

Caring for your Puppy

Owning a dog can be an extremely rewarding experience, but it also carries with it quite a bit of responsibility. Some dogs will live as long as 17 years so they will be a big part of your family for a long time.

Choosing a Puppy

You will need to consider what breed you choose carefully to ensure their size, maintenance needs, and temperament will suit your lifestyle. Visiting the library or researching breeds on the internet will help you to choose the best dog for your family. Talking to your Veterinarian or Vet Nurse is also a good idea, as they will be able to point out any potential health issues a particular breed may be prone to.

Once you choose your puppy it is wise to have it vet checked before completing the purchase. This will help to ensure the puppy you choose is healthy without any congenital defects that may be difficult for you to detect.

If you choose a breed prone to Hip or Elbow Dysplasia, you should ask the breeder to show you the parents Hip/Elbow scores. A good breeder should be able to give these to you without hesitation. Bring these with you when your puppy has its vet check so your vet can discuss them with you.

If you are not particularly worried whether your dog is a pedigree breed or not, you might find just what you are looking for at the SPCA or local pound. Often the experienced staff can identify what breeds the puppies have been crossed with, which will give an indication of what they will grow into. The SPCA also vet checks, quarantines, vaccinates, and sometimes neuters all it's puppies before re-homing, so you can be reasonably confident your 'SPCA Special Puppy' is a healthy one!

Vaccination

There are many diseases that are fatal to dogs. Fortunately, we have the ability to prevent many of these by the use of very effective vaccines. In order to be effective, these vaccines must be given as a series of injections. Ideally, they are given at about 6, 9, and 12 weeks of age, but this schedule may vary somewhat depending on several factors.

The routine vaccination schedule will protect your puppy from four diseases: distemper, hepatitis, parainfluenza virus and parvovirus. There are two other optional vaccinations that are appropriate in certain situations. Your puppy should receive kennel cough vaccine if a trip to a boarding kennel or breed show is likely. Leptospirosis is a disease spread in rat urine, therefore it is recommended that dogs that frequent waterways, rubbish dumps and farming areas be vaccinated.

In adulthood your dog may only need a 3 yearly booster vaccination depending on their lifestyle.

Why the Series of Vaccinations

When the puppy nurses its mother, it receives a temporary form of immunity through its mother's milk. This immunity is in the form of proteins called antibodies. For about 24-48 hours after birth, the puppy's intestine allows absorption of these antibodies directly into the blood stream. This immunity is of benefit during the first few weeks of the puppy's life, but, at some point, this immunity fails and the puppy must be able to make its own long-lasting immunity. Vaccinations are used for this purpose. As long as the mother's antibodies are present, vaccinations do not have a chance to stimulate the puppy's immune system. The mother's antibodies interfere by neutralising the vaccine.

Many factors determine when the puppy will be able to respond to the vaccinations. These include the level of immunity in the mother dog, how much antibody has been absorbed, and the number of vaccines given to the puppy. Since we do not know when an individual puppy will lose the short-term immunity, we give a series of vaccinations. We hope that at least two of these will fall in the window of time when the puppy has lost immunity from its mother but has not yet been exposed to disease. A single vaccination, even if effective, is not likely to stimulate the long-term immunity that is so important.

Your vet will also discuss other health and puppy care issues with you, and answer any questions you may have during your puppy's vaccination visits.

Intestinal Worms

Intestinal parasites are common in puppies. Puppies can become infected with parasites before they are born or later through their mother's milk. Sometimes you can see the worms in the puppy's faeces; they can look like a grain of rice, or like spaghetti. However, not all parasites are visible, so microscopic examination of a stool sample will usually help us to determine the presence of intestinal parasites.

We recommend the use of Drontal or Endoguard, a de-worming product that is safe and effective against several of the common worms of the dog. It is given every two weeks until twelve weeks old, then every 3-6 months for the rest of the dog's life. It is important that it be repeated because the de-worming medication only kills the adult worms. Within 3-4 weeks, the larval stages will have become adults and will need to be treated.

