



## **General Pet Advice Pamphlet Table of Contents**

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# Selecting the Right Pet for Your Kids and Making the Introduction

**F**OR MANY KIDS, THE FAMILY PET IS their best friend—a companion who not only provides unconditional love, but also teaches them about friendship, responsibility, loyalty, and empathy. While most family pets are cats and dogs, other animals may also be appropriate for children. Rabbits, hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, small birds, and fish can make great family pets, for instance, as long as they receive the specialized care they need.

The key to creating a true “family pet”—one who is gentle, loyal, and loving to both animals and people—is to treat the animal as a beloved family member and to provide the training and care he deserves. It’s not enough to get a pet “for the kids.” A pet is not a temporary playmate for children, but a lifelong family member who depends on the entire family, especially adults.

## How Old Should My Child Be before We Get a Pet?

Although many experts recommend a child be at least six years old before a pet is brought into the family, you are the best judge of your child’s maturity. At the very least, your child should exhibit self-control and understand (and obey) the word “no.” If you think your child is ready for a pet, first introduce her to friends’ well-behaved pets so you can observe your child’s behavior around them.

## Should We Get a Young Animal or an Older One?

Many families with young children choose a kitten or puppy, believing these pets are safer, easier to train, and more adaptable than older, larger pets. But this isn’t always true. Because puppies and kittens are fragile, require extra time and care, and are prone to play-related scratching and biting, they may not be appropriate for a household with young children. Adopting a friendly, calm, adult animal who has a known history of getting along with young children may be the best choice for your family. Before making a decision, talk with animal experts

such as veterinarians, animal trainers, and animal shelter adoption counselors who can help you select the right animal for your family.

## What Kind of Dog Is Best with Kids?

As a parent, you want your child to be safe around your dog. You want to know which breeds are good with children and which aren’t. The truth is, all dogs have the potential to bite, and a dog’s breed is only one of many factors that affect temperament and behavior. The best dogs for kids are those who receive proper socialization, humane training, exercise, and attention; who are given adequate food, water, shelter, and veterinary care; who are sterilized; and who are safely confined.

## How Should My Child Interact with Pets?

To protect both your child and your pet, it’s critical that an adult supervise all pet-child interactions. It’s also important to help your child see the world through your pet’s eyes. Ask your child how she would feel if someone poked at her eyes or pulled her ears. Explain that even the most docile pet has limits, and that all animals must be treated with caution and respect. Help your child understand that:

- Pets need space and may not always welcome human attention, especially when eating, playing with their toys, or resting.

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- Pets may become upset by too much petting or stimulation. Teach your child to heed warning signs (such as hissing, lip curling, retreating, and growling) that indicate her animal friend wants to be left alone.
- Other people's pets may feel and display discomfort if your child touches or even approaches them. Tell your child to get permission from an adult before touching another pet. Explain how some pets may feel threatened when stared at, cornered, or hugged.
- Animals in pain may lash out or bite anyone who tries to touch them. Teach your child to leave an injured pet alone and to notify an adult immediately.
- Some dogs get excited and may even become dangerous when children scream and run. Teach your child appropriate behaviors around dogs.
- Dogs contained in yards or cars may try to protect their territory if approached. Teach your child not to tease or get close to them.
- Dogs may become overly excited and dominant during games such as tug-of-war or wrestling, possibly injuring a child in the process. Teach your child not to play such games with dogs and to instead play fetch with a ball or Frisbee®.

### How Can I Help My Pet Feel Safe?

Pets, like children, need time to adjust to new surroundings and circumstances, and need opportunities for downtime. Provide pets with a place of their own where they can retreat from children. Don't put your pets in situations where they feel threatened. For example, dogs left alone in yards can be accidentally or intentionally teased by neighborhood children. What's more, pets live longer, healthier, and safer lives when kept indoors with the family.

### How Can My Kid Help Care for a Pet?

Allowing children to help care for a pet teaches responsibility and instills a feeling of competency and accomplishment. Choose tasks appropriate for the age of your child. Even young children can be involved in some aspect of caring for an animal friend—selecting a new toy or collar, assisting with grooming, or carrying a food can.

### How Can I Teach My Kids to Take Good Care of Pets?

The best way to teach your children how to be responsible pet caregivers is to be one yourself. This should start before you even get a pet—make sure you have realistic expectations about pet ownership. And take steps to select the right animal for your family at the right time.

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As soon as you bring a pet into your family, set up and enforce rules regarding proper pet care. For example, tell your children not to pull the animal's tail, ears, or other body parts, and insist that they never tease, hit, or chase the pet. Teach children how to properly pick up, hold, and pet the animal. These simple lessons are essential to helping kids become responsible caretakers.

Although certain pet-care activities must be handled by adults, you can still include your children by explaining what you're doing and why. For example, when you take your pet to the veterinarian to be spayed or neutered, explain to your child how the operation not only reduces pet overpopulation but can also make your pet healthier, calmer, and more affectionate.

Involve your children in pet-training activities, which not only make your pet a more well-mannered family member, but also teach your child humane treatment and effective communication.

Ultimately, your children will learn how to treat animals—and people—by watching how you treat the family pet. They'll study how you feed, pet, and exercise your companion animal. And they'll pay close attention to how you react when a pet scratches the furniture, barks excessively, or soils in the house. Frustrating as these problems are, "getting rid of" the pet isn't just unfair to the pet and your children, it also sends the wrong message about commitment, trust, and responsibility. When faced with pet problems, get to the root of the problem. Often a veterinarian, animal shelter professional, or dog trainer can help you resolve pet issues so you can keep the whole family together.

