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## **Many families have adopted new pets during the pandemic; here's how to prepare for your cat or dog's best, healthy life**

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**Of all the things** to result from the past year of pandemic-pressured living, perhaps the best has been more time spent with our four-legged companions.

Another bright outcome of that extra homebound time has been more households opting to introduce new furry friends into their homes, either for the first time or as siblings to existing pets.

In the face of many challenges presented throughout 2020, the Spokane Humane Society only saw a 3 percent decrease in adoption numbers for the year, says Executive Director Ed Boks.

"Despite the government shutdown and social distancing and having adoptions by appointment only, we still had a phenomenal year, and the public has been wonderful despite all the hardships," Boks says.

"People are willing to wait in line to come to the shelter, and we're adopting a lot of animals. I think it has to do with people having more time at home to work with the pet they adopt."

Part of the Spokane Humane Society's success can also be attributed to its new partnership with Bark, a Rescue Pub, where guests of the restaurant can schedule time to meet dogs and cats housed there in a connected, on-site area. The 302 pets that met their new owners at Bark account for 13.7 percent of 2020's adoption total, Boks adds.

While bringing home a new puppy, kitten, or adult dog or cat has certainly been a positive distraction for many households this past year, there's also much to consider before, during and after welcoming a new furry family member.

Even those who haven't recently increased the size of their pet posse should also take note that animals may struggle to readjust to being left alone for long periods once a return to work outside the home comes.

**Veterinarian Megan Bauer**, owner and sole practitioner of Latah Creek Animal Hospital in south Spokane, says the practice has definitely noticed 2020's adoption trend.

"We have seen a lot of both new clients and new pets," Bauer says. "I think that is one of the only good things to come out of the pandemic: A lot of dogs and cats have been adopted."

A myriad of questions on how to best care for a new animal companion may loom for these new pet parents, including how to find a veterinarian, picking the right food and much more.

When choosing a veterinarian for a new pet, Bauer says top factors to consider include proximity to your home, as well as a clinic's hours and how that fits with your schedule.

Many clinics in the area also partner with Spokane Humane Society and other nonprofit rescues to offer free wellness checkups for new clients within two weeks of adopting their pet, says Boks.

While most vet clinics currently only offer drop-off appointments due to the pandemic, this is also an option that may otherwise be available, along with Saturday morning appointments, at many clinics.

Another detail pet owners may want to consider is whether a clinic has been certified as a "Fear Free" practice, she says.

Fear Free is an educational course and application of care founded by Marty Becker, a nationally recognized veterinary expert, bestselling author and Washington State University alumnus who practices in Sandpoint. Pet owners can search for certified doctors and clinics, as well as other animal professionals like groomers and trainers, on the program's website, [fearfreepets.com](https://fearfreepets.com).

"It's additional training and certification that we get, considering not just the pet's physical well-being but emotional well-being," Bauer explains. "It's very anxiety inducing to come to the doctor, so it's using pheromones and keeping a calm environment, gentle handling, anti-anxiety meds, and really working with the owner and pet to make sure they have a really calm experience at the vet and it's not scary."

Budgeting for veterinary care and other regular expenses, like food, grooming and other supplies or services, is also something to consider even before meeting your new dog or cat.

Some pet owners may want to look into pet insurance, which can help when an unexpected illness or injury arises. Bauer says a number of her practice's clients use pet insurance from Trupanion. Monthly rates, she says, are typically based on an animal's age, breed, location and what's covered, and can range anywhere from \$40 to more than \$100 a month.

"I think pet insurance is a great thing for people to have," Bauer says. "It's really helpful for those sudden injuries or illnesses that are hard to plan for."

Like human health insurance, she says most plans have a deductible that first needs to be met. Depending on their plan or plan provider, clients also may pay up front for care, and then submit documentation for reimbursement.

If pet insurance doesn't sound like the right option for you, Bauer suggests setting aside a "nest egg" or budgeting monthly for regular expenses.

