



8100B Arlington Blvd
Falls Church, VA 22402
Tel: 703-942-8800
Fax: 703-942-8817

Recommendations for New Puppy Owners

We would like to congratulate you on the acquisition of your new puppy. Owning a dog can be an extremely rewarding experience, but it is also a large responsibility. We hope this handout will give you the information needed to make some good decisions regarding your puppy.

First, let us say that we are grateful that you have chosen us to help you with your puppy's health care. If you have questions concerning any subject related to your puppy's health, please feel free to call our hospital. Our entire professional staff is willing and happy to help you.

What type of play behavior should I expect from a healthy puppy?

It is very important that you provide stimulating play for your puppy, especially during the first week in their new home. Stalking and pouncing are important play behaviors in puppies and are necessary for proper muscular development. Your puppy will be less likely to use family members for these activities if you provide adequate puppy-safe toys. The best toys are lightweight and movable. Any toy that is small enough to be swallowed should be avoided. Hard toys should also be avoided as they can lead to broken teeth. We can help you choose the safest toys for your puppy.



How do I discipline a puppy?

Disciplining a young puppy may be necessary if their behavior 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 behavior. However, remote punishment is preferred. Remote punishment consists of using something that appears unconnected to the punisher to stop the problem behavior. Examples include using spray bottles, throwing objects in the direction of the puppy to startle (but not hit) them, and making loud noises. Remote punishment is preferred because the puppy associates punishment with the undesirable act and not with you.

When should my puppy be vaccinated?

There are many fatal diseases of dogs. Fortunately, we have the ability to prevent several of these by vaccinating your pet. The following vaccines are available for your puppy:

DHLPP – This stands for Distemper Hepatitis Leptospirosis Parainfluenza Parvo. In order to be effective, this vaccine should be given every 3-4 weeks beginning at about 6 to 8 weeks of age and continuing until your puppy is about 16 weeks of age. This schedule may vary depending on your pet's individual needs.

- Distemper is a virus that causes lung, intestinal, and brain disease.
- Hepatitis is a virus that causes liver disease.
- Leptospirosis is a bacteria that causes liver and kidney disease.
- Parainfluenza is a virus that can cause respiratory disease.
- Parvo is a virus that causes life-threatening diarrhea.

Rabies – Rabies causes fatal brain disease. This vaccine is given at 12 to 16 weeks of age. In Virginia, rabies vaccination is legally required to be given by 20 weeks of age.

Bordetella – This vaccination helps protect against kennel cough. It is given once and may be given as early as 6 to 8 weeks of age.

There are two other vaccinations available for dogs. A Lyme vaccine is available, but its use is controversial due to differing opinions on its efficacy and possible side effects. While it is not part of our routine vaccination protocol at Caring Hands Animal Hospital in Merrifield, it may be appropriate for dogs with an especially high exposure to ticks (such as hunting dogs or dogs that sleep outdoors) because Lyme disease is transmitted by ticks. You may hear about a vaccination for giardia which is an intestinal parasite. This vaccine is not recommended due to poor efficacy.

Why does my puppy need more than one vaccination?

When puppies nurse its mother they receive a temporary form of immunity through the mother's milk. This immunity is in the form of proteins called maternal antibodies. For about twenty-four to forty-eight 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 their 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 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, 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, which is so important.



Rabies vaccine is an exception to this since one injection given at the proper time is enough to produce long-term immunity.

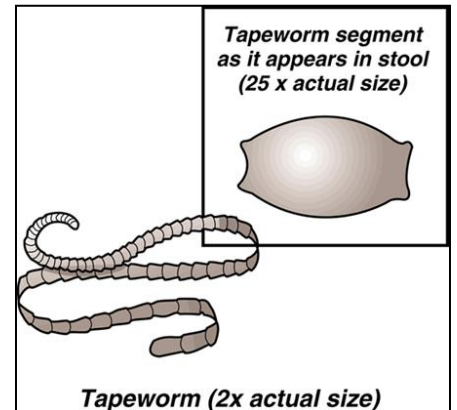
Do all puppies have worms?

Intestinal parasites are very common in puppies. They can become infected with parasites before they are born or later through their mother's milk. Some of these parasites can also be transmitted to humans. A fecal exam is a microscopic examination of a stool sample that helps to identify parasites such as roundworms, hookworms, and whipworms. This exam is recommended for all puppies at their first visit, at 6 months of age, and then yearly thereafter. In addition, all puppies should be treated with a deworming product to eliminate the most common types of worms. We do this because our deworming medication has no side-effects and because your puppy does not pass worm eggs every day so the stool sample may not detect worms that are present. Deworming is done at the first visit and repeated in about three weeks. It is important that it be

repeated because the deworming medication only kills the adult worms. Within three to four weeks the larval stages will become adults and need to be treated. Dogs remain susceptible to re-infection with intestinal parasites into and throughout adulthood. Regular and consistent use of monthly heartworm preventative (discussed below) will help prevent infection from roundworms, hookworms, and whipworms.

