Bringing home a new puppy or kitten

Introducing a new puppy or kitten to your home is very exciting and fun but also comes with challenges. Young animals require a lot of work but the return of unconditional love is so worth it. This introduction phase is critical in setting up a lifetime of health and a strong human-animal bond. We have outlined what is essential to having a successful introduction of a new furry family member.

1. Vaccination- Appropriately timed vaccination is crucial to the health of puppies and kittens. Vaccination prevents life threatening diseases that cause significant illness, mortality or can be costly to treat. Vaccination needs to start at 6-8 weeks, with booster sets given every 3-4 weeks until the pet reaches 16-18 weeks. We vaccinate dogs for distemper/parvo, rabies and Bordetella (kennel cough) and cats for distemper, leukemia and rabies. We will determine the appropriate schedule of vaccines at the new puppy/kitten appointment.
2. Parasite control- Young animals are susceptible to disease caused by parasites. Screening and appropriate deworming are essential to optimal health
3. Microchipping- This can be important to help re-unite lost pets with their owners. The microchip can be administered at any age, but usually on the second or third vaccination appointment.
4. Feeding- We recommend Hill's Science Diet food because it is validated by research and feeding trials. There are so many brands of food marketed and unfortunately not everything you hear in marketing is an accurate description of nutritional needs of dogs and cats. Feeding a highly digestible, balanced puppy/kitten food (and adult food once older) is the foundation for health in the future. Specifically, for large breed puppies, appropriate diet selection during growth has a significant impact on reducing the development of orthopedic diseases.
5. Socialization- Introduction in a positive manner to a lot of varied experiences during early life is key in having a confident pet, that is less likely to have fear or anxiety disorders when older.
6. Training- This is including potty training and overall behavioral training. It is key to start training early. Whatever habits you do or DO NOT want your adult pet to have need to be guided as soon as they arrive home. We recommend positive reinforcement which means praising/encouraging good behaviors combined with distraction/re-direction of undesired behaviors. It is important that interactions with owners are positive so punishment is not ideal as it can send unintended messages to the developing puppy/kitten. Crate training can help with potty training as well as give puppies a quiet place to rest and feel secure. Again make crate experiences positive
7. Activity or Play based learning- The mental curiosity of any pet, but especially young animals needs to be directed in a positive fashion to prevent inappropriate behaviors. Activity can include exercise however, at a young age this should be limited to low impact activities (walking or swimming if appropriate and supervised). Another good way to encourage confidence and development of ideal behaviors is to use puzzle toys. This is a group of toys for dogs that would involve hiding treats inside and the puppy has to figure out how to get them. Interactive toys for cats are also useful. Most importantly teach your puppy or kitten how to use and play with toys as it can be helpful in keeping them from being destructive when left unattended.

8. Spay or Neuter- This is very important to long term health, not just a means for population control. The age recommendations for cats are to be spayed or neutered by 5 months. The age recommendations for dogs are changing over the past 5-10 years, and vary highly dependent on breed. In general, smaller dogs are spayed/neutered at 6 months of age, and then larger dogs are done between 9-18 months of age. There are many pros and cons to the specific age we choose, so discussion with your veterinarian can be helpful to determine what is right for your pet.