Tapeworms are the most common intestinal parasite of dogs. Puppies become infected with them when they swallow fleas; the eggs of the tapeworm live inside the flea. When the dog chews or licks its skin as a flea bites, the flea may be swallowed. The flea is digested within the dog's intestine; the tapeworm hatches and then anchors itself to the intestinal lining. Therefore, exposure to fleas may result in a new infection; this can occur in as little as two weeks.

Flea Treatment

Fleas do not stay on your puppy all of their time; occasionally, they will jump off and seek another host. Therefore, it is important to kill fleas on your new puppy before they can become established in your house.

Flea collars, powders, and supermarket/pet shop flea products usually contain organophosphates. These older chemicals no longer kill fleas effectively, and also have toxic effects on mammals. Combining a flea collar and powder can overdose a puppy and cause poisoning.

There are now new, very safe, effective flea products available. They kill fleas within minutes, have no toxic effects on mammals, are easy to apply, and last for up to 8 weeks per treatment. These products are only available from your vet.

We recommend:

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| Frontline | Apply 8 weekly for puppies (from 8 weeks old) |
| Advantage | Apply 4 weekly for puppies (from 6 wks old) |
| Revolution | Apply 4 weekly for puppies up to 2.5kg (from 6 wks old) |

Note: If the mother is treated with one these flea treatments, the puppies should be flea free until weaning.

Nutrition

Diet is extremely important in the growing months of a dog's life, and there are two important criteria that should be met in selecting food for your puppy. We recommend a NAME-BRAND FOOD made by a national or international dog food company (not a generic or local brand), and a form of food MADE FOR PUPPIES. This should be fed until your puppy is about 12-18 months of age, depending on its size.

We recommend that you only buy food that has the AAFCO certification. Usually, you can find this information very easily on the label. AAFCO is an organisation that oversees the entire pet food industry. It does not endorse any particular food, but it will certify that the food has met the minimum requirements for nutrition. Most of the commercial pet foods will have the AAFCO label.

Feeding a dry, canned, or semi-moist form of dog food is acceptable. Each has advantages and disadvantages. Dry food is definitely the most economical. It can be left in the dog's bowl without drying. The good brands of dry food are just as nutritious as the other forms.

Semi-moist and canned foods are also acceptable. However, both are considerably more expensive than dry food. They often are more appealing to the dog's taste; however, they are not more nutritious. If you feed a very tasty food, you are running the risk of creating a dog with a finicky appetite. In addition, the semi-moist foods are high in sugar.

Table foods are not recommended. Because they are generally very tasty, dogs will often begin to hold out for these and not eat their well-balanced dog food. If you choose to give your puppy table food, be sure that at least 90% of its diet is good quality commercial puppy food.

Unsafe Foods

In addition to table foods, it is also important that you not give certain other things to dogs. Bones of birds (chicken, turkey, etc.) are hollow and splinter easily producing very sharp pointed pieces of bones. These can easily pierce the oesophagus, stomach, and intestines resulting in peritonitis and death. Please never feed cooked bones, or bones that are small enough to swallow, as they can splinter, or cause obstructions. Large raw cannon bones are the safest bones to feed.

Some foods that we eat can be toxic to dogs – never feed chocolate, onions or raisins/sultanas/grapes to your dog.

Housetraining

Housetraining should begin as soon as your puppy enters his new home. How long the training must continue depends on both the puppy and you. Some pups learn sooner than others. Your dog wants to please you. But a puppy's memory is short, so your patience is important. A home with a badly trained puppy is not a happy home for you or the puppy.

