need hygiene, just like humans do, and some dogs (like poodles) need a LOT more than others. You should think about how much time you have to spend in a dog groomer's office, and how much money you can spend. Remember that you'll have to brush your dog, and keep the problem of shedding in mind.
7. What's your motivation? Knowing why you want a dog is crucial to picking the right one. If you want a companion, or a watchdog, or anything else, do your research. Some breeds are better suited than others for certain tasks.
8. How much experience do you have? Different breeds of puppies require different amounts of attention. If you're an experienced dog owner, this consideration might not be important, but if you're a novice, you should probably choose a breed that is low-maintenance. Each dog, and each breed, has distinctive character traits and physical needs that you should research.
9. What's your long term status? If you're single, will a marriage or family change your plans? Will a move mean that you have to leave your dog? Remember that it's not just you that will be affected - it's your pet, too.
10. Can you take care of your senior dog? Puppies aren't puppies forever; just like humans, they age, and they often require more work as they get older. Are you willing to devote the time, or are you just planning to get rid of your dog when he or she is no longer "fun"? If you have thought about these and decided to get a dog, here are some criteria to keep in mind when choosing a puppy.

1. Age. Never buy a puppy that is younger than eight weeks, because they are still undergoing critical physical and psychological development. At six weeks, puppies are barely weaned; in two weeks, they learn valuable social skills with their litter-mates that will ease the transition to your home. Also, as puppies age, they can often be more receptive to obedience training. If you want to take the "rescue" route, try looking for an older dog, who can offer just as much companionship as a puppy.
2. Physical health. Check your puppy for the following problems: signs of lameness, or any discharge from facial orifices. Your puppy's coat should be clean and shiny. His stool should be firm and he should be alert. Make sure your puppy was bred with good parents and has had all of his shots. Also, check the status of the facility where your puppy has been raised. Make sure it is clean, but not heavy with odors from artificial cleaners, and that there are no pests. Make sure your puppy and its caretakers have healthy attitudes.
3. Breeder Behavior. Know your breeder! Make sure they're not trying to "dump" the puppy on you, and that they answer your questions completely and honestly. A responsible breeder can help you decide whether a particular breed of dog is right for you, and if they seem too eager to sell you a puppy, maybe you should look into finding a different source.
4. Temperament and Characteristics. Make sure your puppy's breed has temperament testing, and that its temperament matches what you are looking for. Your personality should match your puppy's, because it can be hard to make a relationship of polar opposites work.
5. Intuition. You should trust your instincts when you're investigating a breeder: does something feel "wrong"? If so, walk away. But remember that your intuition might make you want to take the "feel-good" route of adoption. This requires a huge time commitment and may not be right for everyone. Choosing to get a puppy is a huge, lifetime commitment. Make sure you do your research and honestly evaluate your lifestyle before taking this important step.

About the Author

Ian Spellfield, an occasionally frustrated pet owner, tests and reviews urine removal products at his blog [Urine Off Reviews](http://www.urineoffreviews.com). You can follow his reviews and occasional heartache at <http://www.urineoffreviews.com>

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