

100 Survival Tips for New Graduates



1. Be nice to your nurses and use them if you are unsure - they will probably have more experience than you and will be able to point you in the right direction.
2. Find an activity out of work that you enjoy - it will help you de-stress and meet people if you are going to a new area.
3. If you are struggling - talk to someone.
4. You aren't going to know everything - use books and ask the other vets in practice. If you are unsure - say to the owner I haven't seen this before, do you mind if I get a second opinion from another vet?
5. Admit mistakes - you are only human and mistakes are made.
6. You aren't going to fix everything.
7. Things don't always go as planned.
8. If you aren't getting the support you feel you need initially then bring it up with the manager/owner.
9. Be honest about your abilities.
10. Your job will be stressful- managing client expectations of demand whilst working with uninsured patients and frequent suboptimal outcomes. This does get easier if you manage it well, but find a way to manage it well or the stress will become dangerously cumulative.
11. Remember it is not your fault that the animal is sick/ become injured/ uninsured/ doesn't respond to a medication/ licks its wound! Don't take liability for something and remind clients that they have come to you for your help not a guarantee of improvement.
12. Don't be shy in asking to perform lots of routine surgery- you won't become proficient unless you embark on a steep learning curve.
13. [Out of hours is a great way to learn and see interesting cases, but only do it if you're fully backed up and supported.]

14. You will get it wrong- frequently- this is normal (initially!). [It's the best way to learn, so learn effectively and move on, rather than harmful ruminating].
15. Don't get bullied into doing the extra on call/ weekend duty/ staying late, being less experienced doesn't equate to more rough duty. Don't fall for the line of "we all had to do it", they were stupid to let it happen to them, don't let it happen to you.
16. Get a signed contract before day one and be fully familiar with your expected duties and remuneration package.
17. If you learn from a bad vet you will become a bad vet- recognise [who has good clinical skills] and gets good results and take their advice, [not the steroid and antibiotic loving] vet with a high hit rate on euthanasia. [The best vet may not always be the clients' favourite!]
18. If you don't know, don't be afraid to say so. A client will always appreciate you reaching for a textbook in a consult to check information rather than making your best guess.
19. Make sure you have VDS cover and call them if you have any concerns.
20. Consider carefully accepting sole charge. You may not be ready until 2 or 3 years into your career.
21. If an experienced nurse questions a dose/method of application - look in a book, don't assume you are right. [Swallow your pride; your vet degree doesn't equate to years of clinical and practical experience]
22. Dog and cat vaccines are different, use the right one.
23. It is not always your fault if something dies so let it go. If it is don't make the same errors again and accept we do make mistakes.
24. Randomly buy nice food for the nurses, wash up, tidy away your own mess and they will always have your back - someone else will get the difficult clients, they will catch more of your errors and your coffee will be continuous.
25. Under promise and over deliver - clients and employers will love you.
26. Remove all sharps from surgery kits before handing them to nurses to clean. You will owe them cake if not; this a little known H&S law..... made by Alison Clark!
27. Sometimes clients do not want your treatment options, they want antibiotics. It is OK to tell them no.
28. None of us know what we are doing in life; we are all flying by the seat of our pants, so you are not alone.

29. Be prepared to feel awkward, in the way, out of your depth - it is normal and won't last longer than a few weeks (repeat for each new job).
30. Books are for reading - if you don't know look it up. Part of your job is to know where to find information, not have it all stored in your head.
31. Dr Google is a thing. We all hate him. [But have a few vet-approved, trustworthy websites you can point clients to. Engage with their internet use and guide them appropriately].
32. Don't be afraid to ask anyone for help... [use others experience to make up for your lack of it. And don't apologise for lack of experience – there's no way around it and we were all there once.]
33. If you can't hit a vein ask a nurse!
34. If you are not busy ask other vets/nurses if they need a hand with anything.
35. Don't leave a mess in your tracks, tidy up after yourself. That includes your coffee cup. There is no Practice Fairy.
36. Keep the nurses on your side, you will need them more often than you think.
37. Remember the positive things that happen in your day, it's too easy to dwell on the negatives
38. [You ARE worth your salary (and more!). You're highly committed, trained and skilled. Yes you have a long way to go to professional development, but you've already come so far and you deserve that pay cheque!]
39. Expect to have bad days... when you can't find a cat's uterus etc. ...it is normal and don't let it get you down we all still have days like that even 30 years later.
40. You cannot know everything so ask for help and advice whenever you not sure. Don't feel like you being a pest...always better to ask first than muddle through. We all expect new grads to need help.
41. If in doubt see an animal back the next day ... even if only to put your mind at rest (speak to the boss and check its ok not to charge for occasional visit like this it is just for your benefit).
42. Be confident with clients don't be afraid to say you not sure what is going on and need second opinion then take them out the back and get help... Remember you still know more than the client don't let them bully you; you are the professional.
43. Your clients are people; be interested in them ... how they keeping ... weather etc. so they get to know you and you get to know them. It is important to look after not just their animal but your client also.... have a laugh with them if you can... it's important that they like you for you to gain their trust and confidence... share little anecdotes if you can or things that have happened to you that link with what's happening to them.

