

Puppies: Recommendations for New Owners

Congratulations on your new puppy! Owning a dog can be an extremely rewarding experience, but it also requires a great deal of responsibility. We hope this document will give you the information you need to live a healthy and fulfilling life together.

First, let us say how grateful we are that you have chosen Hope Animal Medical Center to aid in your puppy's care. If you have questions concerning his/her health, please feel free to call us at (706) 546-7879. Our entire professional staff are available to help.

**What type of play should I expect from a puppy?**

Stimulating play is important during the first week. Stalking and pouncing are important play behaviors in puppies and are necessary for proper muscular development.

If given a sufficient outlet for these behaviors with toys, your puppy will be less likely to use family members for these activities. The best toys are lightweight and movable and always under supervision. Any toy that is small enough to be swallowed should be avoided.

**What are some tips for successful puppy training?**

Train early, practice often and socialize, socialize, socialize. Stick with positive reinforcement training. Reward behaviors you want repeated and manage your puppy's environment in order to prevent opportunities for unwanted behavior. Remove reinforcement to stop or decrease behavior. Teach alternative behaviors for behaviors you want to change. Finally, find a trainer both you and your puppy like.

**When should my puppy be vaccinated?**

We have the ability to prevent many canine illnesses—including fatal diseases—through the use of vaccines. In order to be effective, these vaccines must be given as a series of injections. Ideally, the vaccines are given every three weeks until the puppy reaches four months of age. However, this schedule may vary depending on several factors.

The routine vaccination schedule will protect your puppy from several diseases, including distemper, hepatitis, parainfluenza virus, parvovirus and rabies.

Optional vaccinations also may be appropriate for certain dogs. Your puppy should receive a kennel cough (bordetella) vaccine if a trip to a boarding kennel is likely or if the dog will be placed in a puppy training class. We also strongly recommend vaccination for leptospirosis, a re-emerging disease that is potentially fatal to both dogs and humans.

**Why does my puppy need more than one vaccination?**

When a puppy nurses his/her mother, he/she receives a temporary form of immunity through the mother's milk. This immunity is in the form of proteins called antibodies. For about 24 to 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 eventually the immunity fails and the puppy must be able to make his/her own long-lasting defense against disease. 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 neutralizing 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 many of the antibodies have 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 long-term immunity. The rabies vaccine is an exception to this, since one injection given at the proper time is enough to produce long-term immunity.

**Do all puppies have worms?**

Intestinal parasites are common in puppies. Puppies can become infected with parasites before they are born or later through the mother's milk. The microscopic examination of a stool sample will usually help us to determine the presence of intestinal parasites. We recommend this exam for all puppies.

Even if we do not get a stool sample, we recommend the use of a deworming product that is safe and effective against several common worms in the dog. We do this because our deworming medication has no side effects and because worms do not pass eggs every day, so the stool sample we have may not detect worms that are really present.

Deworming is done immediately and repeated in about three weeks. It is important to repeat this treatment because the deworming medication only kills adult worms. Within three to four weeks, the larval stages will have become adults and will need to be treated.

Dogs remain susceptible to reinfection with hookworms and roundworms; therefore, periodic deworming throughout the dog's life may be recommended for dogs that go outdoors.

Tapeworms are the most common intestinal parasite of dogs. The eggs of the tapeworm live inside fleas. Puppies become infected with these worms when fleas are accidentally ingested upon licking or chewing the skin. The flea is digested within the dog's intestine and the tapeworm hatches, anchoring itself to the intestinal lining. Therefore, exposure to fleas may result in a new infection that can occur in as little as two weeks.

Dogs infected with tapeworms will pass small segments of the worms in their stool. These segments are white in color and look like grains of rice. They are about 1/8-inch long and may be seen crawling on the surface of the stool. They may also stick to the hair under the tail. If this occurs, the worms will dry out, shrink to about half their size and become golden in color.

Tapeworm segments do not pass every day or in every stool sample; therefore, inspection of several consecutive bowel movements may be needed to find them. We may examine a stool sample in our office and not find them, but you may find them the next day. If you find them at any time, please notify us so we may provide the appropriate treatment.

**What about heartworms?**

Heartworms are important parasites, especially in certain climates. They can live in your dog's heart and cause major damage to the heart and lungs. Heartworms are transmitted by mosquitoes, so your dog does not have to be in contact with another dog to be exposed.

Fortunately, we have medication that will protect your dog from heartworms. These drugs are safe and very effective if given regularly.

It is important to note that having a long hair coat or staying primarily indoors does not protect a dog against heartworm infection. Heartworm preventatives are dosed according to your dog's weight. As the weight increases, the dosage should also increase. Please note the dosing instructions on the package, but keep in mind that these products are very safe. You could overdose your dog by two or three times the recommended dose without causing harm. Therefore, it is always better to overdose rather than underdose.

**What should I feed my puppy?**

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

We recommend that you only buy food with an [Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO)](https://www.aafco.org/) certification. Usually, you can find this information very easily on the label. AAFCO is an organization 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, whereas generic brands often do not.

