

Pet Care



Finding a Good Vet

It's not easy placing your furry friend in the hands of a stranger. You'll need the advice and guidance of an expert in order to keep pets healthy, safe and happy.

Finding the right fit isn't easy, however, since prospective veterinarians have to be both learned and a good fit with your particular animal. They'll be there for regular checkups, offer informed answers when concerns arise, and supply emergency help should there be a mishap. So you need to have the utmost comfort in the relationship.

That may mean visiting a number of offices in your area, asking specific questions while providing detailed information about your pet and their health history.

INDIVIDUALIZED SERVICE

Your pet will likely arrive at the vet's office in an agitated state, if for no other reason than the unfamiliar surroundings. Check that the staff will give them comforting, personalized service. Does the staff and doctor work with a friendly disposition, discussing things completely with you while genuinely caring for your pet? Try to meet as many members of the care team as



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possible, in order to make sure your comfort level is where it needs to be. Ask neighbors and friends, and read online reviews to see a full picture.

CONTINUING CARE

Beyond regular checkups, some issues with your pet may take place after regular work hours. Discuss the prospect with the vet's office. Find out the practice policy for after-

hours care and emergency visits, including whether they handle these issues on site and extra charges. Is there a separate emergency number, or should you call the regular office? Does the veterinarian make emergency calls to your home, or must the pet be brought in? How these offices handle these critical services could huge play a role in choosing.

PRICING STRUCTURES

Caring for a pet unfortunately involves more than cuddles and long walks together. The costs of health care can quickly add up, depending on the vet's pricing structures. Ask how much they charge for specific regularly needed services, including wellness checks, basic surgery and flea treatments. If the practice lists

costs that are out of your budget, you may need to continue shopping around. Note that some veterinarian offices offer targeted discounts for those who've served in the military and for seniors, so inquire if you qualify. Those with more than one pet can sometimes receive discounts too, since the practice will garner lots of business from one family.

Training Your Dog

Specialized instruction leads to better behaved, healthier pets. Do your homework before signing up, since you'll have to find the perfect teaching fit. In the end, however, there are many clear benefits.

Begin by searching online to find certified trainers in your area, then ask friends, family and neighbors for their take on who might be best to help with errant behavior. Your specific goals for training will help guide you to the right person.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

They'll learn more than "sit" and "stay." Rewards-based training helps owners reward a pet's best actions and redirect any inappropriate behavior. Among the things these sessions will likely address are common issues like jumping up, nipping, racing out of open doors or potty-related misbehavior. Dogs love the mental and physical stimulation that comes with challenges, so you'll be strengthening your bond while learning something new. It's not just for puppies, either: Dogs of any age can learn more about good manners, staying safe



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and having fun together.

BEFORE YOU GO

Trainers will likely inquire, so ask yourself what you're hoping to accomplish at these training sessions. Are you simply hoping for a better-behaved pet, or are you working toward something more advanced like therapy or competitive skills? These answers may narrow your search for a

trainer, since prospective candidates could need specific professional credentials in order to meet those needs. Determine what fees will be charged beforehand, and how payment can be made. Gather and bring along any required documentation, like proof of vaccination. Finally, be prepared for an active, energetic day, too. Ditch high heels or sandals for tennis shoes and

gym clothes.

PREPARING YOUR DOG

Once you've found a trainer, it's important to get your pet ready for their lessons. Purchase and utilize any trainer-specified collar or leash. Only feed them a light meal before training begins so that they have as much mobility and energy as possible. Take a potty break immediately

beforehand, so the coursework isn't interrupted. The best training classes take place in a group setting, which helps dogs with focus while overcoming distractions. In some cases, you may need to prepare your individual pet for these interactions with others. Depending on how they do with others, private lessons may be needed instead.

Becoming a Pet Sitter

Animal lovers can be a source of comfort while owners are away. If you're passionate about pets, you may be able to earn a living caring for them.

Pet owners looking for more personalized attention may look to pet sitters instead of commercial boarding options when they're away. Staying home or with a familiar friend can create a familiar, comforting environment for animals who may be stressed about being left behind.

Typically, these pets need to be looked after for lengthy stints when people are away on business trips or vacations. That may involve staying over at the owner's home, or sometimes bringing the pet to your own. Some even employ pet sitters for every day absences during work hours.