Tapeworms are one of the most common intestinal parasites of dogs. Puppies become infected with them when they swallow infected fleas that are carrying tapeworm eggs. 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 where the tapeworm hatches and then anchors itself to the intestinal lining. Therefore, exposure to fleas may result in a new infection. Tapeworm infections can occur in as little as two weeks.

Dogs infected with tapeworms will pass small segments of the worms in their stool. The segments are white in color and look like grains of rice. They are about 1/8 inch (3 mm) long and may be seen crawling on the surface of the stool. They may also stick to the hair under the tail. If that occurs, they 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. 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 and then you may find them the next day. If you find them at any time, please notify us so we may provide the appropriate drug for treatment.

How important are heartworms?

Heartworms live in the dog's bloodstream and cause major damage to the heart and lungs. Heartworms are transmitted by the bite of mosquitoes. Treatment of heartworm disease is expensive and painful for the patient. Fortunately, we have drugs that will protect your dog from heartworms. These drugs are very safe and effective if given once a month all year round. Caring Hands Animal Hospital of Merrifield recommends Interceptor.

Interceptor is dosed according to your dog's weight. As the weight increases, the dosage should also increase. We will dispense just one or two doses until your puppy is full grown, at which time a full box (6-12 doses) will be dispensed. Please note the dosing instructions on the package.

What can be done about fleas and ticks on my puppy?

Fleas cause itching and skin disease in dogs and can even transmit some intestinal parasites. Ticks can pass a number of serious diseases when they bite dogs. In addition, fleas do not stay on your puppy at all times as they occasionally 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. We recommend using Credellio until they are 6 months old and then Simparica from 6 months and older as a safe and effective preventative for fleas and ticks. Both Credellio and Simparica are chewable tablets given monthly.

Like Interceptor (heartworm preventative), Credellio and Simparica are dosed according to your dog's weight. As the weight increases, the dosage should also increase. We will dispense just one or two doses until your puppy is full grown, at which time a full box (6-12 doses) can be dispensed. Please note the dosing instructions on the package.

Why should I have my female dog spayed?

Spaying is the removal of the uterus and the ovaries and this procedure offers several advantages. The female's normal heat periods results in about two to three weeks of vaginal bleeding. This can be quite annoying if your dog is kept indoors. In addition, male dogs are attracted from blocks away and, in fact, seem to come out of the woodwork. They seem to go over, around, and through many doors or fences. In many cases, despite your best efforts, the female will become pregnant. Your dog will have a heat period about every six months. Spaying your puppy will prevent heat periods and unwanted pregnancies.

It has also been proven that as the female dog ages, 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 between five and six months of age.

Why should I have my male dog neutered?

Neutering or castration refers to the complete removal of both testicles in a male dog and the procedure 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. As dogs age, the prostate gland frequently enlarges and causes difficulty urinating and defecating. Neutering will solve, or greatly help, all of these problems that come with owning a male dog. The surgery can be performed anytime after the dog is five or six months old.

Can you recommend something for pet identification?

The most widely recommend pet identification device is the microchip. This tiny device is implanted with a needle much like administering an injection. A special scanner can detect these chips; veterinary hospitals, humane societies, and animal shelters across the country have these scanners. A national registry assists in the identification and return of microchipped pets throughout the United States and Canada. We strongly recommend microchipping all pets.

There are lots of choices of dog foods. What should I feed my puppy?

Diet is extremely important during the growing months of a puppy's life. We recommend a premium quality food made by a national dog food company (not a generic or local brand) and a diet made specifically for puppies. Puppies should be fed at least 4 times a day until they are 6 weeks of age, then 3 times a day until they are 4 months of age, then at least 2 times a day thereafter. Puppy food should be fed until your puppy is about 10 to 12 months of age, depending on its breed and size.

We recommend that you only buy food that has been certified as complete and balanced by an independent organization. In the United States you should look for food that has been certified by AAFCO, an independent 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. Interpreting pet food labels is difficult because the information is limited and can be misleading. The best measure of a pet food's quality is how your puppy responds to the food. Proper weight, normal stool, no vomiting, and a healthy coat are all signs of a quality diet.

Feeding a dry, canned, or semi-moist form of dog food is acceptable. Any of the formulations are acceptable as long as the label states that the food is intended for growth (or is a puppy food), and is "complete and balanced". This means that the food is nutritionally complete and meets the needs of growth and

development. Each of the types of food have advantages and disadvantages. Dry food is definitely the most inexpensive and it can be left in the dog's bowl without drying.