Feeding a dry, canned or semi-moist form of dog food is acceptable. Each has advantages and disadvantages. Dry food is the most inexpensive and preferred brands of dry food are just as nutritious as other forms. As a rule, most veterinarians will recommend dry food for your puppy. Semi-moist and canned foods 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, many semi-moist foods are high in sugar.

Table food is not recommended. Because human food is generally very tasty, dogs will often begin to hold out for these special treats and not eat the well-balanced dog food. If you choose to give your puppy table food, be sure that at least 90 percent of his/her diet is good quality commercial puppy food.

We enjoy a variety of things to eat in our diet. However, most dogs actually prefer not to change from one food to another unless they are trained to do so. Do not feel guilty if your dog is happy to just eat one food day after day, week after week.

Commercials for dog food can be very misleading. If you watch carefully, you will notice that most commercials promote dog food on one basis—taste. Nutrition is rarely mentioned. Most "gourmet" foods are marketed to appeal to owners who want the best for their dogs; however, these diets do not offer the dog any nutritional advantage over a good quality dry food and they are far more expensive. If your dog eats a gourmet food for a long period of time, he/she will likely not be happy with any other foods. Therefore, if your dog needs a special diet due to a health problem later in life, he/she will probably be very unlikely to accept it.

**How often should I feed my puppy?**

There are several “right” ways to feed a puppy. The most popular method is commonly called "meal feeding." This means that the puppy is fed at specific times of the day. A measured amount of food should be offered four times per day for five- to 12-week-old puppies. What is not eaten within 30 minutes should be taken up. If the food is eaten within three to four minutes, the quantity is probably not sufficient. Puppies fed in this manner generally begin to cut themselves out of one of those meals by three to four months of age and perhaps another one again later. If a meal is ignored for several days, it should be discontinued.

“Free feeding” means that food is available at all times. This works especially well with dry foods for some dogs. Other dogs may overeat and become obese. If there are signs of weight gain after the puppy's optimal weight is reached, this method of feeding should be discontinued.

**How do I housetrain my new puppy?**

Housetraining should begin as soon as your puppy enters the new home. How long the training must continue depends on the puppy and on you. It is important to remember that your dog wants to please you, but a puppy's memory is short, so your patience is key. A home with a poorly-trained puppy is not a happy home for you or your dog.

* Make a box for your puppy's bed. It should be open at one end and slightly larger than the puppy. If the bed is too large, the puppy may defecate or urinate in a corner rather than go outside. If the bed is smaller, the puppy will do his/her business outside rather than soil the bed.
* Enclose the bed in a small area, such as a laundry room. Cover this area with newspapers to be used at night or whenever your pup is left unsupervised.
* The secret to housetraining is a scent post. A scent post is created when your puppy has an accident. The challenge is to locate the scent post in a desired place.
* To create a scent post, leave wet paper or a smear of stool from the last accident on clean paper in the desired place and coax or scoot the puppy to that area. The same is true of an outside scent post. This should be done without paper and in an unused place in the yard. This will solve the "minefield" problem.
* First thing in the morning, the puppy should be scooted to the scent post. This is so he/she can learn his/her way to the door and the scent post. Let the puppy sniff about. The moment he/she has eliminated, pat him/her on the head and immediately bring him/her into the house. Do not let the puppy play. The elimination period and play period should be 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 scooted and coaxed to the scent post as quickly as possible. This routine should be repeated every hour or two throughout the day, especially after meals and naps.
* When the puppy is taken out to play, it is wise to leave the house by another door and avoid taking him/her near the scent post. Never play with your pup until after he/she has been taken out and has eliminated.
* There will, of course, be some accidents in the house. Never let one of these slip by unnoticed. If you catch your puppy "in the act," clap your hands to interrupt him/her, then calmly pick up your puppy and place him/her in the appropriate elimination location. Scrub the area thoroughly until all odor is gone. Sprinkle the area with vinegar or even treats. Dogs don't like to eliminate where they eat!
* Positive reinforcement of proper urine and bowel habits is just as important as proper discipline. When your puppy urinates or defecates in the correct place, spend several minutes stroking and praising him/her.

**How do I ensure that my puppy is well socialized?**

The socialization period for dogs is between four and 12 weeks of age. During that time, the puppy is very impressionable to social influences. If the puppy has good experiences with men, women, children, cats and other dogs, he/she is likely to accept them throughout life. If the experiences are absent or unpleasant, the puppy may become apprehensive or adverse to any of these people or animals. Therefore, during the period of socialization, we encourage you to expose your dog to as many types of social events and influences as possible.

**What can be done about fleas on my puppy?**

Fleas may not stay on your puppy for long; 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. Many of the flea control products that are safe on adult dogs are not safe for puppies less than four months of age. Be sure that any flea product you use is labeled safe for puppies.

