

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.

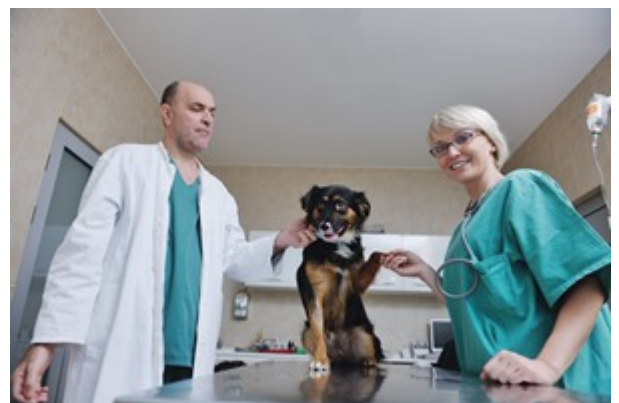
- Ask about the standard length of appointments, emergency service options and hours of operation. This gives you a sense of how available and responsive the vet will be.

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.

How to switch veterinarians

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While deciding to leave may be a challenge, there are only two steps to switching vets!

- [Find a new veterinarian.](#)
- Get a copy of your pet's health records to take to your new vet. This can be the hard part – especially if you have a long-standing relationship with your old vet – because it involves openly admitting your defection. The good news is that the new vet's office will often take care of this bit for you if you just ask. They want your business!

Since moving to the Austin area over ten years ago, my pets and I “went through” four vets before settling on our current doctor. Here's why we changed:

Vet #1: I saw their office near my home and made an appointment. At the time, I had two dogs. We sat in the waiting room – which was a zoo – for about 30 minutes. We entered the exam room and waited some more. Once the vet arrived, the annual checkups for two dogs new to their practice took 15 minutes total. Little discussion or desire to understand me or my pets. (We only went once!)

Vet #2: Again, I went with geographical proximity. This vet's office was saner and much more organized. There were two vets – husband and wife. The wife was nice and engaging; the husband a complete curmudgeon (and cold to both humans and dogs). It just never felt right.

Vet #3: Recommended by my very particular neighbor. The vet was pretty kooky but clearly loved dogs and her job. The office was pleasant and organized. They knew me and my dogs. Nice. Then, I had two dogs in a row go through wacky illnesses. For me, this vet did not do a good job of supporting me or treating my pets while they were in crisis. My problems may have been completely circumstantial, and

admittedly my dogs had uncommon health issues.

Vet #4: Long story short, my first random-illness dog ended up having a series of seizures early in the morning, and I needed a vet that opened early. I was sent to the new vet. Showed up at 7:30 with a very, very sick dog. This vet and her office took us in immediately and helped quickly. The vet read through all of Daisy's health records and went to work. Ultimately, there was nothing she could do, but the office was very supportive. I went back to vet #3 until the next dog health crisis hit. Unhappy with how things were going at vet #3, I remembered how knowledgeable and progressive vet #4 was and switched immediately. The office knows me and my dogs; the vet remembers me and my pet's history (and my family's pet's history); and the office is busy but well-organized. I don't spend a lot of time waiting around, and they can always fit me in in a pinch. This is the best vet I've ever had, and I recommend them often.

Remember that you have options if you lose faith in your veterinarian. When you take your pets to the doctor, you should feel confident and comfortable. Your vet should be engaged and informed.

Recommended puppy toys

Just walk into a pet store and you are besieged with toy options for your puppy. Never fear! Below we provide an assortment of chewing, tugging and brain-using play options.

As a general rule, dog toys fall into 2 categories:

- **Free play** – These belong to the dogs, and they are allowed to play with them at anytime. However, your dog

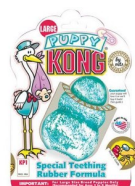
must allow you to retrieve a toy at any time – and the pup must give the toy up willingly. No object guarding should ever be allowed.

- **Supervised play** – These toys belong to the two-legged family members but are shared with the dogs. We decide when we take these out to play, and we decide when the game ends. It's a good idea to end the game just a bit before your dog wears out and gets bored with it. This leaves him wanting just a bit more and makes him excited to continue the game at another time.

CHEW & TEETHING TOYS

These toys are great when your puppy is teething. I like to freeze the teething toys as it has a slight numbing effect from the cold and they get relief from the pain. I used the same method on my childrens teething rings and they all seemed to like it.

- **Kong:** These are great stuffed with peanut butter and treats then frozen for use by teething puppies. If you are going to be gone for a long period in a day fill these with your dogs meal and they can feed themselves and it gives them a great outlet for their energy.



- **Nylabone:** These come in all shapes and sizes and my dogs love them.



- **Chilly Bones:** These give true relief to a teething

puppy.



- **Teething Rings:** These come in a wide variety of designs. Definitely freeze these, your pup will enjoy them even more.



LEARNING TOYS

You can find many toys that will not only alleviate boredom but they will help your furry friend learn to problem solve and think on their own. This can be extremely beneficial when training your dog as a dog that can reason will easily understand the behaviors that you are showing them.

