

NEWS COPY

THE FIRST YEAR

It takes three months and 23 days to finally get the hang of things with a new pet, according to new research.

The survey of 2,000 American dog and cat owners revealed it takes the average respondent almost four months to get into the flow with a new, four-legged family member.

Eight in 10 respondents said the first year of pet ownership is the most important — but that doesn't mean it's easy: results found 64% believe the first year is also the most difficult.

Commissioned by [Royal Canin®](#) and conducted by OnePoll, the survey delved into the first year of pet ownership and the highs and lows that come with it.

One of the highs: 73% said they bonded more with their pet in the first year than in any other, and that was especially true for respondents who adopted a puppy or a kitten (79%).

For those who adopted a puppy or kitten, they were also the most likely to say they were “very prepared” for their new family member to arrive (43%).

But the first year also comes with a lot of tough decisions — with how to train their new pet coming out on top (46%) as the most important decision respondents have to make.

That was followed by questions about food: what kind of food to feed their pet (40%) and what kind of feeding schedule would be best for their pet (39%) rounded out the top three decisions.

Respondents also had questions about what tricks they should teach their pet (37%) and what rules their pet should have (35%).

For those who do give their pets “house rules” (48%), 62% said they ended up breaking them — and they only lasted an average of a month before being abandoned.

The power of puppy dog eyes is undeniable; while some respondents give in on their house rules, others have adopted a pet because they just couldn't say no.

Results revealed — of those who have fostered dogs or cats (43%) — six in 10 have “foster failed,” where they permanently adopted the pet they were fostering.

“The first year is vital to the healthy development of puppies and kittens,” said Dr. Jill Cline, pet nutritionist and site director of Royal Canin's Pet Health and Nutrition Center. “From understanding proper pet nutrition to scheduling a vet appointment to training and socialization, creating a healthy start will impact their health for the rest of their lives.”

Another big set of decisions for respondents revolved around veterinarians — a quarter of respondents said finding a good vet was one of the most important decisions within the first year, while 19% said knowing how often to take their pet to the vet was also important.

Sixty-nine percent of respondents said their vet became an invaluable resource within the first year of pet ownership.

And seven in 10 agreed that taking their pet to the vet sets them up for success later on.

“One of the most important things you can do for your new kitten or puppy is to establish a relationship with a veterinarian,” said Dr. Cline. “A veterinarian will help create a plan for your pet’s health in the early stages of life, including routine care, annual vaccines, tailored nutrition and provide advice for helping the new pet get comfortable in a new environment. The first vet visit also allows new pet owners to build a relationship with their veterinarian that will allow them to stay curious and informed about their pet’s health for years to come.”

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT DECISIONS IN THE FIRST YEAR OF PET OWNERSHIP?

- How to train my pet 46%
- What to feed my pet 40%
- What kind of feeding schedule my pet should be on 39%
- What tricks to teach my pet 37%
- What rules my pet should have 35%
- How often to feed my pet 34%
- What to name my pet 29%
- How to find a good veterinarian 25%
- How often my pet should be taken to the veterinarian 19%