

A Dog Owner's Guide to happy, healthy dogs



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Why do we love dogs so much?

If you're reading this guide, you're probably already a firm fan of dogs and well aware of the joy they can bring to their owners' lives. But just in case you needed a quick reminder, here are five key reasons why dogs have established themselves as man's best friend.

1. Acceptance and unconditional love

Dogs don't care about your wealth or your cooking skills. As long as you take care of them and show them affection then they'll love you for you.

2. A (wo)man's best friend for the long haul

Dogs make wonderful companions and can be extremely loyal. During good times and bad, your dog is likely to stay right by your side.

3. The perfect exercise partner

Dogs provide instant motivation to keep fit and healthy through their need of regular exercise. It'll feel less like working out and be more of a chance to play and bond.

4. Intuitive and can easily sense danger

Many dogs alert their owners during times of emergencies such as house fires, earthquakes and break-ins. This advance notice can make all the difference in terms of survival.

5. Reduces stress and loneliness

Interacting with a dog and nurturing them can help with emotional well-being. In many cases, dogs can help people recover from personal trauma such as bereavement.

Given all the pleasure dogs can bring to their owners, the very least we can do in return is make sure we provide them with the love, care and security they need to be happy, well-behaved members of the household. Check out our guide for some key pointers as to how to ensure your dog is healthy, well looked after and safe to be around family members and the public.



Chapter One:

Why might a dog's behaviour become inappropriate?



Why might a dog's behaviour become inappropriate?

Responsible pet ownership means being aware of why your dog's behaviour might change as well as taking appropriate measures to help avoid it happening in the first place.

Here are five reasons why a dog may display problem behaviours and some guidance on how to keep your dog, yourself and those around you safe.

1. Ill or unhealthy dogs

Dogs that are in pain, feeling irritable or generally not in good health may show behavioural changes as they don't know how to communicate their feelings of being unwell – one of the many reasons to regularly check your dog's health and happiness. This includes keeping up to date with important preventive treatments such as vaccinations, flea and worming treatment, maintaining your dog's dental hygiene, providing adequate grooming and plenty of exercise. You can read more about keeping your dog healthy on page 18.

Did you know ...?

19%

(1.5 million) have not been treated for fleas

18%

(1.4 million) have not received a booster vaccination

13%

(1 million) are not wormed

7%

(567,000) are not registered with a vet

The PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report is the largest annual survey of its kind in conjunction with leading research agency YouGov. Read more about it on page 21.



PDSA Vet Vicki Larkham-Jones says:

'Investing time in socialisation is essential as it can be the difference between a well rounded, confident dog and one that goes on to develop problem behaviours. Socialisation means gradually exposing your puppy to everyday sights, sounds, people and other pets, to develop their confidence and help them learn what is normal.'

2. Territorial aggression

Territorial aggression can occur over key resources such as food, property, toys or even people. If a dog feels threatened, or believes that these resources are in danger, they may show aggression. It's essential to prevent such aggressive behaviours right from the start with proper socialisation of puppies (more on this on page 9).

Paying attention to and understanding your dog's body language can help you to identify when such behaviour is most likely to be exhibited. When you understand your dog's particular triggers of negative behaviour, you can train him or her to view the perceived threat as harmless and help them to stay calm during potentially distressing situations.

3. Fears and phobias

Dogs that haven't been through adequate socialisation as puppies may develop fear or phobias of certain experiences, such as cars, fireworks, thunder or baths. As a result of this fear, your dog may react to stressful situations and experiences by showing aggression.

A dog's fear can be challenging to treat after a young age as it involves gradual desensitisation, but some reward-based training (page 10) can be effective in helping them cope. Don't hesitate to consult your vet or a behaviourist for more specific guidance.

Did you know ...?