These come in many varieties and can provide hours of fun for your pet. Just fill them with treats or use them to feed your dog their meal it will keep them occupied while you are busy.



When playing with my dogs I keep it simple. Balls, ropes, frisbees, sticks and empty water bottles make great toys for interacting with my pets. For the dogs that will fetch but not return the item you can make a great training toy by simply putting a hole through a ball and attaching a long piece of clothesline rope through it. In this way the dog cannot run away with the ball as you have control at all times.

It does not matter what method you decide to use as long as you remember to keep it positive and make it a fun experience for your friend.

Buyer's guide to dog bowls

There are as many choices for dog dishes as we have for our own dinnerware. So many designer patterns and just fun bowls to choose from that making a decision can be difficult. Choose a bowl based on your dog's needs.



DOG FOOD - © Jan Macellan | Dreamstime.com

- For our larger friends, an elevated bowl is much better for digestion. Vary the height based on your dog's height. The optimal height is six inches lower than the dog's "withers" (aka back) for larger breeds and four inches lower for smaller breeds.
- If your pup has long floppy ears, tapered bowls are available to help keep his ears clean and dry.
- If your dog has a tendency to gulp food down all at once, this can cause a variety of health issues. Not to worry – there are bowls that are designed to help alleviate this problem by slowing down consumption. The JW pet skid slow feed bowl is one example. (A freebie solution to this problem is to place another bowl or large object into your pet's current bowl; your dog will have to work harder to get to the food – and therefore will eat slower!)

So, now you've picked a style of bowl. Let's choose a type of

material.

- Plastic bowls may be easily chewed and carried around, but they're lightweight and portable.
- Metal bowls are easy to clean and not really chew toys but be aware that some dogs do not like to see their reflection while they're eating.
- Heavy ceramic type bowls are especially nice if your dog tends to play with his empty bowl (or likes to carry it around a la Snoopy when he is hungry).

We're pretty sure that your dog will not care about how pretty or color coordinated his food and water bowls are, but you might! Most dogs can't read either, and would be perfectly happy to eat and drink out of bowls that say "cat".

Buyer's guide to grooming

Grooming is a very important part of your dog's life. Learning young to tolerate bathing, clipping their nails and brushing their coats and teeth is essential to long term health and well being. With a few simple supplies and some patience and effort on your part grooming can be enjoyable for you and your new friend.



BRUSHES

A good brush that is suitable to your dog's coat is crucial in the grooming process.

- Thick coated dogs will need a pin brush as well as a soft brush to finish their coats.

- Short coated dogs do well with a zoom groom and a softer brush.

BATH TIME

- When bathing your dog be sure to use a dog-appropriate product. Human shampoo is much too strong for our four legged friends. Use a shampoo designed for your pet's sensitive skin.
- Use specialty shampoos to address specific concerns such as dry skin, shedding and allergies.
- Keep an ear cleaner dryer solution on hand. Use this after a bath to keep down ear infections.

NAILS

- Get a good pair of toe nail clippers to begin with. If your nail clippers are not large enough or sharp enough it can make your dog uncomfortable with the process. Dull clippers will crack the nails and cause your dog discomfort.
- Have some quick stop or other blood coagulating product to stop the nail from bleeding if you inadvertently cut into the quick.

TEETH

- Use doggie toothpaste when you brush your pet's teeth as it does not have to be rinsed out and people paste has a tendency to upset their stomachs. Toothpaste designed for our pets also come in yummy flavors like beef, chicken, and peanut butter. This makes my gang look forward to teeth-cleaning time.
- You can use a regular toothbrush or you can purchase a finger toothbrush to help you teach your dog to allow you to brush their teeth.

The Name Game

Dogs love games, and so do we! The Name Game helps to reinforce name recognition and recall, but it can also be a lot of fun. This game teaches your puppy that answering to his name is not only exciting but very rewarding.



As a training technique, the Name Game is important even if your dog recognizes its name already. The true purpose of this exercise is to let your pup know that when he hears his name something good happens. When you call Sparky, he will be not only be willing but also happy to look at you and respond to you in a positive manner.

HOW TO PLAY

Start out slowly and build up to a challenge...

EASY – Call your pups/dogs name in a happy voice, “Sparky!” If Sparky even glances in your direction click or say, “Good Sparky!” Then give him a treat. You can also toss treats if he is further away from you. Next, wait for your dog to look away from you. Call his name in your happy voice. Say nothing but his name. When he turns towards you, click and treat or praise and treat!

TIP: If your pup does not know his name or respond at all to your tone of voice try adding a kissy noise or some other ridiculous sound to get him to turn toward you. Do not add other words. You want him to respond to his name.

TIP: If all else fails drop down to dog level and call your dog’s name, pat the floor. Praise and treat when your dog looks at you.

