The Conscientious Pet Owner’s Guide To Choosing The Right Veterinarian For Your Pet
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Introduction

Thank you very much for requesting this guide. We’re extremely grateful for the opportunity to provide you with information about keeping your pet healthy and helping you to choose the right veterinary practice for your pet.

Our names are Dr. Todd Prince and Dr. Tom Staudacher and we’re the owners and Chief Medical Officers of Naperville Animal Hospital. We’ve been veterinarians with a combined 50 years of experience, and in that time, we’ve learned that animal health is the subject of much confusion. In fact, pet owners have many misconceptions about animal healthcare providers, in terms of how often they should visit a vet, what vaccinations their pet really needs and if their pet even needs to see a veterinarian at all! So we’ve decided to offer this consumer education message to clear up these misconceptions. That way you know the questions you should be asking when you select a veterinary practice for your pet and can make an informed, intelligent decision.

In this guide, we will reveal seven costly misconceptions about veterinary practices and share seven common mistakes to avoid when choosing a veterinary practice for your pet. Plus we’ll give you twelve questions you MUST ask any veterinary practice BEFORE you visit with your pet and tell you the eleven things your veterinarian MUST recommend, perform and believe in. Finally, we’ll give you four recommendations on how to choose the right veterinarian for your pet.

Additionally, if you would like to speak to an animal healthcare professional immediately about any specific issue, please call our practice directly at 630-355-5300 and Dr. Prince, Dr. Staudacher or one of our other highly trained veterinarians or staff members will be delighted to help.

So let’s get started...

7 Costly Misconceptions About Veterinary Practices

As we said earlier, pet owners have many misconceptions about animal healthcare providers. This is partly due to the media and veterinarians not communicating properly with the pet owners in their area. The problem is that these misconceptions can end up costing you financially and have negative effects on your pet’s long-term health if you’re not aware of them. So here are seven costly misconceptions to which you should pay close attention:

1. Veterinary Practices Are Just For Emergencies and For Your “Pet’s Shots”

This is probably the biggest misconception and the one that has most veterinarians pulling their hair out! The fact is that dogs and cats are mammals – just like you and me. As a result, they share many common characteristics with humans such as four limbs, a spine, skin, eyes, ears, nose and throat, teeth, heart and lungs, liver and kidneys etc. In other words, they share all the same parts of the body with which we humans often have medical issues. They are also exposed to many of the same environmental factors such as breathing the same air, not getting enough exercise and, unfortunately, in some cases having a poor diet! Plus, to compound things further, your pets use their mouths for nearly everything, which puts them at greater risk for catching disease.
Now one can see why pets need healthcare just the same as we do. However, there are two big differences: first, veterinarians aren’t just your pets physician but also his or her specialist, dentist, nutritionist, psychiatrist, and when necessary his or her surgeon! Second, pets have a shorter life expectancy than humans so typically one year for your pet is comparable to five to seven years for a human. So just as you will visit your physician for an annual exam to assess the overall state of your health, your pet needs to be seen at least yearly to do the same.

2. **The Cheapest Quote Will Mean The Cheapest Visit**

   It is important to choose your veterinary practice based on the overall *quality* of the hospital rather than just price because after all, like most things in life, you tend to get what you pay for. But whether price is an issue or not, be sure to ask the right questions. You must know what is included within the service for which you have been quoted. For example, you may call three veterinary clinics and asked how much they charge to give your dog his or her ‘shots’. One of them quotes a fee that is $50 cheaper than the others, so you decide to go there. However, what they ‘forgot’ to mention is that the appointment fee was not included in their quote. Because of this, you actually end up spending more or the same as you would have at the other practices who already included this fee and offer a better level of service. This is just one example of many that we could give you.

3. **All Veterinary Practices Are The Same**

   You may not know this, but not all veterinary clinics and animal hospitals were created equally. In fact, different veterinary practices offer widely different levels of service, patient care, facilities, staffing levels, *expertise, veterinarian experience* and client experience. To use an analogy from the hotel world, a 1-star hotel and a 5-star hotel both offer hotel rooms but the experience, level of service, attention to detail, quality and friendliness of the staff will be entirely different between the two.

   Veterinary practices have been guilty in the past of not letting pet owners know what makes their practice different, so make sure you choose a practice that you are going to feel comfortable visiting. For example, is the building in a good state of repair? Is the reception area clean, comfortable and inviting? Is the staff courteous and friendly? Does the practice have state-of-the-art facilities, equipment and computer systems? *Are the doctors up-to-date with their continuing education?* Or do they even offer complimentary beverages while you wait? Is there a partner or owner on the premises at all times? Do they have a board certified veterinarian on their staff? Don’t assume you’ll get the same service you’re looking for from every animal hospital out there. Doing your homework now can save you and your pet a lot of unnecessary stress later.

