

ANIMAL WELFARE

# 9 Things Every Dog Owner Needs to Know to Look After Their Dog



Opinion



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Are you thinking about getting a new puppy or dog as a pet? How exciting! You may have even picked them out – but what next? How do you care for the new addition to your family? Here are a few things to consider and discuss with your veterinary (vet) professional.

**1. Health Checks**

If you have adopted an animal from a shelter – your pet has probably had a health check and first vaccinations. However, if you have acquired a stray or been given a dog by a friend, it is best to book a health check for your pet by a Veterinary professional. They can do a physical examination and discuss a pet feeding and care plan with you.

**2. Identification**

It is important and required by law (Fiji Dog Act) for your dog to be registered with the Ministry of Agriculture and to wear a dog collar and licence tag. If your dog gets lost, this improves the chance the dog will be returned to you. Micro-chipping your pet will ensure that they can be identified even if their collar is lost.

**3. Nutrition**

What sort of food does your pet need? Providing a balanced diet for your pet's age and size is important: each pet is slightly different. If it is a puppy, it needs food to support healthy growth. An active dog will need different amounts of food and feeding times than an older or less active dog.

Preparing your own homemade dog food is an option to ensure it meets their nutritional requirements. Dogs need a diet rich in protein, ideally around 70%. To achieve this, include protein sources like eggs and meat, as well as vegetables and fruits such as pumpkin, carrots, spinach, apples or bananas. Rice and oatmeal are good additions. Leftover food scraps are acceptable as long as they are not



New rescue pet, Zoe, being distracted by a treat of peanut butter while receiving her first vaccination from Wendy Kane, Animals Fiji North Manager and Veterinary Technologist, and held still by her new owner Bonnie Banerjee at the Savusavu Clinic.

spoiled. Dogs benefit from dietary variety.

Remember never give bones! Also, chocolate, grapes, avocado and onions are toxic to your dog and can make them sick. Sweet or very salty food is also bad for dogs.

**4. Vaccinations, medications & other vet needs**

Animals, like humans, need vaccinations to protect them from getting animal diseases and at some time in their life, they may need medicines and protection from getting parasites like ticks and fleas. To ensure that the dog stays happy and healthy, an appointment with your closest vet will allow you to discuss what your dog needs and when they need it.

**5. Desexing (spaying/neutering)**

There are many reasons why you should have your dog desexed if it still needs to be done. It is better for

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their health. A desexed dog roams less and is generally more loyal. Importantly, desexing your pet helps prevent unexpected puppies, saving you money in the long run. Contact your vet to set up an appointment. It is a small charge now, but it will save you money over many years!

In remote areas, take steps to prevent unwanted pregnancies in

dogs, you can discuss ways with your Animals Fiji vet staff. Consider contacting Animals Fiji for an outreach clinic, but note that at least 12-15 animals are needed for the clinic to be scheduled.

**6. Grooming & hygiene**

To keep your dog healthy and fresh, wash them no more than once a week with dog shampoo, brush their coat regularly, and clean their ears and teeth. This routine prevents skin issues, fleas, bad breath, and dental problems. Plus, it allows early detection of health problems, which is then usually easier and less expensive. You can always contact Animals Fiji to assist on grooming tips.

**7. Training**

Doing basic obedience training with a small puppy as soon as possible is important. If it is an older dog, work with them to see what

**SOME THINGS TO LEARN:**

- Do you live a long way from a Veterinary clinic? If you do, you can ring Animals Fiji Clinics during opening hours and make an appointment time to talk to a vet professional about any concerns.
- You may want to set up a video call appointment using your phone. This will help the vet professional see the issue and better understand the problem, which will help them to give better advice.
- We can also help arrange medication delivery or coordinate a vet visit if a number of animals in your area need care or desexing. Your pets' well-being is important to us.
- Contact: Savusavu/Labasa Clinic: (+679) 998 6253 or Nadi/Lautoka Clinic (+679) 993 6647 or visit their website at [www.animalsfiji.org](http://www.animalsfiji.org).

**FIVE FREEDOMS:**

Animals Fiji operates under the Five Freedoms as formalised by the UK Farm Animal Welfare Council. The Five Freedoms are:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst
2. Freedom from discomfort
3. Freedom from pain, injury or disease
4. Freedom to express normal behaviour
4. Freedom from fear and distress

commands they already know and introduce new ones that may suit you both. Establishing a routine is a good idea, and providing rewards for your dog's good behaviour will serve as positive reinforcement, and they will keep doing it.

**8. Exercise and play**

Different age dogs need different types of exercise and play. A puppy has a lot of energy and needs different exercises and activities to stimulate them physically and mentally. All dogs like a walk and like to explore, so if yours is a house or compound pet, put them on a lead and take them for a walk – it will also be good for you!

**9. Love them**

Devote time and effort to nurture a strong bond with your dog. They'll repay you with loyal companionship, benefiting your health by reducing the risk of heart disease and diabetes. Remember, it takes time for a dog to adjust. Follow the 3-3-3 rule: three days of unease, three weeks to feel at home, and three months for routines and attachment.

Patience and consistency are key when working with your puppy or older dog. Enjoy building a lifelong friendship with your new furry member of the family.