

General Dog Care

BEHAVIOR

All dogs are descended from their wild cousin, the wolf, and share many traits seen in wolves. Dogs, and puppies in particular, are denning creatures and feel more secure in small, snug areas with low roofs, thus the success of the training crate.

Dogs are pack animals and do not enjoy being alone. Puppies who stay with their litters until eight weeks old easily will become members of human packs/families. Each pack needs a leader. Ideally all human family members should be ahead of the dog in the pack order. Your dog should not be the leader, as this can result in aggression or other dominance displays.

Before You Bring Your Dog Home

You will need food, water and food bowls, leash, collar, training crate, brush, comb and canine chew toys.

Cleaning Up

Keep your dog on a leash when you are outside, unless in a secured (fenced-in) area. If your dog defecates on a neighbor's lawn, the sidewalk or any other public place, please clean it up.

Feeding

Puppies 8 to 12 weeks old need four meals a day. Puppies three to six months old need three meals a day. Puppies six months to one year need two meals a day. When your dog is one year old, one meal a day is usually enough. For some dogs (such as larger ones or those prone to bloat), it's better to continue to feed two smaller meals. Premium-quality dry food provides a well-balanced diet and may be mixed with water, broth or some canned food. Your dog may enjoy cottage cheese, cooked egg, fruits and vegetables, but these additions should not total more than 10 percent of your dog's daily food intake.

Puppies should be fed a high-quality brand-name puppy food (avoid generic brands) two to four times a day. Please limit "people food," however, because it can cause puppies to suffer vitamin and mineral imbalances, bone and teeth problems and may cause very picky eating habits, as well as obesity. Have clean, fresh water available at all times. Wash food and water dishes frequently.

Exercise

Every dog needs daily exercise for mental and physical stimulation. The proper amount depends on the breed type, age and health status of your dog. Providing enough exercise will improve your dog's health and prevent household destruction and other behavior problems common in underexercised dogs.

Grooming

You can help keep your dog clean and reduce shedding by brushing her frequently. Check for fleas and ticks daily during warm weather. Most dogs don't need to be bathed more than a few times a year. Before bathing, comb or cut out all mats from the coat. Carefully rinse all soap out of the coat, or dirt will stick to soap residue.

Handling

Small dogs, sometimes referred to as "lap dogs," are the easiest to handle. The larger breeds, such as German Shepherd dogs, are usually too large to lift. If you want to carry a puppy or small dog, place one hand under the dog's chest, with either your forearm or other hand supporting the hind legs and rump. Never attempt to lift or grab your puppy or small dog by the forelegs, tail or back of the neck. If you do have to lift a large dog, lift from the under-side, supporting his chest with one arm and his rear end with the other.

Housing

You will need to provide your pet with a warm, quiet place to rest away from all drafts and off of the floor. A training crate is ideal. You may wish to buy a dog bed, or make one out of a wooden box. Place a clean blanket or pillow inside the bed. Wash the dog's bedding often. If your dog will be spending a great deal of time outdoors, you will need to provide her with shade and plenty of cool water in hot weather and a warm, dry, covered shelter when it's cold.

Licensing and Identification

Follow your community's licensing regulations. When you buy your license, be sure to attach it to your dog's collar. A dog license, ID tag, implanted microchip or tattoo can help secure your dog's return if he becomes lost. Training A well-behaved companion animal is a joy. But left untrained, your dog can cause nothing but trouble. Teaching your dog the basics—"sit," "stay," "come," "down," "heel," "off" and "leave it"—will improve your relationship with both your dog and your neighbors. Start teaching puppies basic sit and stay commands. Use little bits of food as a lure and reward. Puppies can be enrolled in obedience courses when your veterinarian believes they are adequately vaccinated. Contact your local humane society or SPCA for training class recommendations. Start teaching your puppy manners NOW!

HEALTH

See a veterinarian if your dog is sick or injured. Take him for a full check-up, shots and a heartworm blood test every year.

Dental Health

Puppies replace their baby teeth with permanent teeth between four and seven months of age. Clean their teeth with a dog toothpaste or a baking-soda-and-water paste once or twice a week. Use a child's soft toothbrush, a gauze pad or a piece of nylon pantyhose stretched over your finger. Some dogs develop periodontal disease, a pocket of infection between the tooth and the gum. This painful condition can result in tooth loss and is a source of infection for the rest of the body. Veterinarians can clean the teeth as a regular part of your dog's health program.