4. **Cats Can Take Care Of Themselves**

   Unfortunately, this is not the case. In fact, cats can develop many of the same medical problems as dogs such as dental disease, parasites, weight problems, heart disease, and even arthritis. They are also prone to urinary, kidney, and thyroid problems and diabetes. However, the signs and symptoms of cat illness *are very hard to spot* and are often only spotted when
they are at an advanced stage, which is why you should have your cat examined annually by a veterinarian. You can visit the website http://catalystcouncil.org/ to find out more about keeping your cat healthy. We highly recommend this wonderful resource!

5. **Indoor Pets Cannot Get Fleas, Ticks, Lice, Heartworm or Intestinal Parasites**
   This is entirely untrue and a very dangerous misconception to believe. Heartworms are spread by mosquitoes, which can be found inside someone’s house as well as outdoors. Similarly, fleas, ticks and lice can enter a house via humans, other pets, by other animals and through opened windows or doors. It is critical to the long-term health of your pet to protect them against fleas (which can spread tapeworms), ticks (which can spread Lymes Disease, Ehrlichia and Anaplasmosis), lice, intestinal parasites (worms) and heartworm. Flea/tick/lice, intestinal parasite and heartworm related diseases are easy and inexpensive to prevent compared to the difficulty and expense to treat them.

6. **If You Spay or Neuter Your Dog, He or She Will Gain Weight**
   Dogs and other animals do not gain weight from getting spayed or neutered. Weight gain results from a poor diet and a lack of exercise. Having your pet spayed or neutered is one of the greatest gifts you can provide your pet and family. These procedures not only help control pet overpopulation, but may also prevent medical and behavioral problems from developing. This allows your pet to live a longer, healthier and happier life.

7. **Veterinary Care Is Expensive**
   While veterinary care is not always cheap, it is not expensive when compared to human healthcare. Consider this: veterinarians go through a more well-rounded training than doctors, as they are required to be familiar with more than just one kind of anatomy and animal species. In fact, most veterinarians are trained to perform orthopedic surgery, gynecological and obstetrical surgeries, intestinal surgeries, minor urologic surgery, oral surgeries, and even minor cardio-thoracic surgeries. The accumulation of skills in the last two years of veterinary school encompasses what many human doctors acquire after 3 or 5 years of post-doctoral residency. Veterinary Clinics usually carry more equipment than a physician’s office as well since they include operating suites, therapeutic lasers, ultrasound machines and other expensive pieces of equipment.

   **Veterinary clinics are extremely expensive to run and maintain yet are able to charge a fraction of what human medical institutions charge!** Please don’t let any misconception that veterinary prices are overly expensive stop you from taking your pet to a veterinarian. Unlike a visit to the hospital or doctor’s office, a good veterinary clinic will give you an estimate of the cost before your pet receives treatment. In all, it is important that you identify which clinics offer the best services, as simply finding the “cheapest” practice available could have significant negative health effects on your beloved pet and should be a “red flag.”
7 Mistakes To Avoid When Choosing A Veterinarian

Let us let you in on a little secret. Veterinary practices are not very good at telling you what makes them different and why you should specifically choose one over the other. You only have to look in the Yellow Pages to see that all of the advertisements for veterinary practices are virtually identical and provide you very little detail to make an informed decision. Because of the difficulty in deciding which veterinary practice to choose, this can result in pet owners making a mistake they later go on to regret. Here are seven common mistakes to avoid when choosing a veterinary practice:

1. Choosing a Veterinary Practice that cannot provide testimonials
   A good veterinary practice should have lots of happy clients who have been so delighted with the level of care their pet has received, and the level of service extended to them as clients, that they have provided a testimonial to acknowledge this. So when narrowing down your choices the first thing you should consider is to visit the veterinary practice’s website and see if they have any testimonials. Also take a look at the reviews from their clients on the website. How many reviews do they have? Hundreds? Maybe even thousands?? What percentage of their clients would refer back to them? These may be in the form of scanned ‘thank-you’ cards, written testimonials with photographs or possibly video testimonials from the actual clients themselves. If they do not have any testimonials or reviews on their website, then you should be asking yourself “why not?”