A few major health-related services she advises people anticipate throughout the life of a pet (beyond spay/neuter surgery when they're young) include routine vaccinations and annual wellness exams, along with periodic dental cleanings (a procedure that requires anesthetization and can cost upward of \$400 to \$600) and blood screenings to look for underlying conditions.

"Something that people don't always think about but is super important is dental cleaning," Bauer says. "That can really improve quality of life and longevity, to make sure they don't have any dental pathology."

Yearly blood panels for pets of any age, Bauer says, can also provide a benchmark for identifying metabolic diseases — diabetes, diseases of the liver, kidney or thyroid, and other infections — as well as other underlying conditions that may be asymptomatic.

"Dogs and cats tend to hide illnesses and that is a great way to make sure nothing is going on, and if you do find something you can treat it before it's life threatening," she says.

Blood panels can range from \$150 to \$300 depending on what's included.

Finally, while there are seemingly endless choices for pet food, Bauer's best advice on how to choose the most nutritious food — and an appropriate amount to feed each day — for your pet at any stage of life is to consult with your veterinarian.

"Talk to your vet before doing internet research," she says.

**Just as important** as making sure your canine and feline friends are healthy from nose to tail is training them to reinforce positive behaviors.

While many adult animals, like those adopted from shelters, and especially senior aged animals, says Boks of the Spokane Humane Society, are often well-mannered and calm, puppies and kittens always require more time invested to instill good behaviors.

Lifelong dog trainer Carol Byrnes, whose family has operated Diamonds in the Ruff training school in Spokane since 1996, has seen an influx of clients with new puppies since the pandemic's onset last spring. One challenge she and her team have faced in meeting that increased demand, however, is working around bans on in-person group classes, especially this winter while outdoor puppy school sessions have been paused.

As a workaround, Diamonds in the Ruff has been hosting Zoom-based classes and one-on-one outdoor sessions with its trainers. While owners wait for in-person classes to resume, however, she says it's important not to let at-home training completely drop off, especially for puppies in the impressionable "teenage" stage.

It's crucial for these young or newly adopted dogs to be regularly socialized. Socialization, she says, doesn't necessarily mean what most people think.

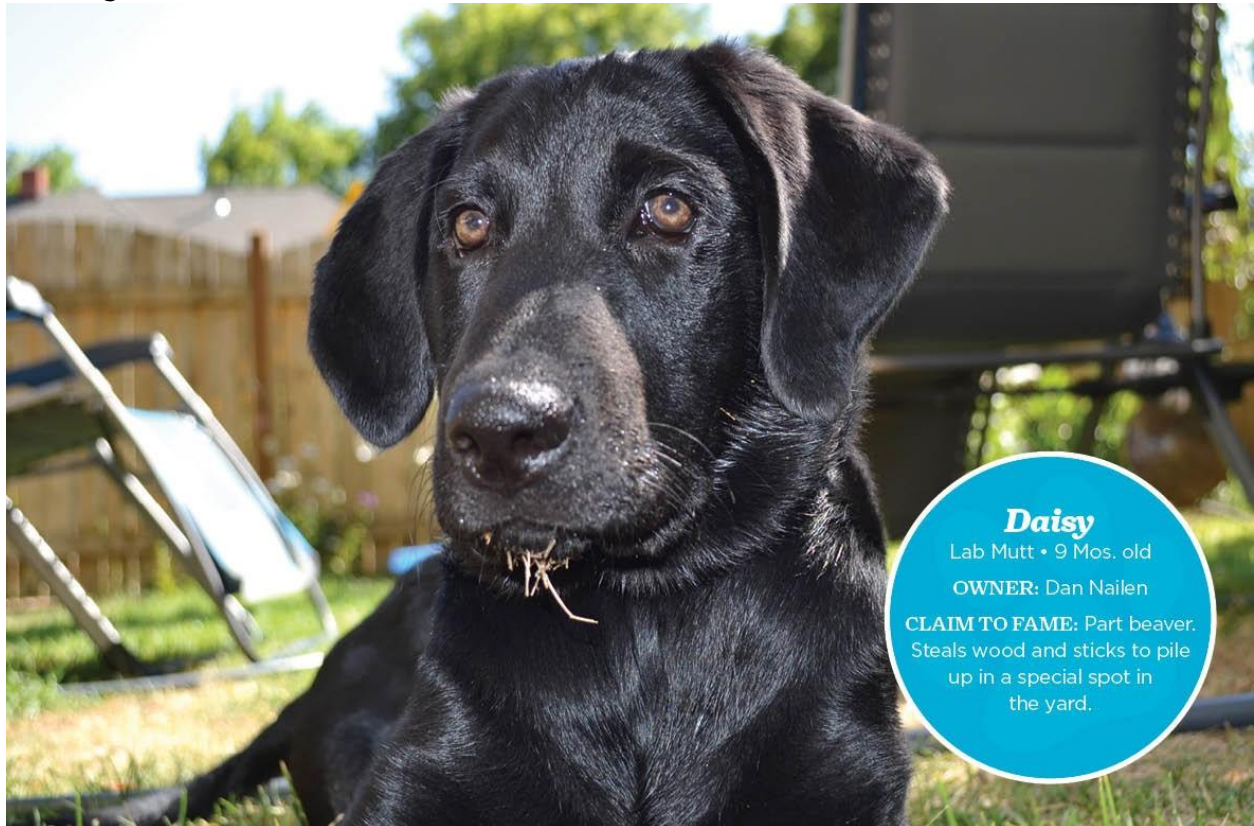
"With socialization, the biggest problem I see is most people think that socialization is about playing with other dogs, and that is the tiniest percentage of what it is," Byrnes says. "Dogs who don't get out of the house and don't see new things and smell new things and sit in the park and watch people walk by and all of that don't have a view of the world, they only have a view of the living room."

