



I want to be a vet!

Club vet Sean Wensley answers your questions about being a vet.

What does a vet do?

Vets do lots of different things! Vets in practice work mostly with companion animals (pets, including horses) and farmed animals. Some work with zoo animals or wildlife. Practising vets help to **prevent disease** (e.g. by vaccinating animals) and they treat sick and injured animals. Other vets work with animals in research establishments, some work with the army or for the Government, while others work at universities, for charities (like PDSA), and abroad. Wherever they work, the number one priority for vets is to ensure the highest possible standards of **animal welfare**.

Do I need to be brainy to be a vet?

Doing a vet degree means that you have to take in a lot of information quite quickly. It is **competitive** to get on to the degree course and the entry requirements are quite **high**; generally, the vet schools require As and Bs at GCSE and A level, especially in science subjects, but you should look at the individual prospectuses to find out exactly what is needed.

Do I need to study for years?

The veterinary degree course is **5 years long**, or 6 years at Cambridge. Many vets also choose to continue studying when they have qualified.

Do vets work long hours?

Veterinary students spend long hours **studying** and must also spend a lot of their holidays gaining hands-on experience by doing a variety of **placements**. Vets in practice don't tend to work 9 – 5 and many are on a rota for out-of-hours work (emergencies).

What is the difference between a PDSA vet and a private practice vet?

There's no difference between a PDSA vet and a private practice vet; they just work for different **employers**. To practise as a vet, you must be a Member of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (MRCVS) which you are entitled to become when you pass your **veterinary degree**. Vets working in private practice are employed by a practice, which gets its income from owners who pay for their animals' medical care. Vets working for PDSA are employed by the charity, which gets its income from charity stores and kind supporters who fundraise for us, including **Pet Protectors!**

What does a typical day involve?

A practising vet usually starts at 8.30am by checking on the animals that are hospitalised and deciding if they need any changes to their treatment. Then morning **consultations** begin. We **vaccinate** animals to protect them against deadly diseases and treat them to prevent infections with parasites such as fleas and worms. We also see animals that have come in sick or injured, and deal with **emergencies** — animals that have been hit by a car, for example. Then **operations** begin; common ones include neutering (spaying and castrating), dental work, repairing wounds and removing tumours.



What other skills do you need to be a vet?

Top of the list is a concern for animals and their welfare. But **communication** is important, too. People think of being a vet as an animal job, but most animals that you deal with have an owner! You have to enjoy interacting with people, and be tolerant, patient and demonstrate **empathy**.

What is your favourite part of your job?


I enjoy being able to give **advice** that improves the health and happiness of our animals. I also like the challenge of dealing with lots of things going on at once, and I like how varied each day is.

What is your least favourite part?

It is frustrating treating conditions that could easily have been **prevented**. For example, we see lots of problems with pet obesity, where the owner has given their pet too many unhealthy treats and not enough exercise. The owners are trying to show their pets that they love them, but in fact they are killing them with kindness. Another example is dental disease in rabbits, caused by not feeding them enough hay or grass. It is important that these sick pets are able to get the treatment that they need from vets, but also that owners are **educated** about preventing these conditions in the first place. This is why I like working for PDSA, because the charity treats pets but also runs large awareness-raising campaigns.

How can I get work experience?

As well as getting the required grades, to get a place at vet school you also need to have done a variety of **work experience**. This is to show that you are comfortable working around animals in different settings (e.g. riding stables, farms, rehoming centres etc.) and will be able to cope with the practical aspects of the course. The best way to get this experience is simply to make contact with various places that keep and look after animals in your area. Explain that you are planning to apply to vet school and be willing and keen. It is good to get a variety of different types of **placements** if possible, as this will look good on your application form. If you get a placement, you might be asked to do lots of basic jobs (e.g. mucking out stables), but in return you will get great first-hand experience of working with animals. Be polite but don't be afraid to ask **questions** to help you understand what you are seeing or being asked to do.



For further information on becoming a vet, visit the Veterinary Careers pages in the Visitors section of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons website, www.rcvs.org.uk.