2. Not taking a tour of the practice before you join with your pet
   It is important to visit the clinic you are considering before making an appointment with your pet. Hopefully, the clinic you eventually choose will be your pet’s primary healthcare provider for many years to come; thus before making a decision, you should request a tour that way you can ask questions and familiarize yourself with the hospital while also ensuring that your pet is getting the best treatment available. Though there may be times of the day when a tour is not advisable, a good veterinary practice should be more than willing to give you a tour of their facility. If they are not willing to let you see what goes on behind the scenes, then you should be asking yourself “what do they have to hide?”

3. Choosing the cheapest service and not ‘comparing apples with apples’
   One of the biggest mistakes pet owners make is to call several clinics asking for a quote and then choosing the clinic with the cheapest price. In many cases, this is the clinic’s fault for not being clear on exactly what you will be getting for your money. **This is because the price you are quoted is not always for the same level of service, facilities and level of veterinary expertise in each case.** For example, if your dog needs a neuter or spay, then you may find some ‘cheap’ clinics offering these services at a price that is a fraction of what other clinics charge. However, for that ‘cheap’ price, they may be offering a minimum quality of care and not be providing items we would consider essential to the health and comfort of your pet such as pre-anesthetic blood work, pulse oximeter monitoring, blood pressure monitoring, EKG monitoring, CO2 monitoring, pain management (both during and after surgery), intubation (a way of preventing airway obstruction), safer anesthetics, or post-operative monitoring. **And is their anesthetic**
equipment and monitor equipment working well and regularly maintained? Many practices have outdated surgery and surgical monitoring equipment that has never been properly cared for. Would you want your pet operated on under those conditions?

Unless you have no choice, and we do understand that some people are in less fortunate financial situations, you should never focus on just the price when choosing your pet’s healthcare provider. Focus on comparing veterinary practices by the overall level of patient care and client experience and remember the practice offering the best value for the money is usually not the practice offering the cheapest prices!

4. Choosing the practice closest to home just because they’re the closest

Unless you do not have your own transport, convenience of location should not be the sole reason for choosing your pet’s healthcare provider. After all, it’s not as if you will be visiting your veterinarian several times a week so driving a few extra miles may be worth it to get the standard of care you want for your pet. Of course, if you have visited the practice closest to home, and they offer great patient care, great facilities and a great client experience, then consider yourself very lucky that you don’t have to look further afield!

5. Choosing the practice that only offers appointments

We live in a very busy society; for example, most Moms have a full-time job just shipping their kids back and forth between home, school, soccer practice, or wherever else it may be, so taking their pet to the veterinary clinic can be an unwanted and stressful time. This is especially so if their experience at their respective veterinary practice isn’t a good one. Because of this, it can be tempting to choose the veterinary practice that will only see you by appointment. Our practice works on a non-appointment system, which means we will see you whenever it is convenient for YOU and take as long as is necessary to properly treat and care for you and your pet. Come in when you’re ready and we’ll be ready for you! There is no clock ticking while you’re in our office. We work strictly on YOUR schedule; our main concern is your pet – not getting to the next scheduled appointment. Of course if you would like to schedule an appointment, we will be most happy to accommodate you!

6. Waiting until your pet is sick before choosing a vet

The worst time to look for a vet is when you really need one, so your safest option is to plan ahead. You can save valuable, and sometimes life-saving, time if your pet is already known to the practice when they become sick. Remember, just like when you visit a human doctor, your veterinarian may need to know your pet’s medical history to help diagnose the problem and determine the correct and safe treatment. Waiting until your pet is sick to bring him or her in will not only delay treatment but could result in you choosing the wrong veterinarian for your pet. Also, by choosing the right vet ahead of time, you may actually prevent your pet from getting sick in the first place! Our practice additionally has an after hours emergency doctor on call so there’s no need to go elsewhere if your pet has a problem during irregular business hours. We’re here when you need us.
7. **Not asking the right questions before you visit with your pet**

In our experience, most pet owners consider their pet as an extension of their family – their ‘furry four-legged child!’ Additionally, our pets give their love unconditionally and deserve to have such high status in return. So when choosing the healthcare provider for your pet, doesn’t it make sense to be as choosy as you would be in choosing the best pediatrician or orthodontist for your child? Ask the veterinarian you’re considering to tell you about the most recent continuing education seminar they’ve been to. If it’s been longer than 6 months since they’ve updated their veterinary knowledge RUN! You need to ask questions in order to have all the information you need to compare the practices you are considering. To help you out, we have included a list of questions to ask within this guide.