If you use a flea spray, your puppy should be sprayed lightly. This trick to spraying a puppy will make the outcome safer and more successful: When a puppy is sprayed, the fleas tend to run away from the insecticide. If you spray the body first, many fleas will run to the head where they are very difficult to kill. The best method is to spray a cotton ball then use that to wipe the flea spray onto the puppy’s face, from the nose to the level of the ears. This will keep you from getting spray in the eyes and will cause the fleas to run toward the body. Wait about two minutes, then spray the back of the head and the body. Leave the spray on for about three minutes, then wipe off the excess. This will permit you to kill the most fleas while putting the least amount of insecticide on the puppy.

For long-term flea control in puppies, we recommend using an oral prevention that is administered monthly or every 3 months based on the product, or a Seresto Collar which is good for 8 months. All are safe to use in puppies over eight weeks of age.

**My puppy seems to be constantly chewing. Why does this occur?**

For many owners, chewing is an undesirable characteristic in a puppy, but it is a perfectly normal behavior. The puppy’s baby teeth are present by about four weeks of age. These teeth begin to fall out at four months of age and are replaced by the adult teeth by about six months of age. Therefore, chewing is a behavior that you can expect until about six or seven 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 or nylon chew bones so other objects are spared.

**My puppy has episodes of hiccupping and a strange odor to his/her breath. Are these normal?**

Yes. Many puppies experience episodes of hiccupping that may last several minutes. This is normal and will not last but a few weeks or months. All puppies have a characteristic odor to their breath that is commonly called “puppy breath.” It is also normal and will last only until the puppy matures.

**Can I trim my puppy's nails?**

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

* 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.
* If your dog has black nails, you will not be able to see the quick, so only cut a very small amount 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.
* If your dog has some clear and some black nails, use the average clear nail as a guide for cutting the black ones.
* When cutting nails, use sharp trimmers. Dull trimmers tend to crush the nail and cause pain even if you are not in the quick.
* You should always have styptic powder available. If you have cut into the puppy's quick, this powder will help to stop the bleeding. Styptic powder is sold in pet stores under several trade names, but it will be labeled for use in trimming nails.

**What are ear mites?**

Ear mites are tiny parasites that live in the ear canal of dogs and cats. The most common sign of ear mite infection is scratching of the ears. Sometimes the ears will appear dirty because of a black material in the ear canal. This material is sometimes shaken out.

The instrument we use for examining the ear canals, an otoscope, has the necessary magnification to allow us to see the mites. Sometimes, we can find the mites by taking a small amount of the black material from the ear canal and examining it with a microscope.

Although they may leave the ear canal for short periods of time, ear mites spend the vast majority of their lives within the protection of this canal. Transmission generally requires direct ear-to-ear contact.

Ear mites are common in litters of puppies in which the mother has ear mites. Ear infections may also cause the production of a dark discharge in the ear canals. It is important that we examine your puppy to be sure the black material is due to ear mites and not infection.

**Why should I have my female dog spayed?**

Spaying offers several advantages. The female's heat periods result in about two to three weeks of vaginal bleeding. This can be quite annoying if your dog is kept indoors. Male dogs are attracted to this from blocks away and, in fact, seem to come out of the woodwork to find her. Your dog will have a heat period about every six months, and in many cases, despite your best efforts, the female will become pregnant.

Spaying is the removal of the uterus and the ovaries. Therefore, heat periods no longer occur and unplanned litters of puppies are prevented. It has also been proven that as the unspayed female gets older, she has an increased chance of developing breast cancer and uterine infections. Spaying your dog before she has any heat periods will virtually eliminate this possibility.

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 after she is four months old.

**Why should I have my male dog neutered?**

Neutering offers several advantages. Male dogs attracted to a female dog in heat will go through many avenues to find her. Male dogs are also more aggressive and likely to fight, especially with other male dogs.

Neutering is the removal of the testicles. As male dogs age, the prostate gland frequently enlarges and causes difficulty urinating and defecating. Intact males are also often more prone to developing infections (prostatitis) or cancer (prostatic adenocarcinoma). Neutering will greatly reduce the incidence of these diseases.

This surgery can be performed any time after the dog is four months old.

**If I choose to breed my female dog, when should that be done?**

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.

We do not recommend breeding after five years of age unless she has been bred prior to that age. Having her first litter after five years of age increases the risk of problems during the pregnancy and/or delivery.

Once your dog has had her last litter, she should be spayed to prevent the reproductive problems older dogs often develop.

**Can you recommend something for pet identification?**

The latest in pet retrieval and identification is microchipping. This tiny device is implanted with a needle, so the process is much like getting an injection. Our scanner, as well as scanners at humane societies and animal shelters across the country, can detect these chips. A national registry permits the return of microchipped pets throughout the United States and Canada.

**Are there any emergency tips that I should know?**

Listed below are some common emergency situations you should be aware of.

* **Hit by car:**Let your dog stand up by him/herself. If he/she cannot, transfer him/her 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 he/she knows very well. Use caution for the safety of both you and your dog. Seek medical attention immediately.
* **Overheating:** If you suspect your dog has collapsed from heat stress, begin by treating him/her with a cool water bath, fans, cold compresses or ice packs. Seek medical attention immediately.
* **Minor burns:**Treat with cool water and seek medical attention.