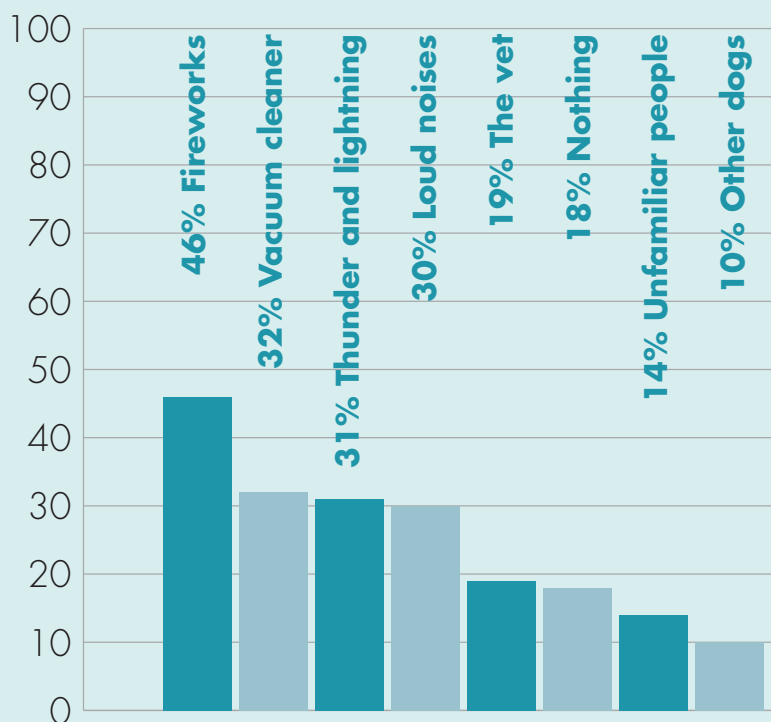
**Over
240,000**

dogs show aggression towards people on a weekly basis.

Since 2011, there have been over 5,500 attacks on Royal Mail postmen and women, some leading to a permanent disabling injury. Attacks have resulted in the loss of 4,100 working days due to injuries. Many of these attacks could have been prevented by appropriate training and socialisation from puppyhood.

Remember:

If you've bought your dog from a rescue or rehoming centre, you're unlikely to know just how much socialisation he or she has had, so keeping a close eye on their reaction to the environment is key.



Overall, as the graph above shows, 82% of dogs are afraid of something

PDSA Animal Wellbeing Report 2011

4. Attention-seeking

Just like a child may behave badly to get attention, dogs can do the same. You may decide to provide them with the attention they're after but by doing so, your dog is likely to associate that bad behaviour with being rewarded and so continue the unwanted behaviour.

Try not to reward your dog for any bad behaviour, but equally don't punish them. Instead, present them with an opportunity to show good behaviour – for example you could tell your dog to go to their basket and lie down. As soon as they do so, give them a treat. This is known as positive reinforcement or reward-based training, dogs will learn and respond much quicker with this method of training.

5. Bored and aggravated

Many dogs prefer being busy and active for most of the day, so having little to do or being stuck at home without any company can lead to boredom, which can result in destructive or anti-social behaviour.

Dogs shouldn't routinely be left alone for more than four hours but, for the times you are out, there are many things you can do to keep your dog occupied at home. Place interesting toys that they can play with around the house and set up challenges using hidden treats, dog puzzles and toys filled with food.

Did you know ...?

2.1m

Around 2.1 million dogs are left alone for longer than the recommended 4 hours every day.

Dog-friendly places

If it's possible, take your dog with you to places you enjoy visiting. You'd be surprised at how many places welcome dogs. Here are three of the many great sites out there with information on dog-friendly pubs, eateries, beaches and days out:

Dogfriendly.co.uk

dogfriendlybritain.co.uk

dogpeople.co.uk



Chapter Two:

How can I avoid an aggression problem in my dog?



How can I avoid an aggression problem in my dog?

Owners and breeders should pay special attention to puppy socialisation and training. This helps establish good puppy behaviour from a young age and avoids the difficulties of having to re-train a dog once a certain behaviour has been ingrained.

To help avoid your dog developing problem behaviours, here are four key areas to focus on:

1. Socialisation

Socialisation is one of the most important things you can do for a puppy. It's all about letting them meet people and other animals, and letting them experience lots of everyday sights and sounds, especially in their first few weeks of life.

A well-socialised puppy is more likely to grow up to be a friendly and outgoing dog. If socialisation isn't done properly they're more likely to be anxious and fearful as adults. Anxiety and fear are unpleasant feelings that reduce a dog's quality of life and, in addition, can cause problem behaviours, including aggression.

Did you know ...?