### For More Information

Below are some books to help you choose a pet for your family. Please note that, except for its own materials, The Humane Society of the United States is not affiliated with any of these references and their inclusion here does not represent an endorsement.

Benjamin, Carol Lea. 1988. *Dog Training for Kids*. John Wiley & Sons.

Christensen, Wendy, and the staff of The HSUS. 2002. *The Humane Society of the United States Complete Guide to Cat Care*. St. Martin's Press.

Lane, Marion S., and the staff of The HSUS. 2001. *The Humane Society of the United States Complete Guide to Dog Care*. Little, Brown, & Company.

Rosenthal, Lisa. 1999. *A Dog's Best Friend: An Activity Book for Kids and Their Dogs*. Chicago Review Press.

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# Removing Pet Stains and Odors

**YOU KNOW HOW IT GOES:** The minute you turn your back, your pet decides that your new carpet is the perfect place to relieve himself. You clean and clean, but you can't get rid of that smell. What can you do?

Well, for starters, you need to find which areas are soiled and then retrain your pet to avoid eliminating in those areas. And to do that, you'll have to clean those areas, and clean them well. Here are the steps you'll need to take:

- Find all soiled areas using your nose and eyes. A black-light bulb will usually show even old urine stains. Turn out all lights in the room, use the black light to identify soiled areas, and lightly outline the areas with chalk. Black lights can be purchased at home supply stores.
  - Clean the soiled areas appropriately to remove the odors.
  - Rule out medical causes for the behavior by visiting your veterinarian.
  - Figure out why your pet is urinating or defecating in inappropriate areas. (For help, see our tips sheets "Solving Litter Box Problems," "Housetraining Your Puppy," and "Reducing Urine-Marking Behavior in Dogs and Cats." These tips sheets can be found at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org).)
  - Make the areas unattractive or unavailable. (For help, see our tip sheets on dog aversives and cat aversives. These tips sheets can be found at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org).)
  - Make the appropriate "bathroom" area attractive. (For help, see our tips sheets "Positive Reinforcement: Training Your Dog (or Cat!) with Treats and Praise," "Housetraining Your Puppy," and "Solving Litter Box Problems." These tips sheets can be found at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org).)
- Teach your pet the appropriate place to eliminate by using positive reinforcement techniques.
  - To be successful, you need to follow all these steps. If you fail to completely clean the area, your retraining efforts will be useless. As long as your pet can smell his personal scent, he'll continue to return to the "accident zone." Even if you can't smell traces of urine, your pet can. Your most important chore is to remove (neutralize) that odor with the following steps.

## To Clean Washable Items

Machine wash as usual, adding a one-pound box of baking soda to your regular detergent. It's best to air dry these items if possible.

If you can still see the stain or smell the urine, machine wash the item again and add an enzymatic cleaner (available at pet supply stores) that breaks down pet-waste odors. Be sure to follow the directions carefully.

If your pet urinates or defecates on the sheets or blankets on a bed, cover the bed with a vinyl, flannel-backed tablecloth when you begin the retraining period. It's machine washable, inexpensive, and unattractive to your pet.

## To Clean Carpeted Areas and Upholstery

For new stains, those that are still wet, soak up as much of the urine as possible with a combination of newspaper and paper towels. The more fresh urine you can remove before it dries, especially from carpet, the easier it will be to

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remove the odor. Place a thick layer of paper towels on the wet spot and cover that with a thick layer of newspaper. If possible, put newspaper under the soiled area as well. Stand on this padding for about a minute. Remove the padding and repeat the process until the area is barely damp.

If possible, put the fresh, urine-soaked paper towel in the area where it belongs—your cat's litter box or your dog's designated outdoor "bathroom area." This will help remind your pet that eliminating isn't a "bad" behavior as long as it's done in the right place.

Rinse the "accident zone" thoroughly with clean, cool water. After rinsing, remove as much of the water as possible by blotting or by using a "wet vac."

### **For Stains That Have Already Set**

To remove all traces of heavy stains in carpeting, consider renting an extractor or wet vac from a local hardware store. This machine operates much like a vacuum cleaner and is efficient and economical. Extracting/wet vac machines do the best job of forcing clean water through your carpet and then forcing the dirty water back out again. When using these machines or cleaners, be sure to follow the instructions carefully. Don't use any chemicals with these machines; they work much more effectively with plain water.

Once the area is really clean, use a high-quality pet odor neutralizer available at pet supply stores. Be sure to read and follow the cleaner's directions for use, including testing the cleaner on a small, hidden portion of fabric first to be sure it doesn't stain.

If the area still looks stained after it's completely dry from extracting and neutralizing, try any good carpet stain remover.

Avoid using steam cleaners to clean urine odors from carpet or upholstery. The heat will permanently set the stain and the odor by bonding the protein into any man-made fibers.

Avoid using cleaning chemicals, especially those with strong odors such as ammonia or vinegar. From your pet's perspective, these don't effectively eliminate or cover the

urine odor and may actually encourage your pet to reinforce the urine scent mark in that area.

If you've previously used cleaners or chemicals of any kind on the area, then neutralizing cleaners won't be effective until you've rinsed every trace of the old cleaner from the carpet. Even if you haven't used chemicals recently, any trace of a non-protein-based substance will weaken the effect of the enzymatic cleaner. The cleaner will use up its "energy" on the old cleaners instead of on the protein stains you want removed.

