

How to find a great veterinarian

Much like the quest for the “right” human doctor, finding a veterinarian that you trust is a critical pet owner task. If you like your veterinarian (and how the vet’s office operates), you will be more likely to keep up with annual checkups and vaccinations, and you will be more likely to seek advice if your pet develops new symptoms.



You are your pet’s best advocate, and your vet should understand this and seek your input about changes in your pet over time.

You need to ask many of the same questions about your pet’s potential doctor that you would ask about a personal doctor:

- Is the doctor qualified to treat your pet?
- How do current and past clients rate the doctor’s performance?
- Does the doctor’s personality and style work with you and your pet?

QUALIFICATIONS

- If you’ve found your vet through a reputable source, chances are that he or she is licensed. If you are in doubt, contact your state’s Veterinary Licensing board to confirm the vet’s status.
- You can call the Veterinary School the veterinary graduated from to confirm his or her status.
- Ask the prospective vet to provide information about

specialized training and continuous education strategies for the vet and the vet's office. This can tell you how progressive and current the vet's practice will be.

NOTE: Your prospective vet should be very willing to share information about his or her training, affiliation and credentials. If that isn't happening, it should be a big red flag.

REPUTATION

- One of the best ways to find your next vet is to ask friends, family, breeders and other folks-in-the-know for a recommendation.
- You and your pet will deal with all of the office staff and vet techs as much or more than the actual veterinarian, so be sure to ask about the entire experience with the veterinarian's office.
- Many online service directories allow clients to leave reviews and recommendations. Do a quick internet search on your veterinarian candidate and see what pops up. Keep in mind that a bad experience may be due to personality conflicts or special circumstances, but if you see a trend of not-so-positive comments, you should steer clear.

STYLE & PERSONALITY

Both you and your pet should feel comfortable with your vet and vet's office. (Okay, most cats and some dogs will never be okay with a trip to the doctor. In that case, at least you should feel good about the visit.)

- Gruff, clinical and knowledgeable or social, chatty and engaging? Do you want your veterinarian to be the all knowing expert or a helpful resource? Keep this in mind as you research potential vets.
- Some folks want a deeper relationship with their pet's

doctor. They want to visit and discuss every symptom and behavior. Other folks want to get it over with – no chit chat. Let's just say that there is not much more annoying than dealing with someone who is behaving the exact opposite of what you want.

- Ask about the standard length of appointments, emergency service options and hours of operation. This gives you a sense of how available and responsive the vet will be.

There are two doctors at my vet's office. One is chatty and progressive; she likes to research things online and is up on all the latest vet news. The other is much more traditional; he says "this is the way we treat XYZ. period." Both are capable and engaging veterinarians, but they probably appeal to different parts of their customer base.

REMEMBER: If you lose faith in your veterinarian or get a bad vibe, the good news is that it is easier to switch your vet than it is to switch your human doctor. Try not to feel guilty if this happens to you, there is no one-veterinarian-fits-all mandate.