**12 Questions You MUST Ask Any Veterinary Practice BEFORE You Visit With Your Pet**

As we’ve just said, one of the biggest mistakes you can make is not asking the right questions. So here are twelve questions you should ask any veterinary practice before considering the long-term healthcare provider of your pet:

1. Do you have any testimonials you can show me?
2. Can I come in without an appointment?
3. Does your practice offer a FREE microchip to all new patients?
4. Do you have a staff veterinarian (emergency doctor) on call after hours?
5. Do you have special Cat Friendly areas just for cats?
6. Do you have a Board Certified Dog/Cat specialist on staff?
7. How many veterinarians are in the practice?
8. How much Continuing Education do your Veterinarians attend each year?
9. Are X-rays, ultrasound, bloodwork, EKG, MRI/CT and other diagnostics done in-house or referred to another practice?
10. Do you offer boarding and grooming services at your facility?
11. Do you have staff on premises overnight to monitor in house hospitalized and boarding patients?
12. Do you offer discounted Preventative Care Plans?

**11 Things Your Veterinarian MUST Recommend, Perform and Believe In**

Beware of veterinary practices that provide a limited service just so they can offer discounted prices or those who prescribe unnecessary treatments that your pet may not need. A good veterinary practice should always have the health and wellbeing of your pet as their number one concern but also respect that you, the owner, are the one paying the bill! As we said in the previous section, one of the questions you should ask a prospective healthcare provider for your pet is what they recommend, perform and believe in. To help you compare, here are eleven things we believe a good veterinary practice must recommend, perform and believe for your pet to have the longest, healthiest and happiest life possible:
1. Regularly Scheduled Exams
   The reason that you go for an annual exam is because even though your pet might be looking great on the outside there can be underlying things going on that can only be found by having a visit with a veterinarian along with a physical examination. Frequent exams are even more important for pets than people since it can sometimes be difficult for pets to tell us if they are not feeling well. A visit to your veterinarian gives them the chance to identify small problems before they become big ones and put your mind at ease.

2. Spay / Neuter
   Pet overpopulation is a big problem in the United States, so unless your pet competes in shows or is used for pedigree breeding there is no reason not to have him or her spayed or neutered. In fact, did you know that surgically altered pets have been found to have fewer medical problems and live longer, healthier lives than those who are not? For instance, female dogs and cats, spayed before their first heat cycle, almost never get breast cancer! In addition, behavior is generally improved by spaying and neutering, and despite what you may have heard, spaying and neutering will not cause your pet to get fat or lazy.

3. Microchipping
   Did you know that getting lost is the #1 cause of death for pets? Microchipping your pet(s) provides peace of mind and the best chance to come home. Because it is implanted into your pet, a microchip is much more reliable than a collar and tag as there is no chance it will fall off. You should know that a microchip does not hurt your pet and does not require surgery. It is a one-time insertion, very much like a vaccine injection. It is designed to stay in the location where it was inserted. Then, if your pet ever does get lost, any scanner should be able to retrieve your pet’s specific identification number. A Microchip provides the best chance for a happy homecoming. That is why we provide a free Microchip to all new pets that come through our doors! It’s our way of contributing to overall pet safety and wellness.

4. Parasite Control
   It is essential that your pet be protected against parasites because not only can they be fatal but some parasites can also transmit diseases that are infectious to humans. Your veterinarian must recommend and offer protection for your pet against both Internal Parasites (heartworms, intestinal worms) and External Parasites (fleas and ticks). Fleas (Tapeworms) and ticks (Erlchia, Anaplasma, Lymes disease) can transmit a number of serious diseases so prevention is the best medicine. Remember when you protect your pets against parasites you’re also protecting your kids! Indoor dogs and cats need protection just as much as outdoor pets.

5. Vaccinations
   Vaccinations are widely recognized as being critical to protecting our dogs and cats from life-threatening infectious disease. However, some vaccines do not need to be taken annually and, despite their benefits, vaccines can have adverse side effects and therefore must be chosen carefully. For this reason, vaccine recommendations should be designed with the risk factors and life style of each individual pet.
6. **Nutritional Counseling**  
Over half the dogs and cats in the USA are either overweight or obese, thus it is important to get the correct advice on what you should be feeding your pet – taking into account what’s appropriate to his or her age, medical condition and lifestyle. A good veterinary practice will offer nutritional counseling for your pet so that you can ensure he or she has a proper, healthy diet.

7. **Routine Blood Screening**  
Some illnesses can stay hidden and undetectable without blood testing so properly timed and carefully chosen laboratory testing is important. For example, pre-surgical blood tests before any anesthetic procedure/surgery and *screening tests at every wellness examination after 7 yrs of age* can help identify problems early and save you expense and heartache later.