If urine has soaked down into the padding underneath your carpet, your job will be more difficult. In some cases, you may need to take the drastic step of removing and replacing that portion of the carpet and padding.

### **To Clean Floors and Walls**

If the wood on your furniture, walls, baseboard, or floor is discolored, the varnish or paint has reacted to the acid in the urine. You may need to remove and replace the layer of varnish or paint. If you do so, make sure the new product is safe for pets. Employees at your local hardware or home improvement store can help you identify and match your needs with appropriate removers and replacements. Washable enamel paints and some washable wallpapers may respond favorably to enzymatic cleaners. Read the instructions carefully before using these products and test them in an invisible area.

### **Retrain Your Pet**

Finally, in conjunction with cleaning, be sure to teach your pet where you want him to eliminate. To do this, make the "accident zone" unattractive and the appropriate "bathroom" area attractive, and see our related tip sheets at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org). The retraining period may take a week or more. Remember, it took time to build the bad habit, and it will take time to replace that habit with a new, more acceptable behavior. Treat your pet with patience and give him lots of encouragement!

### **Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)**

- **Housetraining Your Puppy**
- **Positive Reinforcement: Training Your Dog or Cat with Treats and Praise**
- **Reducing Urine-Marking Behavior in Dogs and Cats**
- **Solving Litter Box Problems**
- **Using Aversives to Modify Your Cat's Behavior**
- **Using Aversives to Modify Your Dog's Behavior**

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# Coping with Allergies

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**B** *EING A PET OWNER IS NEVER EASY.* While pets bring us joy and companionship on a daily basis, they also require training, veterinary care, time, love, attention, and even tolerance. Tolerance is especially necessary when a pet owner is allergic to his or her companion animal.

Studies show that approximately 15 percent of the population is allergic to dogs or cats. An estimated one-third of Americans who are allergic to cats (about two million people) live with at least one cat in their household anyway. In a study of 341 adults who were allergic to cats or dogs and had been advised by their physicians to give up their pets, only one out of five did. What's more, 122 of them got another pet after a previous one had died. It's clear the benefits of pet companionship outweigh the drawbacks of pet allergies for many owners. Living comfortably with a companion animal despite being allergic to him requires a good understanding of the allergic condition and an adherence to a few rules.

## Basics

All cats and dogs are allergenic (allergy-causing) to people who are allergic to animals. Cats tend to be more allergenic than dogs for allergic people, although some people are more sensitive to dogs than cats. Contrary to popular belief, there are no "non-allergenic" breeds of dogs or cats; even hairless breeds may be highly allergenic.

Dogs with soft, constantly growing hair—poodles or bichon frises, for example—may be less irritating to some individuals, although this may be because they are

bathed and groomed more frequently. One dog or cat of a particular breed may be more irritating to an individual allergy sufferer than another animal of that same breed.

What is the source of irritation to pet-allergic humans? Glands in the animal's skin secrete tiny allergy-triggering proteins, called allergens, that linger in the animal's fur but also float easily in the air. Allergens are present in the animal's saliva and urine, too, and may become airborne when saliva dries on the fur. The severity of reaction to these allergens varies from one person to the next, ranging from mild sniffing and sneezing to life-threatening asthma, and can be complicated by simultaneous allergies to other irritants in the environment.

## Solutions

If your or a family member's allergies are simply miserable, but not life-threatening, take these steps to reduce the symptoms.

- Create an "allergy-free" zone in the home—preferably the bedroom—and strictly prohibit the pet's access to it. Use a high-efficiency HEPA air cleaner (available at almost any home and garden store or discount

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department store) in the bedroom. Consider using impermeable covers for the mattress and pillows because allergen particles brought into the room on clothes and other objects can accumulate in them.

- Use HEPA air cleaners throughout the rest of the home, and avoid dust-and-dander-catching furnishings such as cloth curtains and blinds and carpeted floors. Clean frequently and thoroughly to remove dust and dander, washing articles such as couch covers and pillows, curtains, and pet beds. Use a “microfilter” bag in the vacuum cleaner to effectively catch all the allergens.
- Bathing your pet on a weekly basis can reduce the level of allergens on fur by as much as 84 percent. Although products are available that claim to reduce pet allergens when sprayed on the animal’s fur, studies show they are less effective than a weekly bath. Even cats can become accustomed to being bathed; check with your veterinarian’s staff or a good book on pet care for directions about how to do this properly, and use whatever shampoo your veterinarian recommends.
- Don’t be quick to blame the family pet for allergies. Ask your allergist to specifically test for allergies to pet dander, rather than making an assumption. And understand that allergies are cumulative. Many allergy sufferers are sensitive to more than one allergen. So if you’re allergic to dust, insecticides, pollen, cigarette smoke, and cat dander, you’ll need to reduce the overall allergen level in your environment by concentrating on all of the causes, not just the pet allergy. For example, you may need to step up measures to remove cat dander from your home and carefully avoid cigarette smoke during spring, when it’s difficult to avoid exposure to pollen.