Semi-moist foods may be acceptable depending on their quality. The texture may be more appealing to some dogs and they often have a stronger odor and flavor. However, semi-moist foods are often high in sugar.

Canned foods are a good choice to feed your puppy but are considerably more expensive than either of the other forms of food. Canned foods contain a high percentage of water, and their texture, odor, and taste are very appealing. However, canned food will dry out or spoil if left out for prolonged periods of time so it is more suitable for meal feeding rather than free choice feeding. In addition, canned food can lead to increased plaque and tartar buildup on the teeth.

Table foods are not usually recommended. Although 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.

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 by the way you feed them. Do not feel guilty if your dog is happy eating the same food day after day, week after week.

Commercials for dog food can be very misleading. If you watch carefully you will notice that commercials often promote dog food on the basis of TASTE. Nutrition is rarely mentioned. Most of the "gourmet" foods are marketed to appeal to owners who want the best for their dogs; however, they do not offer the dog any nutritional advantage over a good quality food and they are far more expensive. If you read the labels of many of the gourmet foods, you will notice that they do not claim to be "complete and balanced". If your dog eats a gourmet food very long, it will probably not be happy with other foods. If it needs a special diet due to a health problem later in life it is very unlikely to accept it.

How should I feed my puppy?

There are several "right" ways to feed puppies. 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, and what is not eaten within thirty minutes is taken up. Puppies fed in this manner generally begin to cut back on one of those meals by three to four months of age and perhaps another one later. If a certain feeding is ignored for several days, it should be discontinued.



"Free choice feeding," means that food is available at all times. This works well with dry foods and for some dogs. However, other dogs tend to overeat and become obese. If there is weight gain after the optimal size is reached this method of feeding should be discontinued.

The amount to feed will depend on your puppy's activity level and the amount of calories in the diet you are feeding. You can start by following the feeding guide suggested by the pet food manufacturer. Keep in mind that many of these feeding guides will overestimate the amount to be fed, especially in spayed and neutered pets, and will need to be adjusted to your pets needs.

How do I housebreak my new puppy?

Housebreaking should begin as soon as your puppy enters their 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 poorly trained puppy is not a happy home for you or the puppy.

The keys to effective housebreaking are patience and consistency. A regular and consistent schedule of feeding, play, and napping will make housebreaking easier. Take your puppy out after each meal, after each nap, and after playing. Go to the same area each time and use commands or phrases such as "go potty" to encourage him to eliminate on command. Always praise and reward your puppy as he prepares to eliminate.

While you are housebreaking, your puppy should never be out of your sight unsupervised. Each accident he has in the house that is not seen and interrupted will reinforce the wrong behavior. When you can't supervise your puppy they can safely be left in a crate for limited periods of time. If you need to leave them for longer periods of time, arrange to have someone come to let them outside. As a last resort, if you must leave for longer periods, put your puppy in a puppy-proofed room with their crate in one corner, toys and water available, and a papered area for him to eliminate in if necessary. Using a "puppy room" can slow housebreaking. As a general rule of thumb, expect your puppy to be able to hold it for 1-2 hours longer than the number of months old they are (a 3 month old puppy should be able to go 4-5 hours between eliminations).

There will of course be some "accidents" in the house. When your puppy first begins to eliminate in the house, you should interrupt the behavior. Hand clapping and using shaker cans or horns can be intimidating enough to interrupt the behavior. Remote punishment is preferred. Remote punishment consists of using something that appears unconnected to the punisher to stop the problem behavior. Examples include using spray bottles, throwing objects in the direction of the puppy to startle (but not hit) them, and making loud noises. Remote punishment is preferred because the puppy associates punishment with the undesirable act and not with you. Whichever method you choose, it must startle the puppy and make them stop eliminating. If your puppy continues to eliminate try a different method to interrupt him. Never let one of these slip by unnoticed; punishment five minutes after the offense is too late. Never use harsh punishment. Scrub soiled areas with an enzymatic pet deodorizer like Nature's Miracle or Pet Deodorizer.

Remember that housebreaking takes time. Be patient and look for gradual improvement. Housebreaking can take anywhere from 1-2 weeks to several months depending upon the puppy and may vary from breed to breed.

What about crate training?

The premise behind crate training is that puppies won't eliminate where they sleep. Most dogs become attached to their crates just as animals in the wild do to their dens. You want your puppy to consider it a safe haven.

Begin by selecting a crate that will fit your dog when they are an adult. Your (adult) dog should be able to comfortably stand and turn to change positions in his crate. You may block off the unused space and gradually enlarge it as the puppy grows. The crate should be where the family spends most of its time. If the puppy will eventually be sleeping in your bedroom, it is nice to have a crate there for nighttime.

