

Your dog's welfare needs



Do you know the five key things dogs need for a happy and healthy life?

According to the recent "Pet-Care Practices in Victoria"¹ research, many Victorian dog owners don't.

This research involved a survey of 1,629 dog, cat, bird and rabbit owners in Victoria. It aimed to measure how well owners understood their pets' welfare needs.

The five key welfare needs are summarised as follows:



Environment

The need for a suitable environment (place to live)



Diet

The need for a suitable diet



Behaviour

The need to express normal behaviour



Companionship

The need to live with, or apart from, other animals



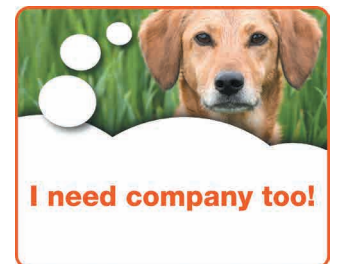
Health

The need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

Welfare worries for dogs

- Loneliness - dogs are highly social animals, yet eight per cent of dogs are regularly left alone for more than 12 hours at a time. Another 15 per cent are regularly left alone for eight to 12 hours. And 39 per cent of dogs have no other animals to keep them company while owners are out.

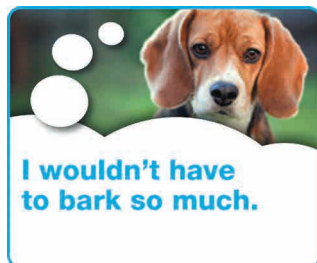
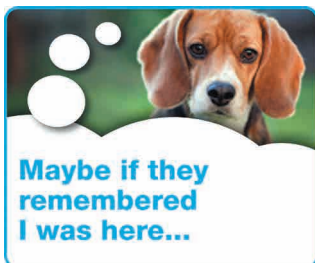
¹ Bennett, P.C., Mornement, K., & Howell, T. (2013). Pet-care practices in Victoria, 2013: a survey of bird, cat, dog and rabbit owners. Unpublished report, La Trobe University, Australia.



- Lack of exercise and socialisation - dogs need daily walks outside the property, and regular socialisation with people and other animals. This ensures they remain physically and mentally healthy. Yet 63 per cent of dogs do not get walked daily. Sixty-two per cent of dogs didn't attend 'puppy preschool' socialisation classes.
- Obesity - up to 40 per cent of dogs are overweight. Forty-eight per cent of owners feed their dogs treats at least once a day. Obesity can cause major health problems such as diabetes, and can reduce quality of life and shorten lifespan.
- Lack of preventative vet care - 15 per cent of dogs are not vaccinated against common diseases, six per cent aren't treated for fleas and seven per cent aren't wormed.
- Toxic treats - three per cent of owners feed their dogs chocolate as a treat, three per cent feed them grapes, and 17 per cent feed them cooked bones as a treat.

Top tips for dog owners

- Ease your dog's loneliness - if your dog is regularly left alone for more than four hours a day, aim to spend an extra hour or two with him or her per day to help compensate. Or ask a friend, relative or pet carer to visit your home to give your dog some company. You can keep your dog busy while you are out by giving him or her a large raw marrow bone to chew, stuffing hollow (indestructible) toys with food, or providing a large block of ice that has had some treats frozen into it. If your dog gets anxious when left alone, speak to your vet or an animal behaviouralist. Consider getting a second dog for company, if your lifestyle and budget allows it (and ensure you understand how to safely introduce a new dog to the household).



- Learn about your dog's ideal body shape and weight, by looking at the dog body condition score chart (available on the DEPI website – www.depi.vic.gov.au/pets). Talk to your vet to ensure your dog is on the right diet for its age and lifestyle, and follow feeding instructions on food packets carefully.
- Review your dog's treats. Familiarise yourself with the list of human foods that are toxic for dogs (www.depi.vic.gov.au/pets). Many safe and healthy alternatives are available, from commercially prepared dog treats, to human foods such as carrot sticks. If your dog is overweight, you might be surprised just how much the treats are contributing to his or her weight problem. Limit treats and completely avoid feeding unhealthy or fatty treats (such as cheese). Low calorie dog treats are available commercially. Or you can try feeding your dog green beans as a treat. They are great for overweight dogs, and most dogs really enjoy them (they can be given fresh or frozen).
- Make a commitment to walk your dog more often - daily walks should be your ultimate goal, but even one extra walk a week will make a huge difference to your dog's quality of life. Dogs have an evolutionary need to walk - just letting your dog run around your yard is not enough. Dogs need to be walked outside the property, to bond with you, meet other people and dogs, and experience the sights and smells of their territory. Here are some solutions to common reasons why many owners don't walk their dogs:
 - Does your dog pull at the leash? Consider dog training as a solution, or buy a walking harness to gently and instantly stop your dog pulling on the lead (one example is the Gentle Leader Easy Walk Harness - this type of harness is available from many suppliers, contact your local pet supplies or try searching the internet).
 - No time to walk your dog? A short walk is better than no walk at all. Try setting your alarm 20 minutes earlier in the morning, and have an invigorating walk before work.

Interestingly, research has found that dog owners get more exercise walking their pet than someone with a gym membership does!

- Motivation a problem? Just start walking your dog and you'll soon see how much joy he or she is getting out of it. This enthusiasm can be contagious (and the guilt you feel if you don't walk your dog will be enough motivation to keep up the activity!) There are also lots of fun apps available for your smartphone - just do a search on 'dog walk'. These apps allow you to log your walks, track your calories, and set fitness goals (for both you and your dog). Apps can also help you find off leash parks and beaches, locations of toilets and dog poo bins, pet-friendly cafes, dog walking clubs and pet events.
- Check when you last treated your dog for fleas and worms. Get advice from your vet regarding suitable and safe treatments, and ensure your dog's vaccinations are up to date.
- If you are thinking of getting a puppy, find out where there are 'puppy preschool' classes in your area - for instance, at your local vet clinic.

Doing just one of these things today could make a big difference to your dog's life!

Learn more

Learn more about the Pet-Care Practices research results, and the welfare needs of dogs – visit www.depi.vic.gov.au/pets



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