- Immunotherapy (allergy shots) can improve symptoms but cannot eliminate them entirely. It works by gradually desensitizing a person’s immune system to the pet allergens. Allergy-causing proteins are injected under the person’s skin, triggering the body to produce antibodies (protective proteins) which block the pet allergen from causing a reaction. Patients are usually given one dose per week for a few weeks to months (depending on the severity of the allergy) and then can often manage with one injection per month.
- Additional treatments for allergies to pets are symptomatic, including steroidal and antihistamine nose sprays and antihistamine pills. For asthma, multiple medications, sprays, and inhalers are available. It is important to find an allergist who understands your commitment to living with your pet. A combination of approaches—medical control of symptoms, good housecleaning methods, and immunotherapy—is most likely to succeed in allowing an allergic person to live with pets.

Of course, if you do not currently have a pet and are considering one and know you are pet-allergic, be sure to consider carefully whether you can live with the allergy before you bring a new pet home. Except in the case of children, who sometimes outgrow allergies, few allergy sufferers become accustomed to pets to whom they are allergic. Too many allergic owners obtain pets without thinking through the difficulties of living with them. And too often, they end up relinquishing pets, a decision that is difficult for the owner and can be life-threatening for the pet.

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# Positive Reinforcement

## Training Your Dog (or Cat!) with Treats and Praise

**W**E ALL LIKE TO BE PRAISED rather than punished. The same is true for your pet, and that's the theory behind positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement means giving your pet something pleasant or rewarding immediately after she does something you want her to do. Because your praise or reward makes her more likely to repeat that behavior in the future, it is one of your most powerful tools for shaping or changing your pet's behavior.

Correct timing is essential when using positive reinforcement. The reward must occur immediately—within seconds—or your pet may not associate it with the proper action. For example, if you have your dog “sit” but reward her after she’s already stood back up, she’ll think she’s being rewarded for standing up.

Consistency is also essential. Everyone in the family should use the same commands. It might help to post these where everyone can become familiar with them. The most commonly used commands for dogs are:

- “Sit”
- “Stay”
- “Down” (which means “lie down”)
- “Off” (which means “get off of me” or “get off the furniture”)
- “Stand”
- “Come”
- “Heel” (or “let’s go” or “with me”)
- “Leave it”
- “Settle”
- “Watch me”

Consistency means always rewarding the desired behavior and never rewarding undesired behavior.

### Using Positive Reinforcement

For your pet, positive reinforcement may include food treats, praise, petting, or a favorite toy or game. Food treats work especially well for training your dog. A treat should be enticing and irresistible to your pet. It should be a very small, soft piece of food, so that she will immediately gulp it down and look to you for more. If you give her something she has to chew or that breaks into bits and falls on the floor, she’ll be looking around the floor, not at you. Small pieces of soft commercial treats, hot dogs, cheese, or cooked chicken or beef have all proven successful. Experiment to see what works best for your pet. You can carry the treats in a pocket or fanny pack. Each time you use a food reward, you should couple it with a verbal reward (praise). Say something like, “Good dog,” in a positive, happy tone of voice.

Some pets may not be interested in food treats. For those pets, the reward could be in the form of a toy or brief play.

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When your pet is learning a new behavior, she should be rewarded every time she does the behavior, which means continuous reinforcement. It may be necessary to use a technique called “shaping” with your pet, which means reinforcing something close to the desired response and then gradually requiring more from your dog before she gets the treat. For example, if you’re teaching your dog to “shake hands,” you may initially reward her for lifting her paw off the ground, then for lifting it higher, then for touching your hand, then for letting you hold her paw, and finally, for actually “shaking hands” with you.

Intermittent reinforcement can be used once your pet has reliably learned the behavior. At first, reward her with the treat three out of every four times she does the behavior. Then, over time, reward her about half the time, then about a third of the time, and so on, until you’re only rewarding her occasionally with the treat. Continue to praise her every time—although once your dog has learned the behavior, your praise can be less effusive, such as a quiet, but positive, “Good dog.” Use a variable schedule of reinforcement so that she doesn’t catch on that she only has to respond every other time. Your pet will soon learn that if she keeps responding, eventually she’ll get what she wants—your praise and an occasional treat.

By understanding reinforcement, you’ll see that you’re not forever bound to carry a pocketful of goodies. Your dog will soon be working for your verbal praise, because she really does want to please you and knows that, occasionally, she’ll get a treat, too. There are many small opportunities to reinforce her behavior. You may have her “sit” before letting her out the door (which helps prevent door-darting), before petting her (which helps prevent jumping up on people), or before feeding her. Give her a pat or a “Good dog” for lying quietly by your feet, or slip a treat into a Kong®-type toy when she’s chewing it instead of your shoe.

## The Pros and Cons of Punishment

Punishment can be verbal, postural, or physical, and it means giving your pet something unpleasant immediately after she does something you don’t want her to do. The punishment makes it less likely that the behavior will occur again. To be

effective, punishment must be delivered while your pet is engaged in the undesirable behavior—in other words, “caught in the act.” If the punishment is delivered too late, even seconds later, your pet will not associate the punishment with the undesired behavior.

Punishment delivered by you may erode your dog’s trust. That’s why punishment is most effective when it does not come directly from you. For example, after your dog acts in an undesirable way, use a shake can, an air horn, or keys—but don’t draw attention to the fact that the noise comes from you. If your dog perceives her “environment,” instead of you, to be delivering the punishment, she’ll be more likely to avoid the behavior even when you’re not around.

In addition, if you’re too late in administering it, punishment will seem unpredictable to your dog. She’s likely to become fearful, distrustful, or aggressive, which will only lead to more behavior problems. What we humans often interpret as “guilty” looks are actually submissive postures by our pets. Animals don’t have a moral sense of right and wrong, but they are adept at associating your presence, and the presence of a mess, with punishment.