In that regard, socialization is about exposure for dogs to all kinds of new environments and stimuli, from walking on grass or concrete, sniffing the breeze, seeing and hearing other people and animals, and much more.

Two other keys to instilling desired behaviors in dogs are starting early and being consistent, Byrnes says.

"Thinking about raising a dog is a lot like raising a child," she says. "You really need to pay attention to what their good habits are going to be. If you don't want them on the couch later, don't let them on the couch now. Changing rules makes things more difficult."

Diamonds in the Ruff's website offers an impressive catalog of links (look for the "Behavior FAQs" page) to free, online resources personally vetted by Byrnes on everything from crate and house training to solutions for common, unwanted behaviors like jumping, begging and licking.



**While the past year's shift** to work-from-home has been a win-win for most pets and their owners, Byrnes says it's also essential for dogs to gradually transition back to being left alone at home for long periods so they're ready when you *do* return to the office (and so your home isn't destroyed the first day back in an act of canine rebellion).

"Crate training is a good idea now, and making it a positive place where they only get a special chew or Kong toy inside the crate for a half-hour daily when you're home," she suggests. "That causes positive experiences with the crate so it's a place they want to hang out, and it's not scary to have the door closed and be left in there. The dog becomes used to being left there while you're doing something else."

Crate training is also highly recommended by the Spokane Humane Society's adoption counselors to all dog adopters.

"We really encourage that and provide a video with tutorials on crate training a dog," Boks says. "Dogs by nature are den animals and if they have a den, if you will, or a crate, when they come into a new environment that is their safe place. We find that with dogs, when they have that safe place, they adjust to a new home much more quickly."

He says the same "safe space" concept is also true for cats, who often need time alone to adjust to the sights, smells and sounds of new surroundings.

"Part of our adoption counseling is the three-three-three rule; three days, three weeks, three months," he says. "The first three days, their mind is blown, it's a whole new environment. Then in three weeks, they start to learn the routine and feel more comfortable and sure of themselves. Sometimes it can take up to three months to feel 'Hey, I'm home now, this is where I belong.' We try to prepare people for that, and say that it may be three months before you see who this animal really is."