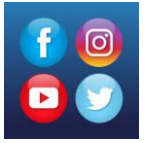




**Kirkham Surgery:** Hillock Lane, Freckleton, Preston, PR4 1TP

Tel: 01772 639 800 Fax: 01772 634 801

**Blackpool Surgery:** The Old Bank, 369 Whitegate Drive, Blackpool, FY3 9PH Tel: 01253 766352



## Choosing a Healthy Pet

Now you have chosen the type of pet you want, the next step is to look into where you can get your new pet from. Making sure you research the breeder and how your new pet has been raised and in what kind of environment, is vitally important to ensuring that you choose a healthy and well adjusted pet.

There are many common things to look out for no matter what pet you choose so here's a handy check list and some key questions to ask.

### General Checklist

**Eyes:** should be clear and bright with no discharge.

**Ears:** should be clean and have no particular smell or discharge or scabs.

**Nose:** should be clean with no discharge. There should be no signs of noisy breathing, sneezing or sores.

**Mouth:** should have no specific smell and the gums must be pink in colour and teeth should be white with no tartar build-up.

**Belly:** should not be swollen as this can be a sign of a worm infestation or other, serious health issue. The body should be firm and not too thin or too fat.

**Coat:** should be clean with no matting or bald patches.

**Stools:** should be firm.

### Puppy

- Check into the breeder and the environment a puppy has been bred in to. Avoid puppy farms and ask to see the parents (or at least the mother) of the puppy.
- Your puppy should be AT LEAST 8 weeks old before it is developed enough to leave its mother.
- Your puppy should be micro-chipped before they go to their new home.
- Your puppy should have good energy levels and be curious and want to play.
- Ask for any vet records from the breeder and if they have had any kind of socialization, such as contact with other people.



### Kitten

- check into the breeder and the environment a kitten has been bred in to.
- Your kitten should be AT LEAST 10 weeks of age before it is developed enough to leave its mother.
- The skin and coat of the perianal area must be clean and free from bare skin, redness or discharge.
- The legs of the kitten must be straight and should not display any problems with walking.
- A kitten at the re-homing age must be confident, non aggressive and must not be afraid of people, other cats and pets. If the kitten is too scared of anything, or aggressive at the age of 10 to 12 weeks, it may take a huge effort to correct it later. It may be acceptable if he's a bit protective in the beginning when a strange person comes in. However, if you encourage him to play, he must respond. If he's not, the kitten may not be socialized properly.
- Take a look at the other kittens in the litter for signs noted above. You may not do this as in depth as you would with a kitten you choose, but a quick overall check-up might be beneficial. Check the queen and other pets in the home well. Any signs of poor health must be seriously evaluated.

## Rabbit

- Rabbits offered for sale should not be less than 6 weeks of age and should be separated by sex with males (bucks) in one cage and females (does) in another. If the rabbits are not separated by sex and/or the seller cannot guarantee the sex of any rabbit there is a risk of choosing a female that may be pregnant and so it is best to look elsewhere for a rabbit.
- Before selecting a rabbit first look at the cage - it should be clean and not overcrowded and the rabbits should have access to food and water.
- Any droppings in the cage should be firm and not runny.
- Observe all the rabbits in the cage to see that all look healthy and lively as if one rabbit appears ill the others may also be ill or at risk of becoming ill.
- Look out for sneezing, excessive scratching, dirty coats or lethargy as any of these could indicate health problems.
- If there is no cause for concern after an initial inspection of the cage and rabbits, then you can start in selecting your rabbit. Ask to hold any rabbit that you are thinking of choosing and go through the general checklist.



## Guinea Pig

- Try to find out the age of your guinea pig and adopt one that is as young as possible (around 6 weeks old is the youngest a piglet should head to a new home).
- If any of the other guinea pigs in the same cage (or same shelter, breeder, or store) seem ill, resist the temptation to adopt from there as if it is contagious your guinea pig may become ill at a later date.
- As with rabbits, make sure males and females are separated. Familiarize yourself with the differences between males and females and if the source doesn't separate them or seems unsure about the gender, move on. It is best to avoid the possibility of surprise litters, especially in very young guinea pigs. They can become pregnant by about 4 weeks old but this would be extremely dangerous for the mum-to-be.
- Try a shelter first. There are many guinea pigs who need a second chance at a forever home. If you go to a breeder, make sure they are breeding for specific goals such as temperament and health. If you go to a store, make sure you can handle the guinea pig before you buy, to do a quick health check and assess its temperament.



## Hamster/Rat

- Try to find out the age of your hamster, and adopt one that is as young as possible (around 6 weeks old is best).
- If the hamsters or rats in the same cage seem ill, resist the temptation to adopt or buy from there as if it is contagious, your pet may become ill at a later date.
- Make sure that males and females are separated as you don't want to adopt or purchase a pregnant pet, especially in young hamsters/rats.
- If you are able to handle the hamster or rat before you buy, this is useful to determine temperament. A hamster or rat that is skittish or squeaks whenever touched should be avoided. Rats that show any sign of aggression should also be avoided.
- Not all hamsters are able to live together so seek further advice before housing in groups.
- If you already own a rat you should make sure that you quarantine your new rat, even if they appear healthy, at a separate location for a minimum of 2-3 weeks to ensure that your resident rat does not pick up any illnesses.
- Male rats are usually larger than female rats and tend to be calmer than females. Females tend to be smaller and more active than males and tend to be more inquisitive by nature.
- Some male rats, as they mature, may urine mark although neutering can sometimes eliminate this type of behaviour. Female rats go into "heat" every 4-5 days.



Of course not all rats are the same. Some females are very laid back and some males are as active as any female. Either way you will still have a charming, intelligent, endearing pet.

Once you arrive home with your new furry friend be sure to take it slow so that they will not be stressed out. Let them get used to their new environment and then begin offering them treats and hand them carefully. Some rodents are shyer than others, but with time and patience your new pet will come to know and trust you.