44. Get to know the staff socialise with them if you can and make sure you have friends/ family that you can spend time with.
45. Try and do stuff locally to get to know people. Don't rely solely on social media for your friendships. It can be a lonely life.
46. Sleep lots ... you will get used to this job but it is very tiring to start with ... it will get better.
47. Eat well. Biscuits are great, but you're setting yourself up for an insulin crash half way through afternoon consults. Drink plenty of water (if possible have a water bottle by your side and sip between consults), and eat low GI, hi protein breakfast and lunch.
48. Remember communication is the answer to everything... don't make things complicated for your clients keep it simple and concise don't overcomplicate things.
49. Make sure they have a clear idea of your plan but don't give them too much they can't take it in. [Trusted web resources are good to point them to].
50. If an animal is [difficult to handle] because of stress [or pain, get consent to] treat it first, then discuss everything fully with them afterwards.
51. Do not give an animal out straight away after it has been in the Surgery for an operation, hospitalised etc. Sit them down in the Consult Room, explain everything and back it up with written instructions. If you bring the animal through AND try and explain, they are obviously so pleased to see it. THEY WILL NOT LISTEN and take in information.
52. Tell people what you have given and how this will help in treatment.
53. Do not assume that an owner knows how to put eye drops in, ear drops, Spot-ons. Creams. [Demonstrate it to them]
54. [If you're ambulatory, always reverse in so you can drive straight out. Nothing worse than a bad visit, then backing into the owner/farmer's car.]
55. Go home when it's time to go home whenever possible. [Book time the next day to report bloods etc., don't do it all before you go unless there is a genuine urgency.]
56. Learn time management skills - don't leave things to the last minute.
57. Clean up after yourself and the nurses will love you for it.
58. Remember everyone at work is part of the same team and you are an important but small part in the way the practice runs.
59. Do your share of tea making.
60. Do the basics well and remember the logical way to work cases up.
61. Don't think you should know everything - that's what books are for.

62. Be nice to clients and enjoy the consulting time - you can learn a lot about normal life from clients' own experiences - I was told a story by an ex SAS man about falling through the jungles of Belize and being impaled on a tree when his parachute failed. [Learn to enjoy working with and listening to clients if you want to enjoy your career]
63. [Book a holiday / time off 3 months after your start date. You really will need it!]
64. Remember to stay in touch with your friends at college and talk openly and regularly with them about your experiences. Not just one-up-man-ship!
65. Make friends with the nurses and treat them as equals, they will cover your back and help you in all sorts of ways.
66. Remember you can't be right/perfect all the time and if you don't know the answer tell the client but explain to them how/who you are going to talk to, to find out, they will respect your honesty and feel you care about their pet.
67. Talk to your vet colleagues at work and discuss cases, they should be happy to support you, if not, you're in the wrong practice!
68. Remember the adages, 'common things are common' and 'if it looks like a duck and quacks like a duck, it's a duck', most things you see in practice are frequent, eliminate the common causes first before going for the more obscure.
69. Remember at the beginning of a consultation to introduce yourself and ask how you can help, then SHUT UP! Let your client speak until they've finished, you'll pick up much more information and you'll get a reputation of caring and listening. Also, if the client has an idea what their pet is suffering from don't dismiss it!
70. Try and become an integral part of the practice, socialise, offer to swap shifts when someone asks. You're more likely to get better support both professionally and personally if you do this.
71. Don't try and be invincible, it is hard work, you need to take holidays and cut yourself some slack. The first couple of years will knock your confidence at times, make you feel like you can't do anything right, get you tired to the point of exhaustion but remember all the training you've done and cut your-self some slack, have early nights, eat well, meet up with friends and try and find friends outside the veterinary practice for some perspective.
72. If you feel isolated or unsure call the Vetlife, don't wait. They can help in all sorts of ways if only to allow you to talk things through and doing this often makes the problem seem more manageable. The VDS are also very good for a conversation if you're struggling with a case. Call them sooner rather than later. Speak to your new grad friends or colleagues through BVA Young Vets. Chances are they will have had a similar issue and can talk through.
73. Remember it gets better and we've all been there. Try and keep a personal record of all the good things that have happened each day and give yourself a mental pat on the back and when you're having a bad day, read the diary back. And at the end of it all there's always chocolate cake!!

