

Should You Adopt a Puppy or an Adult or Senior Dog?

by [Petfinder](#)

The following is an excerpt from Petfinder.com's [Adopted Dog Bible](#)

When adopting a dog, one choice you'll need to make is whether to adopt a puppy, an adolescent, or an adult. It's not always an easy decision, so let's take a look at the advantages and disadvantages of adopting dogs of different ages.

Puppies are enchanting little beings. They're funny and cute and full of promise. But puppies, like all babies, need a lot of care and attention if they are to fulfill that promise.

Puppies Are a Lot of Work

Your puppy will need to be trained so that she knows what you want her to do and not do. She will need lots of safe exercise and play so that her body develops properly, and she will need you to socialize her with other people and animals so that she feels comfortable in the world. As she learns and grows, she'll get into things, chew, make messes, and have accidents in the house. All in all, a puppy is a tremendous amount of work — much more than many unsuspecting adopters realize.

A Puppy's Health — and Size — May Be Unpredictable

Puppies who are available for adoption through shelters and rescue organizations sometimes offer additional challenges because they come from less-than-ideal situations. Chances are good that their parents were not screened for inherited health or temperament problems, or that optimum pre-natal or post-natal care was provided for mama dog and her pups. Shelter and rescue puppies may have been taken from their mothers at too young an age for optimal emotional development. Veterinary attention may have been lacking prior to the pup's coming into the shelter or rescue group. Responsible shelters and rescue groups provide medical care, treatment for parasites, and vaccinations against infectious disease when appropriate; however, sometimes adopted puppies don't show signs of illness until they move to their new home.

Does this mean you shouldn't adopt a puppy from a shelter or rescue group? Not at all — many wonderful dogs grow from puppies who didn't have the best start in life. But you do need to be aware that even a young puppy has a history, and you may need to give her some extra care to make up for it.

Realize, too, that you can't always predict how the puppy you adopt will mature, especially if she's a mixed-breed. If you adopt a puppy, make sure you're ready to accept her as an adult, even if she's thirty pounds bigger and six inches shaggier than you expected.

Adult and Senior Dogs Are Already Emotionally Mature

Puppies turn into adolescents at lightning speed. That babyish furball you bring home will turn

all legs, ears, nose, and energy in another four months. Adolescence in dogs begins at six months and lasts until anywhere from eighteen months up to thirty-six months, depending on the breed. Small dogs tend to mature physically more quickly than big dogs do, but all dogs are quite immature mentally and emotionally until they are at least two or three years old. They continue to need training, lots of exercise, and ongoing socialization throughout this developmental period.

Adult and Senior Dogs Are Great for First-Time Dog Parents

If this is your first dog, or if you cannot devote the time necessary to train, socialize, and exercise a young or adolescent puppy properly, an adult dog could be a better option for you. If you're not sure, talk to people who are currently raising puppies or have done so recently to get a realistic picture of what it's like. If dealing with puppy pee on the carpet and needle-sharp teeth in your toes for months on end sounds like too much chaos for your taste, adopt an adult.

You Know What You're Getting with an Adult or Senior Dog

When you choose an adult dog, you have a pretty good idea what you're getting. You can see her physical traits and get some idea of her basic temperament, even though dogs in shelters and dogs newly in rescue foster homes may not always show their true personality right away. Still, with the guidelines we offer you later in this book, you can select a behaviorally sound dog who will improve and blossom once settled into your loving home.

Adult and Senior Dogs Will Love You as Much as a Puppy

If you are concerned that an older dog won't bond to you, don't be. Dogs are remarkably resilient and open-hearted. Some completely overcome their pasts in a matter of days; others may take a few weeks or months, and a few will carry a little baggage for even longer than that. Working with your adopted dog to help her overcome any hurdles necessary to enjoy her new life can be an incredibly rewarding experience — and result in a long-term, loving relationship.