If you’ve tried punishment and it hasn’t worked, you should stop using punishment and use only positive reinforcement. And never use physical punishment that involves some level of discomfort or pain, which may cause your pet to bite to defend herself. Holding the neck skin and shaking your dog or performing “alpha rolls” (forcing your dog onto her back and pinning her on the floor) are both likely to result in bites. And punishment might be associated with other stimuli, including people, that are present at the time the punishment occurs. For example, a pet who is punished for getting too close to a small child may become fearful of, or aggressive toward, that child—or toward other children. That’s why physical punishment is not only bad for your pet, it’s also bad for you and others.

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## Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- Nothing in Life Is Free: A Training Technique for Dogs
- Positive Reinforcement—Training Your Cat

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# Reducing Urine-Marking Behavior in Dogs and Cats

**M**UCH LIKE THE MINERS DURING THE GOLD RUSH, dogs and cats are territorial animals. They “stake a claim” to a particular space, area, or object. They let other people and animals know about their claim by marking it using a variety of methods at different levels of intensity. For example, a dog may bark to drive away what he perceives to be intruders in his territory. A cat may mark a valued object by rubbing her head against it.

Some pets may go to the extreme of urinating or defecating to mark a particular area as their own. Urine-marking is not a house soiling problem. Instead, it is considered territorial behavior. Therefore, to resolve the problem, you need to address the underlying reason for your pet’s need to mark his territory in this way. Before this can be done, however, take your pet to the veterinarian to rule out any medical causes for his behavior.

## House Soiling or Urine-Marking: How to Tell the Difference

### Your Pet May Be Urine-Marking If ...

- The problem is primarily urination. Dogs and cats rarely mark with feces.
- The amount of urine is small and is found primarily on vertical surfaces. (Dogs and cats do sometimes mark on horizontal surfaces.) Leg-lifting and spraying are dominant versions of urine-marking, but even if your pet doesn’t assume these postures, he may still be urine-marking.
- Any pet in your home is not spayed or neutered. Intact males and females are both more likely to urine-mark

than are spayed or neutered animals. However, even spayed or neutered animals may mark in response to other intact animals in the home.

- Your pet urinates on new objects in the environment (a shopping bag, a visitor’s purse), on objects that have unfamiliar smells, or on objects that have another animal’s scent.
- Your pet has conflicts with other animals in your home. When there’s instability in the pack hierarchy, a dog may feel a need to establish his dominance by urine-marking his territory. If one cat is intimidating another cat, the bullied cat may express his anxiety by urine-marking.
- Your pet has contact with other animals outside your home. A cat who is allowed outdoors may come home and mark after having an encounter with another cat outside. If your pet sees another animal through a door or window, he may feel a need to mark his territory.
- Your dog marks frequently when you walk him.

### What You Can Do

- Spay or neuter your pet as soon as possible. Spaying or neutering your pet may stop urine-marking altogether. However, if he has been urine-marking for a long time, a pattern may already be established.

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- Resolve conflicts between animals in your home. (For help, see “Canine Rivalry” and “Feline Social Behavior” and “Aggression between Family Cats.”)
- Restrict your pet’s access to doors and windows through which he can observe animals outside. If this isn’t possible, discourage the presence of other animals near your house. (See “Discouraging Free-Roaming Cats.”)
- Keep your cat indoors. He’ll be safer, live longer, and feel less need to mark his territory.
- Clean soiled areas thoroughly. (See “Successful Cleaning to Remove Pet Odors and Stains.”) Don’t use strong-smelling cleaners because they may cause your pet to “over-mark” the spot.
- Make previously soiled areas inaccessible or unattractive. (See “Aversives for Dogs” and “Aversives for Cats.”) If this isn’t possible, try to change the significance of those areas to your pet. Feed, treat, and play with your pet in the areas he is inclined to mark.
- Keep objects likely to cause marking out of reach. Items such as guests’ belongings and new purchases should be placed in a closet or cabinet.
- If your pet is marking in response to a new resident in your home (such as a roommate or spouse), have the new resident make friends with your pet by feeding, grooming, and playing with him. If you have a new baby, make sure good things happen to your pet when the baby is around. (See “Preparing Your Pet for Baby’s Arrival.”)
- **For dogs:** Watch your dog when he is indoors for signs that he is thinking about urinating. When he begins to urinate, interrupt him with a loud noise and take him outside. If he urinates outside, praise him and give him a treat. When you’re unable to watch him, put your dog in confinement (a crate or small room where he has never marked) or tether him to you with a leash.
- **For dogs:** Practice “nothing in life is free” with your dog. (See “Nothing in Life Is Free.”) This is a safe, non-confrontational way to establish your leadership and requires your dog to work for everything he wants from you. Have your dog obey at least one command (such as “sit”) before you pet him, give him dinner, put on his leash, or throw him a toy. Establishing yourself as a strong leader can help stabilize the hierarchy and thus diminish your dog’s need to mark his territory.
- **For cats:** Try to monitor your cat’s movements. If he sniffs in an area he has previously marked, interrupt him with a loud noise or squirt him with water. It’s best if you can do this without him seeing you. That way, he’ll associate the unpleasantness with his intent to mark, rather than with you.

## Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- Aversives for Cats
- Aversives for Dogs
- Canine Rivalry
- Discouraging Roaming Cats
- Feline Social Behavior and Aggression between Family Cats
- Nothing in Life Is Free
- Preparing Your Pet for Baby’s Arrival
- Successful Cleaning to Remove Pet Odors and Stains

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## What Not to Do

Don’t punish your pet after the fact. Punishment administered even a minute after the event is ineffective because your pet won’t understand why he is being punished.

## Pets Aren’t People

Dogs and cats don’t urinate or defecate out of spite or jealousy. If your dog urinates on your baby’s diaper bag, it’s not because he is jealous of, or dislikes, your baby. The unfamiliar scents and sounds of a new baby in the home are simply causing him to reaffirm his claim on his territory. Likewise, if your cat urinates on your new boyfriend’s backpack, it does not reflect his opinion of your taste in men. Instead, he has perceived the presence of an “intruder” and is letting the intruder know that this territory belongs to him.

## Dominance or Anxiety?

Urine-marking is usually associated with dominance behavior. Some pets, though, may mark when they feel anxious or upset. For example, a new baby in the home brings new sounds, smells, and people, as well as changes in routine. Your dog or cat probably isn’t getting as much attention as he was used to getting. All of these changes cause him to feel anxious, which may cause him to mark.

Likewise, a pet who is generally anxious may become more so by the presence of roaming neighborhood animals in your yard or by the introduction of a new cat or dog into your household. If your pet is feeling anxious, you might consider talking to your veterinarian about medications to reduce his anxiety while you try behavior modification techniques.

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BEHAVIOR  
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# Unusual Eating Habits in Dogs and Cats

**IF YOUR PET HAS AN APPETITE FOR** such oddities as socks, rocks, or even feces, chances are you've wondered—and worried—about her unusual eating habits. In this case, your worry may be justified: Not only can your possessions be destroyed or damaged, but objects such as clothing and rocks can produce life-threatening blockages in your pet's intestines.

Eating non-food items has a name: It's called pica. A specific type of pica is stool eating—either the dog's own or that of another animal. It's called coprophagy. Rarely seen in cats, coprophagy is fairly common in dogs, especially those who tend to be highly food-motivated. And although it's not necessarily dangerous to the animal, it probably is unacceptable to you.

## Why Animals Do This

The causes of pica and coprophagy are not known. Many theories have been proposed by various experts, but none has been proven or disproven. One idea is that such behaviors may be attention-seeking behaviors. If engaging in one of these behaviors results in some type of social interaction between the animal and her owner—even a verbal scolding—then the behavior may be reinforced and occur more frequently.

Others think these behaviors may be attempts to obtain a necessary nutrient lacking in the diet, although no nutritional studies have ever substantiated this idea. Pica and coprophagy may also stem from frustration or anxiety. It's even possible that the behaviors begin as play; as the animal investigates and chews on the objects, she eventually begins to eat or ingest them.

Some experts have suggested that coprophagy is carried over from the normal parental behavior of ingesting the waste of young offspring. Others believe that coprophagy occurs more often in animals who live in relatively barren environments, are frequently confined to small areas, or receive limited attention from their owners. It's also possible that dogs learn this behavior from other dogs.

Because pica and coprophagy are not well understood, stopping these behaviors may require assistance from an animal-behavior professional who will work individually with you and your pet.

## Suggested Solutions for Coprophagy

Because the cause of coprophagy isn't known, no techniques or solutions are known to be consistently successful. However, the following techniques may be effective in resolving the problem.

- Treat your pet's food with something that causes her stool to taste bad. A commercial product called 4-BID™ is available through your veterinarian. The same result may be achieved by using the food additive MSG. Based on owners' reports, both of these products work in many cases, but not all. Before using either of these products, consult with your veterinarian.

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- Give your pet's stools a bad taste by sprinkling them directly with cayenne pepper or a commercial product such as Bitter Apple®. For this method to be effective, every stool your pet has access to must be treated so that she learns that eating stools results in something unpleasant. Otherwise, she may discriminate (using scent) which stools have been treated and which have not.
- Keep your dog on a leash any time you take her outside. If you see her about to ingest a stool, interrupt her by clapping your hands, spraying a squirt bottle, or shaking a can (only for pets who aren't afraid of loud noises). Then immediately give her a toy to play with instead, and praise her for taking an interest in the toy.
- Clean your yard daily to minimize your pet's opportunity to eat her stools.
- If your dog eats cat feces from the litter box, install a baby-gate in front of the litter box area. Your cat shouldn't have any trouble jumping over it, but your dog likely won't even make the attempt. Or place the litter box in a closet or room where the door can be wedged slightly open from both sides so that your cat has access but your dog doesn't. Think twice before setting up a booby trap to stop your dog from eating cat feces from a litter box: If it frightens your dog, it's likely to frighten your cat, too.
- Prevent your pet's access to these items.
- If your pet is highly food-oriented, change her diet to a low-calorie or high-fiber diet. This may allow her to eat more food, more often, which may decrease the behavior. Check with your veterinarian before changing your pet's diet.
- If you suspect that anxiety or frustration is the reason for your animal's pica habit, change the behavior by using behavior modification techniques.
- If you catch your pet ingesting items and believe it is to get attention, startle your pet with a loud noise or a spray of water. If possible, avoid letting her know that the startling noise or spray comes from you, and be sure to praise her when she leaves the items alone. You may want to give her something acceptable to eat or chew. Try to set aside 10–15 minutes twice a day to spend with your pet so that she doesn't need to resort to pica to get your attention.
- If you think your pet's pica habit is play behavior, then keep plenty of toys around for her to play with. Cats especially like to play with string, rubber bands, and tinsel, and ultimately ingest them. Keep these items out of reach and provide a selection of appropriate toys. (See "Cat Toys and How to Use Them" and "Dog Toys and How to Use Them.")

