

How do I choose the right dog?

By Dr Gretta Howard

There are so many different breeds of dog to choose from that it can be very difficult to come to a decision. Here are a few important points to help you decide on which dog to bring into your family.

Size of dog

Gone are the days where dogs spend the majority of their life in the backyard alone. These days, dogs are treated as part of the family and taken for daily walks for exercise. A backyard is not essential for owning a dog, however if you have an apartment, a smaller breed of dog is more practical. Dogs that are too small can be a potential trip hazard for elderly owners but a dog too big could be difficult to handle on a lead. Larger dogs mean larger food and veterinary costs too, so pet health insurance should be a consideration depending on your circumstances.

Exercise level

It's vital to check the energy levels of your preferred breeds of dog. For example, working dogs, such as a **Kelpie** or a **Border Collie**, need a lot of exercise and stimulation and are unsuitable for busy working families who do not have much spare time to devote to their dogs. When working dogs are bored and left alone for long periods, they may be inclined to search for some "home entertainment" and may become destructive (eg pull washing off the clothes line).

Dogs that are very active and strong such as **Labrador Retrievers** are probably unsuited to the elderly, especially if the owner has reduced mobility due to arthritis.

Contrary to popular belief, **Greyhounds** tend to enjoy a slow stroll and are happy to laze around the house, as long as they have your company! Have a look at <https://www.gapnsw.com.au/> for more information about adopting a Greyhound.

Grooming requirements

Many prospective dog owners are focussed on purchasing a non-shedding breed, such as a Poodle Cross (eg Cavoodle, Schnoodle, Labradoodle), but are unaware of the grooming requirements which are significantly higher than a short-haired breed. Long-haired breeds are likely to require grooming every 4-6 weeks, which is something to take into account in terms of time and costs involved. When all considered, you may prefer to simply vacuum around the house twice a week.

Climate

Sydney has hot summers so if you are not planning to keep your dog in air-conditioned comfort, then **Arctic breeds**, such as Siberian Huskies or Malamutes are not ideal. Their long coats also put them at an increased risk of tick paralysis as the length of hair makes ticks very difficult to find and remove.

Family friendly

If you have young children, then it is important to familiarise yourself with dog body language and choose an appropriate breed. It is not possible to predict whether a dog is going to be suitable for children from the breed alone, however a **Cavalier King Charles Spaniel** is likely a better choice than a **Sha Pei**, **Bull Terrier** or an **Akita** (fighting breeds) for a young family.

For more information about reading dog body language, visit the dog safety education website: <https://www.thefamilydog.com/stop-the-77/>

Breed selection

It is essential that the dog breed you are interested in is suited to your lifestyle.

There are several very good websites that have a section where you can select suitable breeds after answering questions about you and your situation, here is one of them:

<https://www.pedigree.com.au/dog-breed-information/breed-selector/>

Dogs NSW website has excellent information on the various dog breeds so you can research the ideal breed for you: <https://www.dogsnew.org.au/breeds/browse-all-breeds/>

These sites describe many breeds of dogs in detail which is great if you want to find out more about a particular breed's size, appearance and behavioural characteristics.

What about adopting an adult dog?

You may consider adopting a mature dog from one of the many canine adoption agencies in Sydney, such as the **Animal Welfare League**: <https://www.awlnsw.com.au/adopt-a-dog/>. This is a good way to avoid some of the problems that go with bringing up puppies, such as toilet training issues and not knowing what size the pup will grow to. However, if you are keen on exploring this avenue, it try to get as much information as possible about the behavioural and medical history. Some of the adoption agencies offer the option of fostering a dog temporarily. This may be a good way to determine whether the dog is right for you. It is important to note that some dogs adopted from shelters were abandoned due to behavioural concerns, such as separation anxiety, so may have additional needs and may not suit a busy household with children.

We wish you all the best with your choice and hope you have many enjoyable years with your new companion. Most importantly, at Turrumurra Veterinary Hospital, we can't wait to meet your adorable new furry friend!