74. Biscuits and Tea are vital.
75. Be kind to one another.
76. Talk about problems and insecurities.
77. Admit mistakes and apologise to one another if needed.
78. Do as you would be done by.
79. [If you're not happy; move on. You don't 'owe' a bad practice your loyalty. And don't worry about your CV looking bad – as long as you can justify why you left to a new employer, they won't look badly on your leaving a practice after a few months.]
80. [Find your passion and grow and develop that area.]
81. Make sure all prescriptions are checked by AN Other.
82. Always check the records before calling clients in for consults. This way you are less likely to miss warnings like 'can bite' or 'has needle phobia'. It also means you will get the sex of the patient right and not get the name wrong. Clients notice these things!
83. Aim to recheck your own cases and don't book things in for other people. [If you're unsure ask a colleague to discuss/see the case with you at follow up.]
84. There will be many things you haven't done yet, but far better to try and plan them on a day where you can assist another vet so you get good hands on experience; it goes down far better with bosses too!!
85. Follow protocols, they are there for good reason. If you don't understand something then just ask. Better to ask and discuss it than to ignore it and get something wrong or miss out on giving a good idea to improve a protocol.
86. Don't expect to be able to do everything and don't beat yourself up when you get frustrated about cases / clients.
87. Talk to your fellow vets, nurses and receptionists. You can learn something from everyone
88. Keep a diary / journal and write down 3 good things that happen every day. It is so easy to get distracted by negative experiences / situations.
89. Create a set of year one goals (professional and personal) and work out how you are going to achieve these goals. Without goal setting you won't realise what you have achieved especially in the early months.
90. Do as much as you can in front of the clients and tell them what you are doing and why.

91. Try and have fun. Days can be long in practice and you need to pace yourself. [A sense of humour will get you a long way].
92. Plan time out of work and catch up with friends.
93. Having time off and holidays planned or other things to look forward to are great motivators.
94. LIFE - WORK balance!!! Not the other way around
95. [You and the client have to work together as a team. You're relying on them to follow through your treatment plan, so they need to understand why they are giving it and how]
96. If you don't know something then admit it. [Don't bluff!]. Clients would rather you checked e.g. drug doses or contra-indications, and avoid wrongly dosing their beloved pet.
97. [If your treatment hasn't worked often the client will blame you. don't assume they've administered it correctly. Ask the last time they gave the treatment, and how well the animal took it. Compatibility is as low as 20% and on closer questioning you can often discover your treatment hasn't worked because it's still in the foil packet! You need to reconnect with the client and figure out why and how you can work together to give the treatment as prescribed.]
98. Health and safety is there for very good reasons. Follow the guidelines and protocols and this will keep you right.
99. Type up comprehensive notes at the time of the consultation. Carry a little book for your to-do's! Record useful tips, doses, etc.
100. Ten minute consultations are not long enough. Think about what you have to achieve in this:
- Meet and Greet the client (even getting them into the room if they're infirm can take a few minutes)
 - Carry out a mental risk assessment [kids with hands in your sharps drawer!].]
 - Meet the animal.
 - Assess the temperament of the animal for your own safety and welfare and the animals comfort.
 - Take a history.
 - Examination.
 - [Differential] diagnoses.
 - Investigation/treatment options
 - Cost.
 - Agree tests/treatment.
 - Schedule further appointments.
 - Prescribe drugs.
 - Write up notes.
 - Say Goodbye.

There will be inevitable delays, make sure receptionists are aware that you are a new graduate and book appointments accordingly.

I have gathered the above from a selection of experienced Vets and Nurses. Please note, they are **views and opinions only**. I would like to thank everyone for their contribution, it is very much appreciated and I really hope this advice helps you. I wish you all a very long and successful career in Veterinary medicine.

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