- The puppy's bed may be a box, open at one end and slightly larger than the puppy. If the bed is too large, the puppy may defaecate or urinate in a corner rather than go outside. If the bed is smaller, the puppy will do its "business" outside rather than soil its bed.
- Enclose the bed in a small area, such as a laundry room. Cover this area with newspapers to be used at night, or when your pup is left unsupervised.
- First thing in the morning, the puppy should be taken to the area you want used as the toilet. Let him sniff about. The moment he has relieved himself, praise him and immediately bring him into the house. Do not let him play about. The toilet period and play period should be definitely separate in the puppy's routine.
- The puppy should then be fed. In a short while the puppy will become uneasy and walk in circles sniffing at the floor. The puppy should then be taken to the toilet area as quickly as possible.
- This routine should be repeated every hour or two throughout the day, especially after meals, play and naps.
- There will of course be some "accidents" in the house. Never let one of these slip by unnoticed; punishment one minute after the offence is too late. Verbally scold the puppy and rush him to the toilet area.
- Positive reinforcement of proper urine and bowel habits is just as important as properly applied discipline. When your puppy urinates or defaecates in the correct place, give him loads of praise.

Chewing

One of the characteristics of puppies is chewing. Puppies are trying their new teeth so chewing is a normal behaviour. The puppy's baby teeth are present by about 4 weeks of age. They begin to fall out at 4 months of age and are replaced by the adult (permanent) teeth by about 6 months of age. Therefore, chewing is a puppy characteristic that you can expect until about 6-7 months of age.

It is important that you do what you can to direct your puppy's chewing toward acceptable objects. You should provide items such as rawhide chew bones, nylon chew bones, and other chew toys so other objects are spared.

Discipline

Disciplining a young puppy may be necessary if its behaviour threatens people or property, but harsh punishment should be avoided. Hand clapping and using shaker cans or horns can be

intimidating enough to inhibit undesirable behaviour. However, remote punishment is preferred. Remote punishment consists of using something that appears unconnected to the punisher to stop the problem behaviour. Examples include using spray bottles, throwing objects in the direction of the puppy to startle (but not hit) it, and making loud noises. Remote punishment is preferred because the puppy associates punishment with the undesirable act and not with you.

Socialisation of Puppies

The Socialisation Period for dogs is between 4 and 12 weeks of age. During that time, the puppy is very impressionable to social influences. If it has good experiences with men, women, children, cats, other dogs, etc., it is likely to accept them throughout life. If the experiences are absent or unpleasant, it may become apprehensive or adverse to any of them.

Therefore, during the period of socialisation, we encourage you to expose your dog to as many types of social events and influences as possible. However, this is also the time when your puppy's immune system is not fully developed, and if taken to parks, or areas where unvaccinated dogs have been, your puppy is at risk of picking up diseases such as Parvo. We run Puppy Classes at the clinic, to encourage socialisation in a safe and educational environment. Please talk to one of our vet nurses about Puppy Preschool.

Three Curious Things about Puppies

- Puppies may be observed to make unusual sounds or movements during their sleep. This is called "activated sleep." It probably occurs because your puppy is dreaming and trying to participate in the dream. This behaviour lasts a few months but rarely continues into adulthood.
- Puppies also have "puppy breath." There is a characteristic smell about a puppy's breath. It is not particularly offensive or desirable. It is much like the smell of a new car. It is present a few weeks then disappears.
- Puppies also frequently have episodes of hiccups. They may occur for 10-20 minutes at a time then spontaneously disappear. They are probably related to swallowing of air when eating and do not produce any significant distress to your dog. They will stop as your puppy gets a little older.

Trimming Toenails

Puppies have very sharp toenails. They can be trimmed with your regular finger nail clippers or with nail trimmers made for dogs and cats. If you take too much off the nail, you will get into the quick; bleeding and pain will occur. If this happens, neither you nor your dog will want to do this again. Therefore, a few points are helpful:

1. If your dog has clear or white nails, you can see the pink of the quick through the nail. Avoid the pink area, and you should be out of the quick.
2. If your dog has black nails, you will not be able to see the quick so only cut 1mm of the nail at a time until the dog begins to get sensitive. The sensitivity will usually occur before you are into the blood vessel. With black nails, it is likely that you will get too close on at least one nail.
3. If your dog has some clear and some black nails, use the average clear nail as a guide for cutting the black ones.
4. When cutting nails, use sharp trimmers. Dull trimmers tend to crush the nail and cause pain even if you are not in the quick.
5. You should always have styptic powder available. This is sold in pet stores under several trade names, but it will be labelled for use in trimming nails or bird beaks.

