

Choosing the Right Dog

Dr. Ruth MacPete, DVM

Ruth has more than 15 years of experience in the veterinary industry as a companion animal veterinarian in private practice. Along with being a writer and media personality, she is also a founding member of IDEXX's Pet Health Network team.

Picking the perfect dog can be a challenge, [Dr. Ruth MacPete](#) has you covered with this list of questions to ask before welcoming a new pooch into your family. from Dr. MacPete, find her on [Facebook](#) or at www.drruthpetvet.com!

Picking the right dog is a decision that is more important than you may think. Just go to any animal shelter to see countless homeless dogs that ended up there because they were a mismatch for their adopting families or their families did not anticipate the level of responsibility needed to care for a dog. To avoid adding to the existing problem of homeless pets, think through your decision to adopt a dog and make sure you pick the right dog for your household.

Careful deliberation should go into the decision to adopt a dog. Caring for a dog requires a significant investment in time, money, and emotion. Before you decide to adopt a dog, ask yourself these questions.

Do you have time for a dog? Do you have enough space in your home for a dog? Can you afford to care for them, including veterinary expenses? Do you have time to train them? Are you prepared to take on these responsibilities for the entire life of the dog, which could be 10-18 years? If you answered yes to all of these questions, then the next step is to decide which type of dog is best for you. For starters, factors to consider include size, coat, and level of activity.

Size matters. Would a big dog or small dog fit best in your family? Big dogs need more space, eat more, and absolutely require training to make them well-mannered. Will a [Great Dane](#) the size of a pony fit in your cozy studio in the Village? Can you afford to feed a 200 lb. Saint-Bernard-Mastiff mix? Will you be able control a rambunctious [Rottweiler-Husky](#) mix so he doesn't knock over your guests, especially the young and elderly? These are some of the things you need to consider when deciding what type of dog would be best

for your family. Remember, even big dogs start off as cute little puppies but they don't stay small for very long.

Once you decide the best size dog for your family, think about the type of coat you prefer. This may sound like a cosmetic decision but it is really about grooming and maintenance. Long-haired dogs need to be brushed regularly to prevent tangles and mats. Some breeds like Bichons and [Poodle](#) mixes require professional grooming. Are you willing to do this? Or would a dog with short hair and less maintenance be better for you? Keep in mind grooming doesn't just involve hair brushing, many dogs require regular ear and skin cleaning. For example, certain breeds like Basset Hounds and Cocker Spaniels are prone to ear infections and benefit from regular ear cleanings. Breeds with prominent skin folds, like [Bulldogs](#) and Shar Peis also require regular facial fold cleaning to prevent skin infections. If you can't imagine having to clean your dog's ears or facial folds, one of these breeds may not be the best dog for you.

Lastly, people need to think about a breed's activity level and matching it with their own. Are you a couch potato? Or a marathon runner? Pick a dog that will match your level of activity. Weimaraners and Vislas are high energy dogs that not only love to run, they need to have regular exercise to burn-off energy. They do best in families with active lifestyles. On the other hand, bulldogs and other [brachycephalic](#) breeds (meaning dogs with short snouts) are not able to exercise too much and are heat intolerant. So if you want a dog to be your running or hiking buddy, a bulldog is not the best dog for you. Bulldogs are sedentary dogs that just love to hang out with the family. If you pick an active dog and don't have the time to exercise them, you are asking for trouble. Bored dogs can chew up things and be destructive. Likewise, don't pick a sedentary dog if you want a running partner.

Take your time when choosing a dog and avoid impulsive decisions. Make sure you do your homework so you know what type of dog will be a good fit when you go to the shelter, or contact breeders or breed rescue groups. There are several books and websites that can help you read about breed traits and have questionnaires to help you find the perfect match!

Choosing the Right Dog

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian – they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.