

Caring for Your New Puppy

- Puppies should be fed a name-brand puppy food with the American Association of Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) statement on the bag or label.
- Puppy food should be fed until adulthood, which begins at 9 to 12 months of age for most dogs and 2 years of age for giant breeds.
- Female puppies should be spayed around 6 months of age; male puppies should be neutered between 5 and 10 months of age. This helps to control pet overpopulation and reduces the chances of some behavior problems and medical conditions that can be costly to treat and difficult to cure (e.g., pyometra [uterine infection] or breast cancer in female dogs).
- Punishment, such as rubbing a puppy's nose in urine or feces, does not work and can negatively affect housetraining.

During the first 7 to 8 weeks of life, puppies have specific needs for nourishment, warmth, socialization, and excretion. If you find orphaned puppies younger than 7 to 8 weeks of age, take them to a veterinarian immediately. Your veterinarian can give you advice on caring for them and might be able to give you contact information for animal rescue groups.

The following information pertains to caring for puppies that are at least 7 to 8 weeks of age, the time at which they can safely be taken from their mother and littermates.

Feeding

Puppies should be fed a name-brand puppy food with the American Association of Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) statement on the bag or label. This ensures that the food is nutritionally balanced for puppies. Puppy food should be fed until adulthood, which begins at 9 to 12 months of age for most dogs and 2 years of age for giant breeds. Consult your veterinarian for the exact amount to feed and for help creating a long-term feeding schedule suited to your

puppy's needs. Here's a recommended feeding schedule for puppies:

- 6–12 weeks, 4 meals per day
- 3–6 months, 3 meals per day
- 6–12 months, 2 meals per day

Water should be available at all times.

Veterinary Care

Puppies should have a physical examination by a veterinarian. This examination can provide an opportunity to (1) identify birth defects and other health issues, (2) address questions about feeding and other home care, and (3) schedule a preventive health plan.

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If puppies appear healthy, most veterinarians recommend that they receive their first round of standard vaccinations at around 6 weeks of age. Deworming can also begin at an early age.

Contact your veterinarian immediately if your puppy has any of the following:

- Lack of appetite
- Poor weight gain
- Vomiting
- Swollen or painful abdomen
- Lack of activity
- Diarrhea
- Difficult breathing
- Coughing or wheezing
- Constant crying
- Pale gums

Caring for Your New Pet

- Swollen eyes or eye discharge
- Nasal discharge
- Inability to pass urine or stool

Female puppies should be spayed around 6 months of age; male puppies should be neutered between 5 and 10 months of age. This helps to control pet overpopulation and reduces the chance of some behavior problems and medical conditions.

Training and Socialization

Puppies can usually be housetrained within a few weeks. To facilitate training, puppies should be taken outdoors when they naturally need to eliminate:

- When you get up in the morning
- Before you go to bed at night
- After they eat
- After they drink a lot of water
- After they wake from a nap
- During or after physical activity

Try to select an outdoor area that is inaccessible to other animals (especially dogs). This can help reduce the risk of exposing your puppy to viruses and other

diseases. This becomes less of a concern after your puppy has received the necessary vaccinations against these diseases.

Praise your puppy when he or she eliminates outdoors. Don't punish your puppy for having accidents in the house. Punishment, such as rubbing a puppy's nose in urine or feces, does not work and can negatively affect housetraining.

Obedience training can help establish not only good behavior but also a strong bond with your dog. Puppies should be taught basic obedience commands, including sit, stay, down, come, and heel. Using positive reinforcement, such as a small treat, is more effective than using negative reinforcement, such as punishment for failing to obey. Learning to obey commands can help keep your puppy safe (for example, by preventing your puppy from running away or into traffic). Obedience classes often take puppies starting at 4 to 6 months of age.

Providing your puppy with positive socialization can help prevent behavior problems later in life. When puppies are approximately 2 to 4 months of age, they more easily learn to accept new animals, people, places, and experiences. Puppies can begin to attend socialization classes as early as 8 weeks of age.