### Suggested Solutions for Pica

Pica can be a serious problem because items such as rubber bands, socks, rocks, and string can severely damage or block an animal's intestines. In some instances, the items must be surgically removed. Because pica can be potentially life-threatening, consult both your veterinarian and an animal-behavior professional for help. Here are some other suggestions.

- Make the objects your pet is eating taste unpleasant by applying cayenne pepper, Bitter Apple®, or some other aversive. (For more information on using aversives, see "Using Aversives to Modify Your Cat's Behavior" and "Using Aversives to Modify Your Dog's Behavior.")

### Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- [Cat Toys and How to Use Them](#)
- [Dog Toys and How to Use Them](#)
- [Using Aversives to Modify Your Cat's Behavior](#)
- [Using Aversives to Modify Your Dog's Behavior](#)

### What Doesn't Work:

- Interactive punishment (punishment that comes directly from you, such as verbal scolding) is usually not effective because it may be interpreted by your pet as attention. What's more, many animals learn to refrain from the problem behavior when their owner is present, yet still engage in the behavior when their owner is absent.
- Punishment after the fact is *never* helpful. Animals don't understand that they're being punished for something they did hours or even minutes before. This approach won't resolve the problem and is likely to produce either fearful or aggressive responses from your pet.

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BEHAVIOR  
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# Preparing Pets for a New Baby

**C**ONGRATULATIONS, YOU'RE EXPECTING A BABY! If your family already includes a pet, you'll need to help that first "baby" adjust to the new one you'll soon bring home. You can help your pet cope with this big change in much the same way parents help children understand that a new brother or sister will be joining the family. By following the tips below, you can ease your pet's stress, help her welcome your new baby, and ensure that your pet stays where she belongs—with you and your growing family.

## Can I Keep My Cat?

If you're pregnant, you've probably heard of toxoplasmosis because it can cause serious birth defects. However, toxoplasmosis is a rare disease in the United States and one that can easily be avoided. While the disease-causing parasite can be found in the feces of cats who ingest raw meat, birds, mice, or contaminated soil, toxoplasmosis is more commonly found in uncooked or undercooked meat.

If you're concerned about possible exposure, ask your obstetrician to perform a simple blood test. If the result shows you were exposed to toxoplasmosis during pregnancy, you may be given medication, and your baby may be tested and treated soon after birth. Keep in mind that the odds of contracting toxoplasmosis during pregnancy are extremely low, and even lower for your baby. Being pregnant does not mean you have to give up living with and caring for your beloved cat. Toxoplasmosis is easily avoided by practicing good hygiene and responsible pet care. Just follow these simple steps to reduce the risk:

- Avoid handling or eating uncooked meat.
- Keep your cat safely indoors and away from wildlife.
- Have someone else clean the litter box daily.

- If you must clean the litter box, wear rubber gloves and thoroughly wash your hands afterward.
- Feed cats only commercially prepared cat food.

## How Will My Pet React?

No matter how much you plan ahead, the addition of a new family member may be difficult for your pet. Remember, your dog or cat was your first "baby" and is used to being the center of your attention. So it's understandable that she may experience something akin to sibling rivalry when you introduce a new human baby into your household.

You can minimize this feeling by working with her *before* you bring home your baby. For example, because your new baby will demand a lot of your time and energy, gradually accustom your pet to spending less time with you. Drastically decreasing attention and frequently scolding, ignoring, or isolating your pet *after* the baby comes home will likely make your pet feel stressed. If your pet is particularly attached to the mother-to-be, another family member should develop a closer relationship with the animal. That way, your pet can still feel loved and provided for while mom is busy with the baby.

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## How Can I Prepare My Pet?

Below are several suggestions to make introducing your pet and baby safer and smoother for all. Be sure to carry out these changes months before the baby's arrival to best prepare your pet.

- Take your pet to the veterinarian for a routine health exam and necessary vaccinations.
- Spay or neuter your pet. Not only do sterilized pets typically have fewer health problems associated with their reproductive systems, but they are also calmer and less likely to bite.
- Consult with a veterinarian and pediatrician if the thought of your newborn interacting with the family pet makes you uncomfortable. By working with these experts before your baby is born, you can resolve problems early and put your mind at ease.
- Address any pet training and behavior problems. If your pet exhibits fear and anxiety, now is the time to get help from an animal behavior specialist.
- If your pet's behavior includes gentle nibbling, pouncing, or swatting at you and others, redirect that behavior to appropriate objects.
- Get your pet used to nail trims.
- Train your pet to remain calmly on the floor beside you until you invite him on your lap, which will soon cradle a newborn.
- Consider enrolling in a training class with your dog, and practice training techniques. Training allows you to safely and humanely control your dog's behavior and enhances the bond between you and your pet.
- Encourage friends with infants to visit your home to accustom your pet to babies. Supervise all pet and infant interactions.
- Accustom your pet to baby-related noises months before the baby is expected. For example, play recordings of a baby crying, turn on the mechanical infant swing, and use the rocking chair. Make these positive experiences for your pet by offering a treat or playtime.
- To discourage your pet from jumping on the baby's crib and changing table, apply double-sided carpet tape to the furniture.