Fleas and Ticks

Daily inspections of your dog for fleas and ticks during the warm seasons are important. Use a flea comb to find and remove fleas. There are several new methods of flea and tick control. Speak to your veterinarian about these and other options.

Heartworm

This parasite lives in the heart and is passed from dog to dog by mosquitoes. Heartworm infections can be fatal. Your dog should have a blood test for heartworm every spring, because it is important to detect infections from the previous year. A once-a-month pill given during mosquito season (which varies in different areas of the country) will protect your dog. If you travel south with your pet during the winter, your dog should be on the preventive medicine during the trip. In some warmer regions, veterinarians recommend preventive heartworm medication throughout the year

Neutering

Females should be spayed (ovaries and uterus removed) and males neutered (testicles removed) by six months of age. Spaying before maturity significantly reduces the risk of breast cancer, a common and frequently fatal disease of older female dogs. Spaying also eliminates the risk of pyometra (an infected uterus), a very serious problem in older females that requires surgery and intensive medical care. And spaying protects your female pet from having unwanted litters. Neutering males prevents testicular and prostate diseases, some hernias and certain types of aggression (which differ from protectiveness, which this surgery won't affect).

Medicines and Poisons

- Consult a veterinarian about using any over-the-counter or prescription medication.
- Do not give your dog chocolate.
- Make sure your dog does not have access to rat poison or other rodenticides.
- Call your veterinarian or The ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center (ASPCA/APCC) for 24-hour animal poison information if you suspect your animal has ingested a poisonous substance. The numbers are: (888) 4ANI-HELP (888-426-4435), or (900) 680-0000. A consultation fee applies.

Vaccinations

- Vaccines protect animals and people from specific viral and bacterial infections. They are not a treatment. If your pet gets sick because he is not properly vaccinated, the vaccination should be given after your companion animal recovers.
- Puppies should be vaccinated with a combination vaccine (called a 5 in 1) at 2, 3 and 4 months of age and then once annually. This vaccine protects the puppy from distemper, hepatitis, leptospirosis, parvovirus, and parainfluenza. A puppy's vaccination program cannot be finished before four months of age. Rottweilers, Doberman pinschers and American Staffordshire terriers/pit bulls should be vaccinated until five months of age. If you have an unvaccinated dog older than four or five months, the dog needs a series of two vaccinations given two to three weeks apart, followed by a yearly vaccination. Do not walk your puppy or your unvaccinated dog outside or put her on the floor of an animal hospital until several days after her final vaccination.
- Since laws vary around the country, contact a local veterinarian for information on rabies vaccination. In New York City, for example, the law requires all pets older than three months of age to be vaccinated for rabies. The first rabies vaccine must be followed by a vaccination a year later and then every three years.
- Other vaccines for dogs are appropriate in certain situations. Your dog's veterinarian can tell you about these vaccines.

Worms

It is common for dogs, even in urban areas, to be exposed to worms and possible infestation. Microscopic eggs produced by intestinal worms in infected dogs and passed in their feces provide a source of infection for other dogs. There are several types of worms and a few microscopic parasites that commonly affect dogs. Because most of these cannot be seen in feces, a microscopic fecal evaluation is the only satisfactory way to have your puppy or dog checked for intestinal worms and other parasites. Most puppies, even from healthy mothers in good homes, carry roundworms or hookworms. All puppies should be dewormed by a veterinarian regardless of fecal evaluation.

Additional Information:

- The average life span of a dog varies from 8 to 16 years, depending on breed type, size, genetics and care.
- For more information, search the dog care section on our web site: www.aspc.org
- Write to ASPCA Animal Sciences at 424 East 92nd St., New York, NY 10128 for a list of free behavioral materials.

Recommended Reading:

- "The ASPCA Complete Dog Care Manual"
- "The ASPCA Complete Guide to Dogs"
- "The ASPCA Pet Care Guide for Kids-Puppies"
- "The ASPCA Dog Training Manual," Dr. Bruce Fogle

You can order these ASPCA books by calling The ASPCA Humane Education Department at (212) 876-7700, ext. 4410. TM and ® are protected by The ASPCA. ©2001