WHAT THEY DO

It all starts with TLC. People are leaving their pets with you in the hopes that they'll be cared for in an individualized, loving way. That means tailoring play and interactions to the individual pet, taking care of any unique dietary requirements, administering their medicine, cleaning up cages, aquariums or litter boxes, some individual grooming, and monitoring and communicating any concerns while



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offering regular updates on how the pet is doing. Clients may want sitters to stay over, while others only ask that you regularly check in. In some cases, pets may stay with you.

GETTING STARTED

Starting a pet-sitting service may require little up-front investment and a sharp mar-

keting plan. You won't have a brick-and-mortar store, or the need for any costly specialized equipment. The key needed characteristic is a love of animals, and a comforting disposition. Still, you may choose to become a credentialed pet sitter, in order to learn all you can about this service and as an additional selling point for

your business. Some community and technical colleges offer certificate courses where you'll learn more about working as a pet sitter and running this specialized business.

WHAT TO CHARGE

Hourly rates for pet sitters can vary widely from state to state, and are also dependent

on the services rendered. Rates average around \$13 per hour in the U.S., though sitters in states like Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island tend to make more. In the end, however, this job is like any other with an entrepreneurial bent: The harder you work, the more you earn.

Obesity and Your Pet

More than half of our dogs and cats fall into dangerous obesity. It's important to maintain a healthy diet, while helping them remain active.

The Association for Pet Obesity Prevention has developed a set of guidelines and key things to watch out for as you guard against a condition that can put your pet at risk of serious disease.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Begin by determining what a healthy weight is for your particular pet, factoring in their age as you go. This information is generally available on the internet, but you may need expert advice from qualified veterinarian. They will also be able to handle measurements for your pet, which will then be used in comparison with target numbers. Maintaining the proper weight is a key factor in living longer, having a better quality of life and preventing illnesses. Once you've determined that there is a problem, your pet's doctor can also help you develop a plan to get back to an ideal number.

TROUBLING NUMBERS

Dogs and cats are deemed overweight if they are 10 to 20% heavier than their ideal weight. Pets who live with this



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extra weight are at an increased risk for cardiovascular disease, decreased immune functions, metabolic abnormalities and joint disorders. One study found that fewer than 10% of diagnosed pets later lost the required weight. Among those that did, around 40% ended up gaining it all back within a year.

DEVELOPING A DIET

Calorie tracking becomes very important if your pet is diagnosed with obesity. This figure will need to take into account what they typically eat, personal exercise habits and their current weight. Create these plans in consultation with a veterinarian so that you don't put undue stress on your pet.

Enter all of your information into one of today's handy app programs, and you can track progress right on your phone.

EXERCISE REGIMEN

Different levels of exercise are recommended, depending on whether your pet is deemed overweight or actually obese — since the latter is a

far more dangerous diagnosis. Your veterinarian should be able to give you the best sense of what's appropriate based on their particular health situation, as well as breed and age. Be extraordinarily careful when ramping up exercise regimens for senior pets, since overexertion can have serious consequences.

Spaying and Neutering

You can play an important role in the fight against pet homelessness. There are also key behavioral and medical benefits associated with getting this simple procedure done.

Millions of healthy dogs and cats are euthanized every year because they're never adopted, according to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Pets also may develop negative behavior traits if they're not spayed or neutered — particularly at a young age.

KNOW THE BENEFITS

Neutered males are less likely to mark their territory, meaning few messes around your home. Male pets also tend to wander more while looking for a mate when they aren't neutered. This puts your pet at risk for injuries due to fighting with other animals or neighborhood traffic.

Common diseases are also associated with animals that haven't been fixed, including breast tumors which can happen quite often in both dogs and cats. The chances are lessened even more if you have this procedure done before their first round of heat.



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HOW IT WORKS

Surgical sterilization involves the targeted removal of the pet's reproductive organs. When pets are spayed, the ovaries, uterus and fallopian tubes are removed. Neutered pets have their testes removed. In both cases, surgery eliminates behavior relating to the breeding instinct. While these are the most common procedures, others may

choose a hysterectomy, where the ovaries remain; a vasectomy, where the connecting tubes from the testes are removed; or an ovariectomy, where only the ovaries are removed. There are also non-surgical options, but in these cases breeding-instinct behaviors may remain.

