

Looking After Your New Puppy

Having a puppy is an exciting time and all new owners are looking to do the best for their new 'family' member. Will the puppy live up to expectation and become a treasured companion or a neighborhood terror?

A new environment:

For the puppy being taken away from its mother and siblings into a strange environment where nothing is familiar, it is frightening! Offer the new puppy food at feeding time but only a small amount, not the usual ration. The food, added to the stress the puppy is already going through can lead to an upset in the digestive system. This can be avoided by limiting the food intake for the first 48 hours. Spend the first few days with your puppy, welcoming the puppy and showing the puppy what's right and what's wrong, where the puppy can eat, sleep and go to the toilet. Puppies go through many changes in the first 12 months of their lives and most of their learning and behavioral patterns are learnt in this time. Puppies need to be habituated (to get used to) various stimuli that they will encounter in everyday life. With dogs it is best to introduce them to as many different situations as is possible before the puppy reaches 16 weeks of age. These include car rides, household and other strange noises, other animals, water and traffic.

Time to settle down:

The escape and fear response has not fully developed before the 16 week period and so things out there in the 'big wide' world will not be so scary. Simple obedience and the discouragement of unwanted behavior will help to show you are 'worthy' of the puppy's respect and establishment as a pack leader.

Teach the puppy to socialize with humans and other dogs as soon as possible. A puppy has a short attention span so all training sessions should be frequent but brief. Start house training as soon as the puppy comes home. The key to house training is to take the puppy out often. Yes, that's right.....you go with him!

The puppy's bladder is very small and he/she is just beginning to control the muscles which operate it. Provide paper at a doorway to be used, if you're not quick enough to open the door. Praise the puppy for going in the appropriate places. If the puppy behaves in an unacceptable manner, don't scream, shout and hit out. Push the puppy away or to the floor with a stern 'No!' This is how the mother would discipline her puppy. A 'language' your puppy will already understand. The earlier the training the better, even if it's just the basics.

Most puppies enjoy their own 'space' from time to time. Provide a warm, comfortable, draught free bed area, where your puppy can go, feel safe and get away from it all. Provide fresh drinking water at all times. Provide toys, chews and entertainment for your puppy. Provide items, such as cardboard boxes, an old news paper and old blankets which can be shredded. Give bones to chew on. Hide toys and treats in items so the puppy has to work to get the rewards.

If your puppy gets bored, your house will suffer!

Vaccination:

Vaccination is important to prevent your dog from becoming ill from infectious diseases. The micro-organisms that cause disease can be widespread in certain areas. All unvaccinated dogs are at risk from canine distemper, parvovirus, leptospirosis, infectious canine hepatitis and kennel cough. All dogs older than 6 months to be vaccinated against rabies. These vaccinations to be repeated yearly. Please consult your veterinarian in this regard. Vaccination allows the dog to stimulate the body's own defense system to produce protective antibodies in the blood. This protection is called immunity. A course of vaccinations will be needed for your puppy. These are usually given at around 9 and 12 weeks of age. Is also important. Your puppy may already have worms. These are passed from its mother. Worming should be done every month until the puppy is 6 months old and then every 3-6 months thereafter.

Feeding:

Provide a high quality, low protein, low fat food, to enable your puppy to grow strong but steady. Rapid growth causes health problems in later life. Do not fill the puppy with treats and sweets on top of his daily allowance. Take what ever treats are given out of the daily allowance. Your puppy's diet will then not exceed its needs causing health problems and your puppy will not become fat.

Exercise:

Give the puppy plenty of exercise. If you choose an energetic dog be prepared to take the puppy for walks, no matter what the weather at least twice a day. The puppy will be able to have a good run, burning off any excess energy. The puppy will then return home and be more satisfied to have some dinner and settle for a while. Neutering should be considered if you are not planning on breeding from your dog. Neutering can alleviate many problems such as; roaming in male dogs, calling and spotting in the female dog and unwanted puppies. Dogs can be castrated at around 9 months of age but bitches are usually left to have their first season and then spayed. This can be any time from 6-12 months. The vets then advise spaying 3 months after the first season. Always treat your puppy with praise and kindness and a positive attitude instead of a negative attitude to everything the puppy does wrong.