To introduce your puppy to the crate, associate the crate with positive things such as food and toys. Leave the door open until there is no sign of fear. Play with your pup, tossing favorite toys into the crate for it to retrieve. Place food and water in the crate and encourage your pet to consider it a safe place. This also decreases the likelihood that your pet will soil inside the cage. When the puppy enters the crate without hesitation at mealtime, gently close the door while they eat. Keep the door closed for gradually longer periods. Let the puppy out when it is quiet and calm.

The crate is your dog's special place where it should never be disturbed or threatened. The crate must not be linked with punishment or your puppy will avoid it. Encourage your dog to use the crate as a resting place.

How do I insure that my puppy is well socialized?

The socialization period for dogs is between four and twelve weeks of age. During that time the puppy is very impressionable to social influences. If they have good experiences with men, women, children, cats, other dogs, etc., they are likely to accept them throughout their life. If the experiences are absent or unpleasant they may become apprehensive or adverse to any of them. We encourage you to expose your dog to as many types of social events and influences as possible.

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

Chewing is a normal puppy behavior. Almost all of a puppy's 28 baby teeth are present by about four weeks of age. They begin to fall out at three to four months of age and are replaced by the 42 adult (permanent) teeth by about six months of age. Therefore, chewing is a puppy characteristic that you can expect until about six to 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 puppy-safe items such as nylon chew bones and other chew toys so other objects are spared.

My puppy has episodes of hiccupping and a strange odor to its breath. Are these normal?

Yes. Many puppies experience episodes of hiccupping that may last several minutes. This is normal and will not last more than 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 sharp toe nails?

Puppies have very sharp toe nails. 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 cut into the "quick" and 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:

- 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 1/32" (1 mm) 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.
- Use sharp trimmers as 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. This is sold in pet stores under several trade names, but it will be labeled for use in trimming nails.

Are there any emergency tips that I should know?

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

In any emergency situation, keep the pet as quiet as possible and try to conserve heat by covering it with bedding or newspapers. If necessary, apply the A, B, C of first aid:

- A: Airway
- B: Breathing
- C: Cardiac function

Airway – Anything that obstructs the airway prevents oxygen entering the lungs. Do your best to clear the mouth and throat of any obstruction such as vomitus, saliva or foreign bodies such as grass, sticks or balls. Be careful as your pet may bite you in panic.

Breathing – If your dog is unconscious and does not appear to be breathing try gently pumping the chest with the palm of your hand while feeling just behind the elbow to detect a heart beat or pulse. Close the muzzle with your hand and blow into the nostrils. This is best accomplished by covering the pet's nose with your mouth. Be careful as injured pets may bite you out of fear. If you are unsure about the health or vaccination status of the injured pet, avoid contact with bodily fluids and blood.

Cardiac function – If you are unable to detect a heartbeat or pulse or if appears weak and slow, try pressing on the chest with your palm. Five (5) chest compressions followed by one to two (1-2) deep breaths is a simple form of animal cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

Blood loss

Once you have checked A, B, C above, and if the bleeding is severe, try to stop it. If bleeding is from a cut pad or paw, apply a dressing using a piece of bandage or clothing. If the bleeding persists and is soaking through the bandage, this is a medical emergency. Most bleeding wounds will require medical or surgical treatment. If the wounds are treated within four (4) hours, they can often be sutured. Deep cuts treated after four hours have increased risk of infection and complication.

Burns and scalds

Cool the burned area with cold water as quickly as possible. Cover the burned area with damp towels. If the injury is due to a caustic substance, rinse with cold water for fifteen (15) minutes and contact your veterinarian.

Eye injuries

Injuries to the eye are always very painful. If a foreign body (grass awn, stick, etc.) can be seen, it may be possible to remove it by gently rinsing the eye with eye wash or contact saline solution. Seek veterinary advice as soon as possible.

Seizures

Seizures can be due to many causes. Seizures are usually not life threatening unless they last longer than 3 minutes or occur in rapid succession. All dogs that are seizing or have had a recent seizure should be kept in a dark, quiet, confined area until medical help can be sought. Contact your veterinarian immediately.

Heat stroke

This most commonly occurs in hot weather when dogs are left in cars without adequate ventilation. Body temperature rises dramatically. Clinical signs are excessive panting and obvious distress quickly followed by coma and death. Reduce the pet's body temperature as quickly as possible using cool water and transport the dog to the veterinarian while it is still wet. Keep the car windows open. Evaporation will help reduce body temperature. Avoid using ice or ice water because this may drop the temperature too quickly and cause additional complications.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by Ernest Ward, DVM.
© Copyright 2005 Lifelearn Inc. Used with permission under license. March 24, 2025*