- If the baby's room will be off-limits to your pet, install a sturdy barrier such as a removable gate (available at pet or baby supply stores) or, for jumpers, even a screen door. Because these barriers still allow your pet to see and hear what's happening in the room, he'll feel less isolated from the family and more comfortable with the new baby noises.
- Use a baby doll to help your pet get used to the real thing. Carry around a swaddled baby doll, take the doll in the stroller when you walk your dog, and use the doll to get your pet used to routine baby activities, such as bathing and diaper changing.
- Talk to your pet about the baby, using the baby's name if you've selected one.
- Sprinkle baby powder or baby oil on your skin so your pet becomes familiar with the new smells.
- Finally, plan ahead to make sure your pet gets proper care while you're at the birthing center.

## What Do We Do after Our Baby Is Born?

Welcoming a new baby is exciting for your family. Remember when you first brought home your dog or cat? But before you bring your baby home from the hospital, have your partner or friend take home something with the baby's scent (such as a blanket) for your pet to investigate.

When you return from the hospital, your pet may be eager to greet you and receive your attention. Have someone else take the baby into another room while you give your pet a warm, but calm, welcome. Keep some treats handy so you can distract your pet.

After the initial greeting, you can bring your pet with you to sit next to the baby; reward your pet with treats for appropriate behavior. Remember, you want your pet to view associating with the baby as a positive experience. To prevent anxiety or injury, never force your pet to get near the baby, and always supervise any interaction.

Life will no doubt be hectic caring for your new baby, but try to maintain regular routines as much as possible to help your pet adjust. And be sure to spend one-on-one quality time with your pet each day—it may help relax you, too. With proper training, supervision, and adjustments, you, your new baby, and your pet should be able to live together safely and happily as one (now larger) family.

## Related topics at [www.petsforlife.org](http://www.petsforlife.org)

- [Your Pregnancy and Your Cat](#)

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BEHAVIOR  
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# Caring for Pets When You're Ill

**W**HEN YOU LOSE MUCH OF YOUR STRENGTH OR MOBILITY, simple tasks like walking a dog or cleaning a cat's litter box can seem overwhelming. And if your immune system is weakened by HIV/AIDS, cancer, kidney or liver disease, old age, or pregnancy, you must take extra precautions to avoid disease-causing agents that any human or animal—including pets—can transmit.

Yet living with an illness or immunocompromising condition doesn't mean you have to live without your beloved pet. After all, research indicates that companion animals enhance immune functioning by decreasing stress levels and increasing levels of self-confidence and self-esteem. Pets provide us with a source of affection, support, and acceptance; enable us to feel needed and valued; and ease the pain, sorrow, and loneliness often experienced during illness.

For someone with a serious medical condition, the psychological and physical benefits of pet caregiving usually outweigh the risk of acquiring an illness from the pet—provided that proper precautions are followed.

## How Could Pets Increase My Risk?

Although pets can do wonders for our physical and mental well-being, they can get and transmit disease. To minimize the risk your pet poses to your health, you must minimize the risks to your pet's health. The key is to understand how best to care for your pet and to work with your veterinarian to keep your pet healthy.

Certain pets are more challenging than others. For example, many exotic animals, such as reptiles, are more likely than dogs and cats to transmit certain

diseases, requiring owners to take extra precautions. (The HSUS, in fact, recommends that exotic animals *not* be kept as pets.) Likewise, puppies and kittens may be more susceptible to disease and prone to play-oriented nipping and scratching. And new pets may come with incomplete or unknown medical histories. This does not mean that you have to give up your playful puppy or can't get a new pet. It simply means that you need to rely on a veterinarian or animal shelter adoption counselor to advise you on appropriate pet selection and care.

No pet is guaranteed to be or remain disease-free. But your veterinarian can suggest preventive guidelines to keep your pet healthy, test your pet for parasites and other problems, and provide medical care to help a sick pet recover. And you can minimize risks for you and your pet by keeping your animal indoors, making sure he's well fed and groomed, and taking him to the veterinarian for vaccinations and annual checkups.

## What Can I Do to Protect Myself?

If you have a compromised immune system, it will help to follow these precautions:

- Wash your hands after handling a pet.

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- Wear rubber gloves when changing a litter box or cleaning up after a pet, and wash your hands afterwards.
- Keep your pet's nails short to minimize scratches.
- Follow your veterinarian's advice on keeping your pet free of fleas and ticks.
- Keep your pet indoors and use a leash outdoors to prevent your pet from hunting, scavenging, fighting, and engaging in other activities that expose him to other animals and disease.
- Feed your pet commercial pet food.
- Keep your pet's living and feeding areas clean.
- Keep your pet's vaccinations up to date.
- Seek veterinary care immediately for a sick pet.

## How Can I Meet My Pet's Basic Needs?

If your condition makes everyday pet care too challenging, you'll need to find outside assistance to make sure your pet gets the food, grooming, exercise, and general care he needs. When relatives, friends, and neighbors can't help, a nonprofit pet assistance organization may be able to lend a hand. Typically, these organizations help HIV-infected pet owners by providing everything from emergency foster care and animal transportation to dog walking, pet grooming, and litter box cleaning services.

If you can use this assistance, ask local veterinarians, animal shelters, physicians, health care clinics, social service agencies, veterinary schools, and libraries to refer you to resources in your community.

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