De-sexing

If you don't plan to breed - spay or neuter your puppy. Only serious breeders who have the desire, expertise, time and facilities to breed well should breed dogs.

Statistics show that neutered animals are less susceptible to disease, live longer and fit into our society a lot better. Neutering reduces the sexual frustration experienced by entire dogs, and allows them to concentrate more on working, hunting, tracking, obedience, or just being a well behaved pet!

Spaying Females

Spaying offers several advantages. The female's heat periods result in about 2-3 weeks of vaginal bleeding. This can be quite annoying if your dog is kept indoors. Male dogs are attracted from blocks away and, they seem to go over, around, and through many doors or fences. Your dog will have a heat period about every 6 months. In many cases, despite your best effort, the female will become pregnant. Spaying prevents unplanned litters of puppies.

Spaying is the removal of the uterus and the ovaries. Therefore, heat periods no longer occur. It has been proven that as the female dog gets older, there is a significant incidence of breast cancer and uterine infections if she has not been spayed. Spaying before she has any heat periods will virtually eliminate the chance of either. If you do not plan to breed your dog, we strongly recommend that she be spayed before her first heat period. This can be done anytime from 5 - 6 months old.

Neutering Males

Neutering offers several advantages. Male dogs are attracted to a female dog in heat and will climb over or go through fences to find her. Male dogs are more aggressive and more likely to fight, especially with other male dogs. Neutering will make your dog calmer and more pleasant to live with, but will not reduce his ability or desire to protect your property or family.

As dogs age, the prostate gland frequently enlarges and causes difficulty urinating and defaecating. Neutering will solve, or greatly help, all of these problems that come with owning a male dog. The surgery can be performed any time from 5 - 6 months old.

As with any surgery there is a small risk of complications. However we use modern monitoring devices and anaesthesia techniques; and well qualified Vet Nurses will care for your dog to minimise the risk. Your dog will also be given pain relief equivalent to what you would receive for a surgical procedure, to ensure they are as comfortable as possible. And they will recover in a heated ward with a comfortable bed and blankets.

Breeding

If you plan to breed your dog, she should have at least one or two heat periods first. This will allow her to physically mature allowing her to be a better mother without such a physical drain on her. We do not recommend breeding after 5 years of age unless she has been bred prior to that. Having her first litter after 5 years of age increases the risk of problems during the pregnancy and delivery. Once your dog has had her last litter, she should be spayed to prevent the reproductive problems older dogs have.

Pet Identification

The latest in pet retrieval is micro-chipping, and it is now mandatory in New Zealand for dogs over 3 months of age to be micro chipped. This rice grain sized device is implanted with a needle so the process is much like getting an injection. The code from the microchip is recorded by your local Council when you register your dog. Our scanner can detect these chips; humane societies and animal shelters across the country also have scanners.

Emergency Tips

There are several emergency situations that are common. The following recommendations could be valuable for you to know.

1. Hit by car Let your dog stand up by itself. If it cannot, transfer it to a hard board for transporting. Apply pressure to wounds with soft gauze. Keep your dog warm to prevent shock. An injured dog may bite, even people that it knows very well. Use caution for the safety of both you and your dog. Seek medical attention quickly.

2. Overheating If you suspect your dog has collapsed from heat stress, start to cool it down with a cool water bath, fans, cold compresses, or ice packs. Seek medical attention immediately.

We provide 24 hour emergency medical care. In the event of an emergency, ring our usual phone number, and you will be advised on who is providing care at that time.