82%

of pet owners believe that aggressive behaviour is a result of inappropriate or inadequate training by the owner



Golden rules

- **If your puppy seems anxious or afraid when they're doing or seeing something new, calmly end what they're doing. Don't try to comfort or reassure them as this can make them more anxious and lead to fears and phobias.**
- **Build up new experiences gradually; for example, go to a few local shops before visiting a shopping precinct; a quiet road before a busy road etc. When your puppy is calm and relaxed, give them occasional praise and healthy treats so that they enjoy the experience.**
- **Don't introduce too many new experiences in one day. Three a day is a sensible number, remembering to repeat them as often as possible once your puppy is happy with them.**
- **Supervise play with other dogs carefully. Don't let the play get too boisterous.**

2. Training

Training is a great way to keep your dog's mind active and helps to make sure that you and your dog understand each other.

The key to successful training is to make it fun. The kindest and most effective method is called "positive reinforcement" – also called reward-based training.

The underlying theory is simple: if an animal behaves in a certain way (e.g. sits), then receives something that they like (a reward), they'll want to behave that way again.

The reward can be a treat to eat but try healthy food such as very small slices of carrot to avoid ending up with an overweight, albeit very well behaved, dog.



Golden rules

- **The reward you offer should be something that your dog really likes, so that they're prepared to work for it.**
- **Give the reward while they're doing the behaviour or within half a second after they've stopped doing it.**
- **Keep training sessions short so that your dog doesn't lose interest or get frustrated. End on a high each day, after a success.**
- **Focus on training one clear command at a time. When your dog has learned one, move on to the next.**
- **It may take several tries, but be patient, your dog will eventually understand what you want.**
- **Every dog will make mistakes from time to time. Ignore the mistake, then give the reward next time they get it right.**
- **Never use punishment – this is unkind and doesn't provide lasting results. In addition, if you punish your dog, it can lead to a range of behavioural problems later in life.**
- **Everyone who has regular contact with your dog should praise the right behaviour, use the same commands and ignore mistakes. This means that your dog gets the same message from everyone, rather than different messages, which can be confusing.**

Mythbuster

You don't need to "teach your dog who's boss". Your dog doesn't need to view you as more dominant than them, but they do need to learn to trust you and to understand your commands, using the kind and effective methods described earlier.

Did you know...?

54%

of dogs (around 4.3 million) never went to training classes during their first six months of life despite this being an effective way to teach a dog good behaviour.



Training classes

- Training classes can be highly beneficial, but make sure that any class you are thinking of joining uses reward-based training and does not base training on cruel practices such as the use of water-pistols.
- **The Kennel Club** is the UK's largest organisation dedicated to protecting and promoting the health and welfare of all dogs. It offers friendly training classes across the UK.
- Members of the **Association of Pet Dog Trainers** only use reward-based methods too.

Remember:

When out for their exercise, dogs should be on a lead in built-up areas, and only released when you are absolutely sure it's safe. This protects your dog from traffic, litter and other hazards, and ensures he or she cannot be a nuisance to others.

3. Toys

Dogs need plenty of mental stimulation to be happy. To help provide this, play with your dog regularly using appropriate dog toys. Keep some stored away, so that you can use different toys in different weeks. This will help to keep the toys interesting for your dog, and gives you a chance to clean them as well.

4. Exercise

The amount of exercise needed varies according to the age, breed and health of a dog. For example, a small dog may need less exercise than a particularly active one such as a Border Collie.

Your vet is the best person to advise on how much exercise your dog should be getting and can take the relevant factors into consideration.



Chapter Three:

What else can I do to promote good behaviour in my dog?



What else can I do to promote good behaviour in my dog?

Dogs shouldn't routinely be left alone for more than four hours. Loneliness can lead to depression in dogs and boredom can cause dogs to bark or be destructive in the house.

Dogs are happiest and healthiest when you meet their five welfare needs:

1. Environment
2. Diet
3. Behaviour
4. Companionship
5. Health

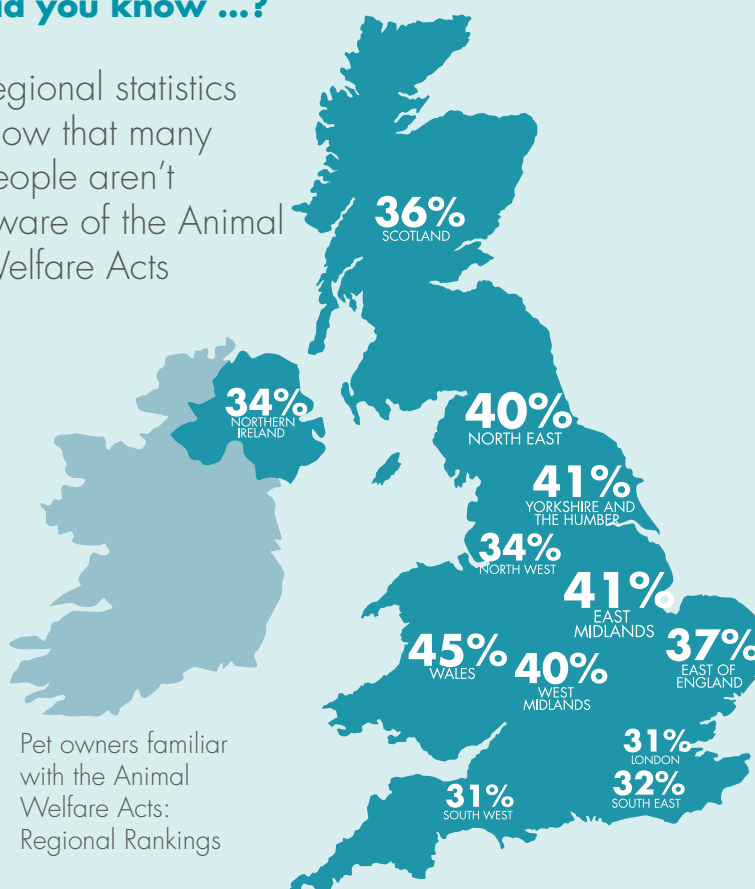
The Animal Welfare Acts 2006 (2011 in Northern Ireland) place a duty of care on owners to meet these five key welfare needs.

It means people must take positive steps to ensure they care for their animal properly.

Make sure you're providing for all five aspects of your dog's welfare:

Did you know ...?

Regional statistics show that many people aren't aware of the Animal Welfare Acts



Pet owners familiar with the Animal Welfare Acts:
Regional Rankings

1. Environment

Dog bed

Giving a dog their own dog bed helps them to rest undisturbed and ensures they have a safe place they can retreat to when they want some 'alone' time. Buy a dog bed that can easily be cleaned regularly and place in a dry, draught-free area.

Cleaning up after your dog

Dog faeces can transmit diseases and carry parasites such as worms. Ensure you clean up after your dog using a plastic bag or "pooper scooper" so that you, your dog and those around you continue to live in a clean and hygienic environment.

Travelling

2. Most dogs like to ride in cars but there are some important safety tips to remember. Your dog should be safely restrained every time you travel, using a special seat belt or a dog guard if they are travelling in the boot.



The law

Dog owners have a legal obligation to clean up after their dog when in a public place, under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005.

Remember

Always keep water at hand should your dog get thirsty. If you're going on a long journey, take a break every hour and give your dog a quick walk.



3. Diet

Types of food

Many vets and organisations, including PDSA, recommend feeding a reputable pet food brand to your dog, as it's not easy to achieve the correct balance of nutrients if you try to tailor your dog's diet yourself. Make sure you are also feeding for the correct life stage, e.g. a puppy needs puppy food. Always consult a vet if you're unsure.

Feeding the right amount

Puppies are usually ready to eat solid food when they are about five weeks old and can begin with four meals a day. This can be reduced to three a day at about 12 weeks. At six months, they can have two meals a day, which can continue for the rest of their life.

It's generally best to feed an adult dog twice a day and it's important not to over-feed them. Over-feeding can lead to obesity and cause health problems such as diabetes, heart disease and arthritis.

Remember

To ensure you're not over-feeding your dog, follow the feeding guidelines on the food's packaging. Weigh the food first to make sure you're measuring out the right amount.



Did you know ...?

4.3m

The obesity epidemic is worsening, as 4.3 million dogs are fed scraps or leftovers of human food.

Only 21% of dog owners decide how much to feed their dog based on its weight or body shape, and just 18% ask a vet or seek other professional advice.

Giving treats

The only time you should really give food treats is when you are training your dog and encouraging good behaviour. You may not realise it, but small treats given regularly all add up, and those extra calories will lead to your dog putting on weight if it isn't being exercised enough.

Chocolate

However tempting, don't feed your dog chocolate intended for humans. Any amount of chocolate can poison dogs and other pets including hamsters and rats due to the toxic effects of theobromine – a component of chocolate. The effects of chocolate poisoning in dogs usually appear within 4 to 24 hours of ingestion, and can last as long as 72 hours.

