

small door

VETERINARY

DOG PARENTING 101



Everything you need to know about
caring for your new dog.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Welcoming a new dog into your family is one of the most rewarding experiences in life, and we're so excited for you to get to know your new furry family member over the coming days and weeks. As a new dog owner, there's a lot to learn, so we've put together this comprehensive guide to help you navigate dog parenthood. Remember – as a Small Door member, you can contact us 24/7 via the app for advice or if you ever have any concerns about your new pup. Best of luck, and we can't wait to meet you both at the practice soon!



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THE ESSENTIALS, ON ONE PAGE

PREPARING YOUR HOME

Make sure you've got all the essentials before you bring your new dog home. As well as the usual supplies, ensure you have:

- A crate with a cosy bed
- The type of food they are used to, to avoid an upset stomach)
- A few toys
- Something for them to cuddle up with, like a blanket or t-shirt that smells familiar

SOCIALIZATION

Socialization involves getting your pet used to new sights, sounds, smells and experiences. Carry pups outside until they are fully vaccinated, and begin exposing them to lots of different people and other animals as early as you can. Gently touch and handle their paws, ears, belly and tail frequently.

NUTRITION

- Begin by feeding your dog the food they are used to. If you want to change brands, do so slowly over the course of a week or so by slowly providing less of the previous food and more of the new food.
- Make sure your pet's food contains an AAFCO statement of nutritional adequacy for your dog's life stage.
- Check out our list of recommended food brands on page 17.
- Don't go overboard with treats; they should make up no more than 10% of your dog's calorie intake to ensure they're getting the right nutrient balance. Consider giving pieces of your dog's regular kibble as training treats.

TRAINING

- Use positive reinforcement techniques (praise and reward for good behavior) rather than punishing bad behavior. Positive reinforcement training is proven to be more effective, and helps develop the bond between you and your dog.
- Train frequently in short sessions (5-10 mins).
- We encourage crate training; it's linked to a number of positive behavioral benefits, and provides a safe space for your pet to rest.
- Never let your dog off the leash until they have mastered recall, and only in safe locations like enclosed parks and hiking trails.

WELLNESS

Exercise and mental stimulation are crucial for the wellbeing of your dog. As well as providing the right amount of exercise for their breed and age, provide toys and play games that mentally stimulate your dog. Food puzzle toys are great to keep your dog busy while you're out of the house.

MEDICAL CARE

- At your first appointment, we'll go over your pup's personalized wellness care schedule, including vaccine due dates, as well as discussing nutrition, exercise, lifestyle and other wellness factors specific to your dog.
- Remember to administer flea, tick and heartworm preventatives every month.
- Regularly brushing your dog's teeth is essential to combat dental disease later in life. Get your dog used to brushing early - read our guide on page 33.
- We strongly recommend you consider pet insurance, to help plan for the unexpected.

BRINGING YOUR NEW DOG HOME

PREPARING YOUR HOME

Before you bring your new dog home, there are a few things you should do to prepare.

1. Ensure you're fully equipped

Make sure you've got all the necessary essentials to help your dog settle in. You'll need:

- A crate with a cosy bed
- Food and water bowls
- Food and treats (ideally the food that they're used to, to avoid an upset stomach)
- A few toys (check out our suggestions on pg. 22)
- A collar & leash. Also consider a harness if you know they pull on the leash, or if they're a breed where their collar may slip over their head (e.g. dachshund, whippet, greyhound)
- ID tag with their name, your name and contact information
- Poop bags, and indoor pee pads if appropriate
- Cleaning essentials for accidents – cleaning sprays specifically for dog messes can help to eliminate scents and reduce the likelihood of your dog doing their business inside again
- Something for them to cuddle up with, like a blanket or t-shirt that smells familiar (if they're a young puppy, something that smells like their mother or littermates if possible, or something that smells like you as their new owner)

2. Dog-proof your home

Make sure any breakables and important items are safely hidden away or out of reach of your pup, to save them from being chewed or knocked over. Keep garbage cans out of reach, and stow cleaning products and medicines up high, away from inquisitive noses.

Also check that none of your houseplants could be toxic for dogs – check out the [ASPCA's list of toxic plants for dogs](#). Attach cables to the wall or cover them with chew-proof protective piping, to make sure your dog doesn't get a nasty shock, and assess your home for any other potential dangers.

3. Have a plan for toilet training

Decide where you'd like your dog to do their business, as it's a lot easier to toilet train if you encourage your dog to go in a consistent location from the beginning – whether this is a spot outside, or a specific place you keep your indoor pee pads.

