Fishkeeping Tips and Things to Consider

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The most common cause for fish illness, is stress. Causes of stress include the wrong environment, food or tankmates. Having a healthy tank is easy, there are just a few things you should consider: Firstly the tank. The tank you choose will dictate the location you keep it, the equipment you will need, and the fish you can keep in it. The first thing is, the tank needs to be in a good location, preferably in a stable place where it won’t get knocked, which is free from draughts and direct sunlight. It also needs to be of a suitable size to accommodate the fish you are intending to keep. If you choose a small aquarium (anything under 20 gallons) only small fish are suitable, unless you are willing to buy larger a aquarium as your pets grow. Suitable equipment for the size of the tank and the fish is also important. Heaters & filters need to be the correct size to keep the volume of water in the correct condition. Large bodied fish (eg. Goldfish) produce a higher volume of waste and will require a higher level of filtration to keep the water clean and free of waste. Large bodied fish also require a higher volume of water each than slim bodied fish. Goldfish and other large fish like Oscars should have at least 8-10 gallons each to grow to their full potential. **Tank décor is also an important thing to consider, it does more than make the tank look nice, it provides hiding places and cover for the tank inhabitants.** Décor is very important, you need to provide suitable hiding places for the fish that require them, open swimming space, a suitable substrate - sharp gravel is no good for fish that spend time on the bottom of the tank, or for plants that you wish to grow. There are many types of substrate available, choose a suitable one for the fish that you intend to keep. Plants are an important part of fishkeeping. Fish and plants compliment each other in a few very important ways. Plants provide shade, shelter and food for some fish. Well lit plants release oxygen which fish need and require carbon dioxide in return which fish release. Also plants use nitrogenous waste from fish, as nutrients for their own growth, thus helping prevent a buildup of toxic nitrogen in the aquarium. There are many types of plants available that are suitable for different water types, many are very easy to grow and require little or no extra attention. Plastic plants are great for providing extra cover if you do not wish to have a fully planted tank, but they will not use up any of the nutrients that will otherwise be used by algae, so some live ones should be included too. **Maintenance - small amounts of regular maintenance are better for the fish and for you.** In Nature the fish we keep live in rivers and lakes that are open ecosystems, in other words, they are constantly cleansed by fresh water flowing through them and removing waste products. Also the population density in a river or lake is nowhere near that which occurs in an aquarium, so the build up of waste products is far less of a problem. An aquarium is a closed ecosystem, so in order to maintain a healthy environment we must attempt to duplicate the natural dispersal of waste products as much as possible. In a new tank especially, you should test your tank water regularly to monitor the quality - easy to use liquid test kits are available which measure hardness, pH, nitrite and nitrate (also your local fish shop should also be able to test for you if you are unsure). It should not take more than 15-20 minutes each week to keep your tank looking perfect. You should change 10% of the tank volume every week or 25% every 2 weeks - use a gravel siphon to remove debris from the gravel and replace it with fresh dechlorinated water at the same temperature to avoid shocking your fish. Only use water from the cold tap for your tank, as water coming out of the hot tap may contain high levels of copper from the pipes, it can be warmed by adding boiled water. Also remove any algae from the glass with a clean scourer - use a scourer made for the material your tank is