Chocolate toxicity symptoms include vomiting, abdominal tenderness, hyperactivity, salivation and changes in heart rate. In severe cases there are fits, increased rate of breathing, and heartbeat irregularities. In very severe cases it can even result in the death of the pet.

Don't forget water

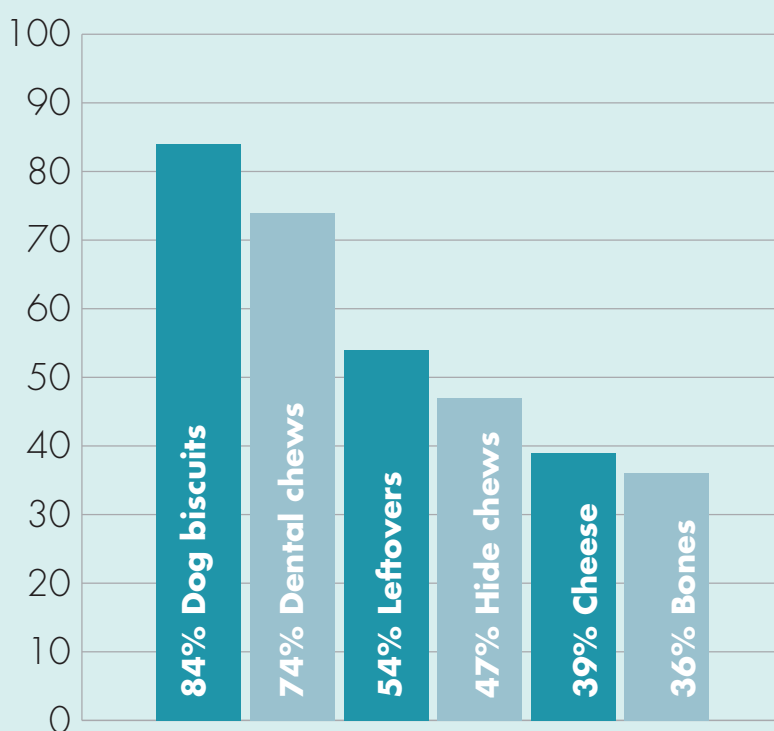
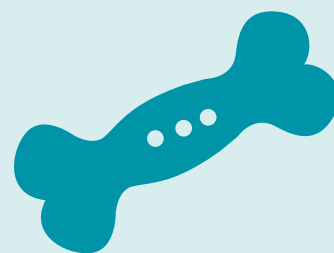
Dogs need to keep hydrated too. Ensure your dog has constant access to fresh, clean water from a clean bowl.

4. Behaviour

This includes socialisation, training, toys and exercise. Please refer to pages 9 - 11 where we have covered behaviour in more depth.

Did you know ...?

When giving their dog a treat, most owners opt for a traditional dog biscuit.



Most popular dog treats in the UK

Remember:

A puppy that has not received adequate socialisation may develop problem behaviours – which can result in them being given away to rehoming centres or even being put to sleep. Tragically, this happens to thousands of dogs every year.

5. Companionship

Being present:

Dogs shouldn't routinely be left alone for more than four hours. Loneliness can lead to depression in dogs and boredom can cause dogs to bark or be destructive in the house.

Going on holiday:

If your dog isn't coming with you on holiday, arrange for someone responsible to care for them. Many well-run kennels not only look after your pet but help them to socialise with other dogs.

Alternatively, you could arrange for a friend or professional "pet-sitter" to look after your dog at home until you return.

Remember

Many kennels won't allow dogs to board if they haven't been vaccinated, so make sure you check your dog's vaccinations are up to date well in advance. It's always wise to leave a list of information, such as how much food and exercise your pet needs, any medication they might be on and how to administer it, as well as your vet's contact details for emergencies.

Petsitter

You can find a petsitter through the National Association of Registered Petsitters. Visit www.dogsit.com for more information.



6. Health

Registering with a vet

When you get a new dog, you should register with a local veterinary practice straight away. Your vet can then devise a care programme for your dog. Go in prepared with a list of the questions you want to ask, so everything can be covered.

Vaccinations

Dog vaccinations protect your dog against various diseases which can cause pain and distress or can even be fatal. They also prevent diseases from being passed onto other animals.

Fleas and worms

Your dog will need regular treatment to prevent them suffering from worms and fleas. Worms can also be harmful to humans, which is another reason why it's important to prevent them. Ask your vet for advice about which products to use and how often to use them.

