

■ New Pet Owner Survival Checklist

Everything you need to do in your pet's first week home — for dogs, cats & birds.

Free guide from HowToCare.store

Use this checklist during your pet's first 7 days. Check each item off as you go. The first week sets the tone for the next 15+ years — don't rush it.

■ Dogs — First 7 Days

- Buy food, water bowls, collar, ID tag, leash, and a crate or dog bed before arrival
- Schedule a vet wellness exam within 48–72 hours of bringing your dog home
- Confirm vaccination records and ask about heartworm, flea, and tick prevention
- Set up a quiet, safe space — especially for the first 2–3 days while they decompress

Tip: Don't force interaction. Let them explore at their own pace.

- Introduce the crate gradually with treats — never use it as punishment
- Begin basic commands: sit, stay, name recognition. Keep sessions under 5 minutes
- Establish a consistent feeding schedule (same times daily)
- Start leash walks in a low-distraction area to build confidence
- Socialize carefully — one new person or environment per day max
- Note any behavioral red flags: hiding, refusal to eat, aggression, excessive panting

Tip: Some anxiety is completely normal for the first 3 days. Give it time.

- Buy enzymatic cleaner for accidents — standard cleaners don't remove scent markers
- Keep a daily log: meals eaten, bathroom schedule, mood, sleep hours

■ Cats — First 7 Days

- Set up litter box, food bowl, water bowl, scratching post, and a hiding spot before arrival

- Confine to one room for days 1–3 — this reduces overwhelm dramatically

Tip: Cats are territorial. Gradual space introduction prevents chronic anxiety.

- Schedule a vet check within 72 hours — test for FIV/FeLV if unknown history

- Confirm vaccination status: FVRCP core vaccine + rabies at minimum

- Place litter box away from food and water — cats won't use a box near their eating area

- Do not force handling. Let the cat sniff your hand and come to you first

- Provide vertical space (cat tree, shelves) — cats feel safer when they can observe from height

- Check for toxic plants in the home: lilies, pothos, aloe, and sago palm are all lethal to cats

- Begin interactive play sessions: 2x daily, 10–15 minutes each with a wand toy

Tip: Play reduces stress hormones and builds trust faster than any other activity.

- Watch litter box output daily — changes in frequency or consistency are health indicators

- If you have other pets, do scent-swapping (swap bedding) before any face-to-face introduction

■ Birds (Cockatiels & Budgies) — First 7 Days

- Set up cage with perches of varying diameters, food dish, water dish, and mineral block
- Place cage against a wall, not in the center of the room — birds feel safer with backing
- Cover the cage partially at night to reduce stress and regulate sleep (10–12 hrs darkness)
- Do NOT handle the bird for the first 2–3 days — observe and let them settle

Tip: Sit near the cage and talk softly. Let them get used to your voice and presence first.

- Schedule an avian vet exam within the first week — find a certified avian vet, not a general vet
- Offer fresh vegetables on day 3 — carrot, romaine, broccoli — alongside seeds/pellets
- REMOVE: avocado, chocolate, onion, garlic, apple seeds — all are toxic and potentially fatal
- Watch droppings daily: healthy = small firm dark part with white urate. Watery = vet visit
- Begin taming: on day 4+, offer millet spray through the cage bars without reaching in
- Keep the bird away from the kitchen entirely — non-stick cookware fumes kill birds silently

Tip: Also check: scented candles, air fresheners, and aerosol sprays near the bird's room.

- Weigh weekly on a kitchen scale — a 10%+ weight drop in 2 weeks = vet visit

■ Questions to Ask Your Vet at the First Visit

What vaccinations are due now and on what schedule? • What parasite prevention do you recommend for this breed? • Is the weight appropriate for this age and breed? • Are there breed-specific health issues I should watch for? • What food do you recommend and in what quantities?

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