Want to Adopt a Pet? WAIT JUST A MINUTE!

It can happen to the best of us. You see a cute, tiger-striped kitten with white paws and green eyes, just begging for your attention. Or maybe it's a gorgeous, tail-wagging Labrador mix who couldn't be more friendly.

You take one look, and the next thing you know, you're walking down the pet food aisle at the local supermarket.

If you're like most of us, falling in love with a pet is easy. And no wonder! Sharing your home with a four-legged friend can be one of life's greatest joys. Dogs, cats, and other pets give us unconditional loyalty and acceptance, provide constant companionship, and even help relieve stress after a hard day's work.

Adopting a pet, though, is a big decision. Dogs and cats are living beings who require lots of time, money, and commitment—over 15 years' worth in many cases. Pet ownership can be rewarding, but only if you think through your decision *before* you adopt a companion.

Things to Consider

The fact that you're thinking about adopting a pet from an animal shelter means you're a responsible and caring person. But *before* you make that final decision to bring a furry friend into your life, take a moment to think about these questions:

Why do you want a pet? It's amazing how many people fail to ask themselves this simple question *before* they get a pet. Adopting a pet just because it's "the thing to do" or because the kids have been pining for a puppy usually ends up being a big mistake. Don't forget that pets may be with you 10, 15, even 20 years.

Do you have time for a pet? Dogs, cats, and other animal companions cannot be ignored just because you're tired or busy. They require food, water, exercise, care, and companionship every day of every year. Many animals in the shelter are there because their owners didn't realize how much time it took to properly care for them.

Can you afford a pet? The monetary costs of pet ownership can be quite high. Licenses, training classes, spaying and neutering, veterinary care, grooming, toys, kitty litter, and other expenses add up quickly.

Are you prepared to deal with special problems that only a pet can cause? Flea infestations, scratched-up furniture, accidents from animals who aren't yet housebroken, and unexpected medical emergencies are unfortunate but common aspects of pet ownership.

Can you have a pet where you live? Many rental communities don't allow pets, and most of the rest have other restrictions. Make sure you know what they are *before* you bring a companion animal home.

Is it a good time for you to adopt a pet? If you have kids under six years old, for instance, you might consider waiting a few years before you adopt a companion. Problem-free pet ownership requires children who are mature enough to be responsible. If you're a student, in the military, or travel frequently as part of your work, waiting until you settle down is a wise choice.

Are your living arrangements suitable for the animal you have in mind? Adopting a large or energetic dog to share your small apartment, for example, is not a good idea—he likely won't have enough space to move around in, and giving him enough exercise will require quite a bit of activity on your part. Choose an animal who will be comfortable in your surroundings.

Do you know who will care for your pet while you are away on vacation? You'll need either reliable friends and neighbors, or money to pay for a boarding kennel or pet-sitting service.

Will you be a responsible pet owner? Having your pet spayed or neutered, obeying community leash and licensing laws, and keeping identification tags on your pets are all part of being a responsible pet owner. Of course, giving your pet love, companionship, exercise, a healthy diet, and regular veterinary care are other essentials.

Finally, are you prepared to keep and care for the pet for his or her entire lifetime? When you adopt a pet, you are making a commitment to care for the animal for his or her lifetime.

Get an Animal for Life

Sure, it's a long list of questions. But a quick stroll through the animal shelter will help you understand why answering them *before* you adopt a pet is so important.

Many of the shelter's homeless animals are puppies and kittens, victims of irresponsible people who allowed their pets to breed. But there are at least as many dogs and cats at the shelter who are more than a year old—animals who were first obtained by people who didn't think through the responsibilities of pet ownership before they got a pet.

Please, don't make the same mistake. Think *before* you adopt. Sharing your life with a companion animal can bring incredible rewards, but only if you're willing to make the necessary commitments of time, money, responsibility, and love—for the life of the pet.

Provided by The Humane Society of the United States.