KNOW THE MYTHS

Many misconceptions have grown around neutering or

spaying pets. Some people believe that the procedure leads to issues with being overweight, but this problem is related to lack of adequate exercise and overfeeding. The surgery is straight forward and without huge risk. Anesthesia is required, and there is a slight chance that related problems may occur. But getting your pet fixed is one of the most common veterinary procedures. While it's

true that getting this done can be expensive, there are low or no-cost options. Some clinics specialize in help those who can't afford it, while others have special programs where spaying or neutering is offered as a discount and bundled with adoption. Visit the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals website for more information and to find a clinic located in your area.

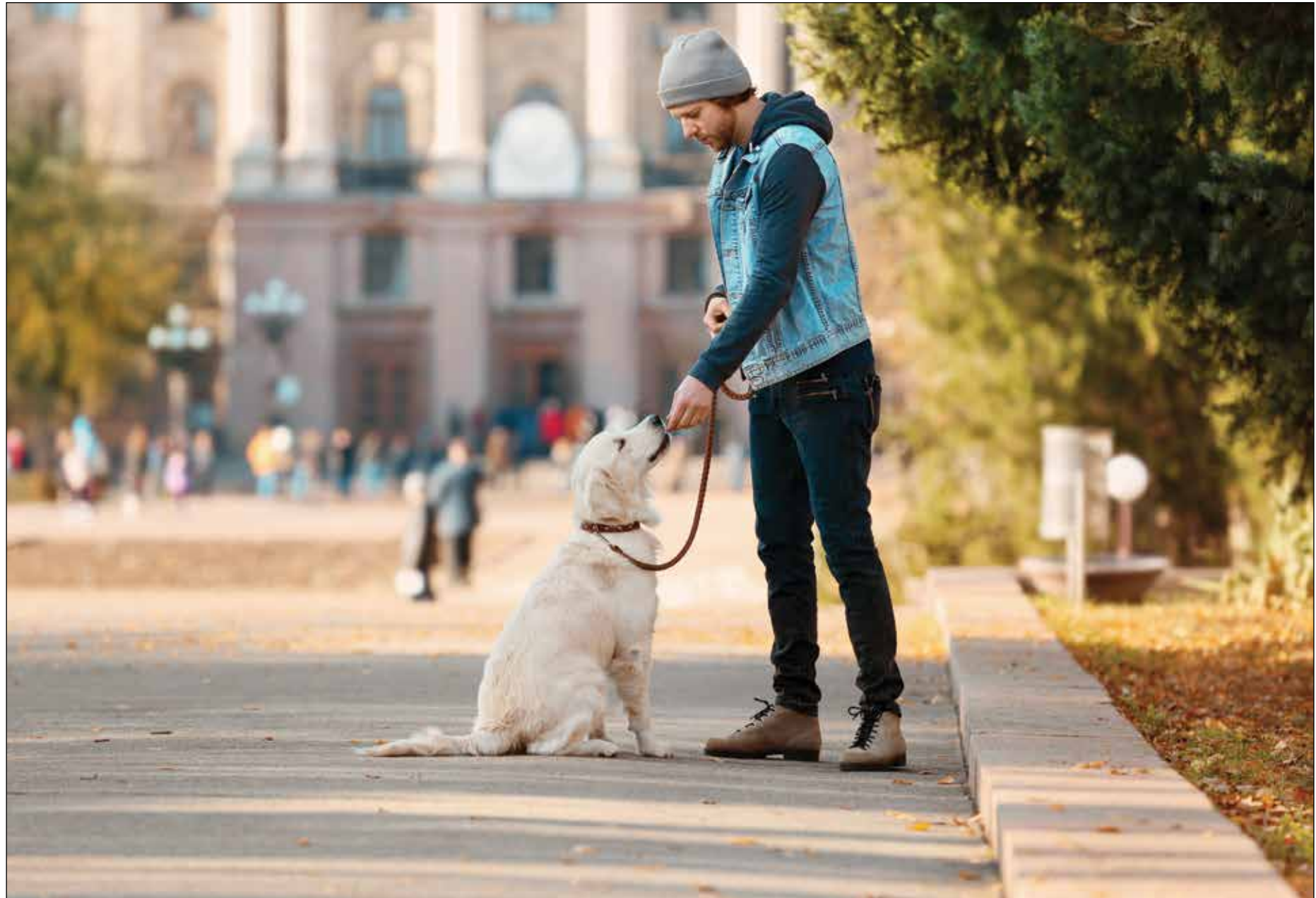
Etiquette for City Dogs

Having an urban pooch can present its own unique challenges. Rural spaces allow for lots of room to roam that may not exist in major metropolitan areas.

There's also obviously going to be a whole lot more people in confined spaces. So it's important that city-dwelling pet owners follow local laws, practice common courtesy and make use of local parks or common areas as much as is possible.

USE YOUR LEASH

Leash laws are nearly universal these days, because they protect community members, your dog and other animals. Dogs who roam free may encounter other aggressive pets, leading to unnecessary altercations and perhaps grave injury. There is also a risk of mishaps with children who don't know how to approach a strange animal, traffic and pedestrians, and older neighbors who may be fearful of your pet. Prevent these and other issues by keeping pets on a leash at all times. Depending on how your specific laws are written, you may be subject to a hefty fine from local officials if you don't.



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WHEN THEY HAVE TO GO

More cities, counties and local neighborhood associations are passing so-called "pooper scooper" laws to protect resident health and help with beautification. These ordinances likewise include fines for those who don't pick up their pet's feces. In some cases, you may also be required to knot the top of the bag and place it in a designat-

ed waste receptacle. You should also train your pet to urinate on hydrants, lamp-posts or other designated spots, since this liquid can be deadly to plants.

BE COURTEOUS

Do your best to control your pet's noise and behaviors, so that neighbors don't feel bothered or threatened. Even developments that allow pets sometimes have residents who

aren't dog or cat lovers. Respect their right to be left alone. Take stairs, rather than enclosed elevators. Try to leave for walks out of side or back exits. If barking and jumping continues to be a problem, consider signing up for a training course.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Try to lease a unit on the first floor, both to make exit-

ing easier and also to avoid bothering downstairs neighbors with noises associated with active animals. If no first-floor space is available, try to establish a playing and sleep schedule that's friendly to those around you. Considering adding coverage for pet damages to your rental-insurance policy. Even if you have a well-trained pet, accidents sometimes happen.

Caring for Your Senior Pet

As our best friends age, they require more attention and help.

Pets are living longer than ever, but that comes with an increase in our responsibilities, too.