8. **Preventative Care Plans**  
Preventative Care Plans are your pets and your best friend. These plans include everything your Pet needs during the course of the year and are custom tailored for the life stage of your pet, all at a significant discount. If your pet is enrolled, you will also be eligible for discounts on most other services our hospital offers, like diagnostic tests, x-rays, surgery, boarding and grooming. It’s a win-win for YOU and your pet! In addition, you NEVER have to pay an office visit fee! Please feel free to visit our website at [www.napervilleanimalhospital.com](http://www.napervilleanimalhospital.com) for further details about these life-saving plans.

9. **24 Hours A Day Emergency Veterinary Care**  
Pets tend to have an unfortunate habit of choosing a time outside of normal business hours to have a medical emergency! Therefore, it is vital that the veterinary practice you choose offers access to veterinary care 24 hours/7 days a week and is not sending you elsewhere for this vital service.

10. **Communication / Education**  
A good veterinary practice understands that information must be provided to clients in a way they understand and ensure that clients aren’t leaving the exam room confused or with unanswered questions. After all, how can you make decisions about the health of your pet if you do not understand the entire scope of what’s going on? A good veterinary practice should also provide you with the information you need to care of your pet. This means keeping you up-to-date with useful and important information beyond the regular annual appointment for your pet. Make sure you veterinary practice also offers you an on-line pet portal, so that you can see your pet’s medical records right from the convenience of your computer or smart-phone.

11. **Respect for your Time and Wallet**  
Good veterinary care isn’t always cheap but a good veterinary practice should provide estimates for any service they provide and have payment options that will help you get the treatment your pet needs while maintaining a respect for your finances. A good practice should also respect your time so that visits to the office run promptly and you are never left waiting for too long.
However we also ask you to recognize that medical and surgical cases can be time consuming to work up and treat, and great care and service take time, so always allow ample time when you plan to come in! A veterinary hospital is MUCH different than a fast food restaurant! Your veterinarian should also be able to offer you several options for treatment, as there are typically several different ways to handle one problem.

4 Recommendations For Choosing The Right Veterinary Practice For Your Pet

1. **Do your research.**
   
   Look at the websites of each practice and see if they can provide testimonials and reviews from their clients (preferably video testimonials) to prove they are who they say they are. If they can’t keep their existing clients happy, then why would you fare any better?

2. **Ask questions!**
   
   Unless you move out of the area, you should be looking to find a veterinary practice that will be the long-term healthcare provider for your pet. You do not want to enter into a long-term relationship without being sure that the practice you choose can meet your needs so ask questions. Ask them what they recommend, perform and believe in. They should be willing and happy to answer all of your questions.

3. **Visit the practice.**
   
   Ask for a tour of the practice before you make an appointment for your pet. Is the staff friendly? Do they make you wait long? Is the practice clean and organized? Is it easy to park? If you don’t feel comfortable when you visit without your pet, how do you think you will feel when you visit with your pet?

4. **Plan your first visit.**
   
   Once you think you have found the right veterinary practice, stop by to visit with your pet and see if the process is as seamless as it should be. Is the staff as friendly on the telephone as they were in the practice? _Get the names, phone numbers and email addresses of the practice owners and manager that way if you have any future concerns you can go to them directly and get your questions answered by someone in charge, not just a salaried employee._

By following these four recommendations, you’ll gain all the information you need to make an informed, intelligent decision. If you are just looking for the cheapest care possible, then we are probably not a good fit for you and there are other veterinary hospitals that can help you.

But if you want first-class care for your pet and an exceptional client experience, then we invite you to call us and arrange a tour of our practice.

We’ll be happy to answer your questions without obligation of any kind. To reach us, call 630-355-5300 and ask to speak directly to Dr. Prince, Dr. Staudacher or our office manager, Leslie. If they are not immediately available, please leave a message and one of us will call you back promptly.
Thank you very much for reading and listening. We hope you found this veterinary consumer message helpful. If you have questions or comments, or if you’d like to schedule a free practice tour, please call us at 630-355-5300.

On behalf of everyone at Naperville Animal Hospital -- We thank you for your kind attention.

Dr. Todd Prince, Diplomate ABVP
Dr. Tom Staudacher
Leslie Shibovich
Naperville Animal Hospital
Since 1989

Check out our website at napervilleanimalhospital.com for our new client offers.

Naperville Animal Hospital
1023 E. Ogden Ave
Naperville IL 60563
Tel: (630) 355-5300
Fax: (630) 355-5391
Email: napervilleanimalhospital@gmail.com
Website: www.napervilleanimalhospital.com