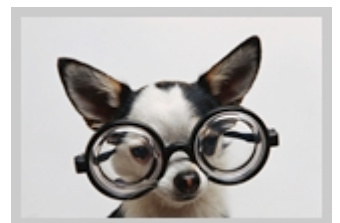
MEDIUM – Practice this exercise any time you are with your pup/dog.. This can be when you are washing dishes, watching TV, working in your flowerbeds or just watching a sunset. Wait for your dog to be distracted, call his name and when he responds, immediately praise in a happy voice! If you happen to have a treat or his favorite toy you may give that to him as well. The better the reward, the more likely he will be to repeat the behavior.

HARD – Call your dog from another room. You can even play Hide and Seek with your dog!

VERY IMPORTANT TIP: NEVER CORRUPT YOUR DOGS NAME

- Never use your dog's name in a negative manner.
 - Never use your dog's name to correct him. He must only associate it with the best things.
 - Never call your pup to you to correct a problem. Go to him and take care of the problem in a fair manner.
 - Looking at you or running toward you when his name is called should always be rewarded.
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Watch me game



Dogs love games, and so do we! The Watch Me Game helps to teach your dog to focus on you. All training activities depend on having your dog's attention. If your friend is not paying attention, he will learn nothing.

HOW TO PLAY

- Place a small, soft treat between your thumb and middle finger. This will leave your index finger free so that you can actually point it toward your eyes.
- Hold the treat towards your dog nose. Let him sniff the treat.
- Have your index finger out and raise it towards your eyes. Actually point at your eyes. Your pups nose will follow the treat. What pup/dog could resist a yummy smelling goodie?
- When your pup makes eye contact, immediately click and treat or praise and treat.. Increase the length of time by 1-2 seconds each time.

You can increase the challenge by lengthening the amount of time your dog must stay focused before receiving the treat. Practice this often and make sure your making this rewarding for your best friend. This is one of the most important exercises that you and your dog can master.

Puppy ping-pong game

Here is another example of using a game to reinforce desired behaviors. In this case, we want to teach your dog that it is always good and fun to come when called. This game works best if you have a hallway in your home.

Even a small one can work. If you do not have a hallway then go to an enclosed room and have everyone sit in a large circle.



HOW TO PLAY

- Draft a team of two or more human participants. This game works best with multiple humans.
- Each human player should be well armed with rewards for your dog, including favorite dog treats, toys and a clicker (if you use one).
- If you are playing in a hallway, situate one person at each end.
- Have each person take turns calling the dog to them. Start by calling the dog's name in a happy, excited voice. "Sparky! Hurry, hurry, hurry! Let's go!" When he comes running to you say, "Good dog! Good Come!"
- Give the dog a treat when he goes to a player on command.

After your dog is reliably returning to you, take him outside to an enclosed area and play the game with more distractions. The more you do this and the better the reward, the more likely your puppy will return to you no matter what the distraction.

Hide-n-Seek Game

Hide-N-Seek is a more advanced game that reinforces name recognition and recall. Play this game often and soon your dog will seek you out every time you call. At that point you can add the word "come" when you call him.



HOW TO PLAY

1. Provide every player with your dog's favorite treats, toys and a clicker (if you use one).
2. Have one person sit in a place out of sight, holding your dog so that he cannot see you.
3. Hide in another room and call your dog by name. Do not use the word "come" until you are sure that he is going to come running. You should start by calling your dog's name in a happy, excited voice. "Sparky! Hurry, hurry, hurry! Let's go!" When he comes running to you say, "Good puppy! Good Come!" At this point you can praise using the word come as Sparky is already rushing towards you.
4. Incorporate whistling, clapping, snapping your fingers, or anything else that gets your dog excited and causes him to come running to you.
5. If you have a helper, he should "hide" and then call the dog in the same manner.

This game can be played with only one person by waiting for Sparky to get distracted and start to wander off. Just jump behind a doorway or into a closet and use the same technique described above.

IMPORTANT TIP: The more you yell "COME, COME, COME!" at your dog the less likely it is that he will come the first time you call him. Every time you use the word and furry friend does not return to you are setting back your training. This teaches your dog that he does not need to come when you first call him. He will assume that he does not have to return to you until he's ready. Instead of yelling "COME" at your dog, try other words and sounds to encourage him to return to you.

If your dog struggles with Hide-N-Seek, you can start with [The Name Game](#) and [Puppy Ping-Pong](#).

Buyer's guide to pet ids

Keeping proper identification on your pet greatly increases the chance of finding your furry friend when lost. According to the American Humane Society only about 17% of dogs and 2% of cats ever find their way back from shelters to their original owners.



There are several simple ways to improve the odds finding your pet if it ever gets lost.

1. Keep a up to date ID tag on your pet at all times.
2. Micro-chip your dog to insure that if it is turned into any shelter there is a clear way to contact you.
3. Register your pet in your city or county.

Several new services are springing up, as well.

The [Virtual Leash](#) service offered by Dog Tag Art creates a web page for your pet that includes unlimited emergency contacts that can be instantly notified when someone has found your lost pet. Users can contact you via phone, email, Twitter or text message. This service costs \$1 per month, but you must purchase one of their tags for about \$15. Your pet's unique web address is printed on the tag, and it is very simple to keep your contact info current.

There are approximately 9.6 million pets euthanized every year

because their owners cannot be located.