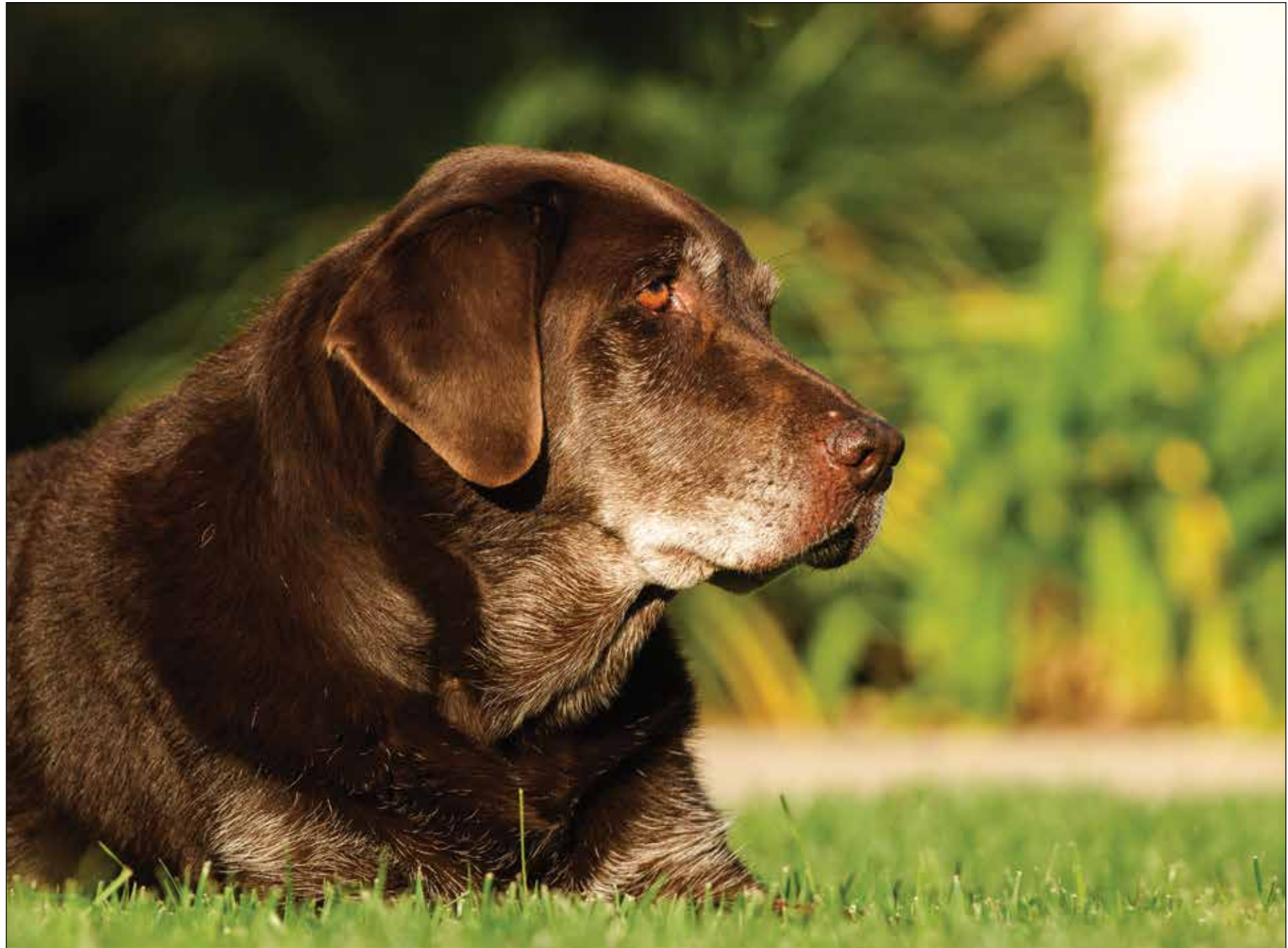
Credit for these lengthier lifespans goes to improved veterinary care, smarter dietary choices and better living conditions. Our pets richly deserve all of this special attention. But owners should prepare themselves for the budget pressures that inevitably follow as our furry friends age.

THE AGE RANGE

Small dogs and cats are generally considered to be geriatric when they reach the age of seven. Larger breeds of dogs usually have shorter life spans, so their geriatric age is moved up to six. Beginning around then, pets are at greater risk of cancer, kidney or urinary tract issues, heart and liver disease, diabetes, joint and bone problems, senility and general weakness.

SPECIAL CONCERNS

Senior pets also become more susceptible to quality-of-life issues that are commonly associated with their older owners, like obesity, arthritis and dental problems. Pets naturally slow down some as they age. So be on the look out for sharp declines in mobility, as that may be a sign of issues like arthritis or dete-



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riorating joints. Pay close attention to trouble they may have with using stairs, or an inability to get comfortable when trying to lay down. Becoming more sedentary often leads to weight problems, and that has also be linked to various negative health outcomes including heart disease and diabetes.

CHANGING NEEDS

Your pet's needs will continue to change as they age. Weather conditions may play an increasing role in what they do outside, since the risk of injury increases. Be aware of extremes in heat or cold, since older pets will be more sensitive to them. Lowered metabolism may require

tweaks to their diet. A certain amount of exercise is required to help with weight gain, and to combat heart disease. Just be careful not to overdo it.

BEHAVIORAL ISSUES

Older pets who become disoriented may be suffering from a kind of cognitive dysfunction that's similar to

Alzheimer's. The American Veterinary Medical Association also warns pet owners to watch for a decrease in thirst or appetite, since those are warning signs for larger problems in the pancreas or stomach. If wounds are slow to heal, that could indicate immune-system issues and cancer.