Microchipping

Microchipping increases the chances of a dog being reunited with their owner should they become separated. This will become a legal requirement in England, Scotland and Wales from April 2016. It's already a legal requirement in Northern Ireland. You also have a legal obligation to ensure your dog is wearing a collar and tag in public.



Did you know ...?

Pet owners who are registered with a vet were asked what influenced their choice of veterinary practice. The most common reasons were:

1
NEAREST
TO ME

2
BEST
REPUTATION

3
FRIENDS
USE IT

Remember

Puppies should be vaccinated before they mix with other animals. This socialisation is essential for their development, so you should get them vaccinated as soon as possible.

The law

As of 6th April 2016 it will be compulsory for all dogs over the age of 8 weeks in England to be fitted with microchips under the Microchipping of Dogs (England) Regulations 2015.

The Control of Dogs Order 1992 says that any dog in a public place must wear a collar and tag with the name and address of the owner on it. There is a potential fine up to £5,000 for owners who fail to ensure their dog is wearing one.

Did you know ...?

More than
1.5m

dogs don't wear a collar and tag, while 30% of dog owners are unaware that this is a legal requirement.

Neutering

PDSA, as well as many other vets and animal organisations, recommends neutering both male and female dogs. There are hundreds of thousands of unwanted animals in need of homes, and neutering stops animals from adding to this problem by having unwanted litters.

It also reduces the risk of our pets developing some serious diseases, such as certain cancers – helping them to live longer and enjoy a better quality of life.

Grooming

All dogs need regular grooming. A long-haired dog should be combed and brushed once a day, while a dog with short hair will usually only need brushing twice a week. Look for a brush and comb that are suited to the hair type of your dog.

Insurance

While most dog owners will have considered routine costs, such as vaccinations and worming, it is the out-of-the-ordinary expenses that you may not be prepared for. The cost of treatment associated with a road accident, for example, can run into thousands of pounds. It's wise to take out an insurance policy on your pet, as an investment of a few pounds a month can prevent a huge bill at a stressful time.

Dog grooming

Once in a while, you could treat your dog to a trip to a dog grooming salon. There are many dog grooming salons across the UK and some even offer pampering treatments.

However, it is best to use a service you trust or look for a Quality Assured Groomer (a mark to signify a groomer has been professionally audited and assessed as professionally competent) near your area. For more information, visit www.petcare.org.uk

Insurance

There are plenty of organisations around that offer pet insurance, including PDSA, so shop around for the best policy for you. Third-party insurance is included in most policies, and this is essential to avoid large payments should your dog cause an accident.





About National Accident Helpline

National Accident Helpline is the UK's leading provider of free and impartial personal injury advice and support. We champion the underdog. We believe thousands of genuine injury victims don't have a voice and would be worse off without our help. With more than 21 years' experience, National Accident Helpline is dedicated not only to securing access to justice for injury victims, but also to raising awareness of safety issues to help make our environment a safer place.

This year, to help dogs stay happy and healthy and ensure they are friendly pets, we have teamed up with PDSA, the UK's leading veterinary charity, to create this guide.



About PDSA

At PDSA we believe that every pet deserves to live a happy and healthy life. As the UK's leading veterinary charity, with 51 Pet Hospitals and over 380 Pet Practices, we strive to improve pets' lives – through prevention, education and treatment.

Every year our dedicated veterinary teams carry out 2.7 million treatments on 470,000 pets. Founded in 1917 by animal welfare pioneer Maria Dickin CBE, PDSA is the UK's leading veterinary charity.



"A dog is the only thing on earth that loves you more than he loves himself"

Josh Billings

About the PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report

21,040 pet owners, vets, vet nurses and children surveyed by PDSA.

The PAW Report is based on the five welfare needs companion animals require to be healthy and happy, as detailed in the Animal Welfare Acts. Each year, respondents are surveyed about each of the five welfare needs, in direct relation to their pet, and their level of knowledge in each area.

The Report is produced in conjunction with YouGov, one of the UK's leading research companies. YouGov has an established track record of consistently accurate and high-quality survey data, representing all ages, socio-economic groups and other demographic types.

Read more or download the latest report here.

<http://pdsa.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/pdsa-animal-wellbeing-report>



All statistics used in this guide are taken from the PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW report) 2014 unless otherwise stated.