manufactured from - glass or acrylic and one that has not been used for the dishes! You should also rinse out the debris collected in the filter sponges in the water you have just removed from the tank. **Varied diet - this is as important for your fish as it is for humans. Feeding the same food all the time leads to deficiencies that can cause ill health.** You should feed your fish a good quality flake or pellet food as the main part of their diet, this should be regularly supplemented with fresh food such as bloodworm, daphnia or brineshrimp, which are available frozen and live. Many fish will also eat many types of vegetables, such as peas and sweetcorn (which should be squeezed out of the skin as it is indigestible) tomato, lettuce (not iceberg, as this is also indigestible), courgette, carrots and potato are also good, but should be either boiled for a few seconds to soften slightly or frozen, then defrosted, which will do the same thing. You can grow some live food yourself in your garden by putting a plastic bucket or bin out to collect rain water, in a couple of weeks you will get daphnia living in it, and in the warmer weather, mosquito larvae, which you can collect with a fine mesh net. Feed your fish what they can eat in about 2-3 minutes, to give you an idea, fishes stomachs are about the same size as their eyes. Small fish do better being fed small amounts a couple of times a day, larger fish can be fed more in one go, but should be fed less often. Very large fish should only be fed once every few days! You should not overfeed your fish, as this can cause digestion problems, and will just pollute your tank with uneaten food or excess waste. Most fish will also benefit from not being fed once every couple of weeks. **Compatible tank mates. If your little neons think that a big fish is going to eat them, they will become stressed and ill regardless of how well you look after them.** Keep small fish with small fish, and big aggressive fish either on their own or with other big aggressive fish, as a general rule, if one fish can get another into its mouth - it will! There are always exceptions to the rules, it is possible to end up with a placid specimen of a usually aggressive fish, it is equally possibly to get a particularly aggressive specimen of a fish that are usually placid. Most fish are sold as juveniles and as such will not be displaying their adult behaviour which can be very different. It is beneficial for young fish to stick together in the wild to find food and shelter but when they become adults, many fish will require their own territory and some can be quite vicious in defending it. Shoaling fish, like tetras and barbs, should be kept in groups of at least 5-6 to allow them to behave in a natural way. Tiger Barbs especially can do damage to other fish if they are not kept in a big enough group. You should spend a few minutes at least each day observing your pets, to make sure they are all alive and are well. If you suspect any of them are not, you should check all equipment is working, test the water and perform a partial water change. Use medication only when a specific illness can be identified. **Early signs to watch for include:** Behavioral changes in your fish Fish who are gasping at the surface Fish who appear sluggish, or resting on the bottom Fish who lose their appetite **Visual symptoms of declining water quality:** Clamped fins ‘Flashing’ (flicking or rubbing against objects) Finrot - this needs immediate treatment, the fish will die if fin rots all the way to the body. Popeye - caused by bacteria increasing the amount of fluid behind the eye. Swollen and/or discoloration in their gills (healthy gills should look bright red, like fresh meat) Redness or streaks of blood at the base of their fins or flowing through their fins **Information you should volunteer to staff when buying new fish, to help you make the best choices**: The size of your tank The types of fish present in your tank The pH and condition of your water (which can affect the suitability of some fish) **Questions you should ask when buying new fish:- How big does it grow?** This is important to make you can provide a suitable home for your new pet for it’s whole life. Fish shops are full of unwanted fish that have grown too large. Make sure you have a large enough tank for your fish to grow, fish do not stay to the size of the tank, however their growth can be stunted which will shorten their lives unnecessarily. **Is my tank going to provide a suitable home?** Consider your décor, do you have enough hiding places, or open space for swimming, is the substrate suitable? Do you have enough plants, or will the fish you want eat or uproot your carefully planted aquascape? Is the temperature range acceptable? **Is it compatible with my existing fish?** You do not want to waste money buying

new fish that will either eat your existing fish or anything that will be bullied or eaten as soon as they go into the tank. Investigate the fish you want before you get them. **What does it eat?** Some fish eat only plants or algae, some eat insects, some will eat whatever you put in the tank including other fish! Make sure you are aware of the dietary requirements to ensure you can look after it properly. **How many should I have in my tank?** Some fish like to live in groups, and will not do very well on their own, some fish will live happily will other fish but will not tolerate the presence of their own kind. Some fish will not tolerate the presence of any other types of fish, and some are best kept completely on their own. **Fish deserve to be cared for as well as any other animal, they are not ‘disposable’ pets. To have a fish die through ignorance of it’s needs is as inhumane as if it were a cat or a dog. There are many books and websites full of information - a little research will avoid a lot of potential problems, and a lot of stress, for you and your pets.**