4. Discuss plans as a family/household

You should discuss plans for your new furry family member together, to ensure everyone is on the same page when it comes to behavioral matters, lifestyle choices and who's responsible for what.

Your dog will feel more comfortable and learn the rules of the house more quickly if everyone is consistent and you tend to follow a routine. For example, if you're happy to let the dog up on the couch, but your partner isn't – it's better to discuss this before your pup arrives!



THE FIRST DAY WITH YOUR NEW DOG

Meeting the family

Even if your dog has met all the members of their new household before coming home, they may still be a little anxious on the day, so it's best to take things slow and not overwhelm them. The best way to introduce a dog to their new home is to gather everyone together in one room, and with your dog on a loose leash, let your dog explore and approach their new humans, rather than everyone approaching the dog.

Once your dog approaches the family members, have them give a high-value treat to help cement the positive association. Make sure to watch your dog for signs of distress or aggression throughout. Generally, a wagging tail is a good sign, whereas a stiff tail, ears folded back, pulling away or growling indicate they are distressed, and you should remove them from the situation and try more slowly next time.

Introducing your new dog to other pets

If you have other pets in the household, again, take things slowly. Ideally, allow your new dog to explore the home without your other pets present for about 30 minutes to an hour (you can put your other pets in a separate room) so the new dog can explore and get used to the smells prior to interaction with other pets.

For adult dogs, or if you're concerned about your adult dog meeting a new pup, you can introduce dogs through a baby gate so they can smell each other but not hurt each other.

If your pets don't instantly warm up to each other, give them a few minutes at a time in the same room to observe and interact with each other, and if you notice any signs of distress, separate them.

Offer high value treats to both pets to reward calm and positive interactions, and try to stay relaxed yourself. Pets are highly attuned to our own senses, and often take their own emotional cues from us.

Exploring the house

Let your dog take their time exploring the house; they'll want to smell everything to take it all in! For younger or more timid dogs, it may help them feel more comfortable to be introduced to your home bit-by-bit, by blocking off certain rooms or parts of a room. Baby gates or play pens can be useful for this.

Establish a space where your dog can retreat to if they feel overwhelmed at any point. Position their crate and bed somewhere quiet, away from the busier rooms in the home.

Establishing a routine

Try to establish a routine with your dog straight away. Take them out for walks and feed them at consistent times. Having a routine is comforting for dogs, and this will help them settle in more quickly.



REGISTERING YOUR DOG

In many locations, it's mandatory to register your dog with your local health department. If you've adopted, your shelter may already have filed the paperwork for you, otherwise, it's best to do this as soon as you bring your dog home, to ensure you're complying with local laws, and to help reunite you with your dog in the event that they go missing.

SOCIALIZATION

Socialization means ‘learning how to be a part of society’, and while it’s most important during puppyhood, you may find you need to socialize a new adult dog too. Socialization is how dogs learn about themselves, other dogs, and other species they will interact with. It’s how your pup will figure out how to communicate with other animals, and understand what’s acceptable and what’s not.

Poorly socialized dogs can be fearful, timid, or aggressive later on, so socialization is an important part of overall behavioral health.

The critical socialization period for dogs is around 6 to 14 weeks of age. Even though, at this age, your dog won’t have received their full series of vaccinations at this point, it’s important to begin socialization by carrying them outside, introducing them to other vaccinated dogs, dog-friendly cats, and lots of different (friendly!) people. Toys, treats, and other high-value rewards (like lots of verbal praise) will help your puppy associate new friends as a positive experience.

Get your puppy used to a wide variety of sights, sounds, noises, smells, and tastes at a very early age, and they’ll be less fearful and jumpy when they encounter them as an adult.

You want to make sure your puppy accepts being touched and handled by a lot of different people to make them less fearful of strangers and more accepting of vet exams later. The moment you bring your dog home, start getting them used to being touched; rub their belly, gently put your fingers around their mouth, lightly pinch their toes and between their paw buds, brush their coat and handle their ears.

The more people who do this (always gently, and with a great deal of care!), the better – so invite your family members and friends over for puppy-

petting, early and often! (We don’t think they’ll mind.)

And remember, anytime you take your pup to a new place, or introduce them to a new person or experience – the groomer, dog park, and of course the veterinary practice – give them a new toy or a favorite treat. That way, new experiences will be associated with positive feelings.

A great environment for your puppy to work on socialization is at a puppy school or a puppy-training class. In these classes, vaccinated puppies can learn essential communication skills, become accustomed to new sights and sounds, and begin basic obedience training.

SOCIALIZATION CHECKLIST

- Being touched and petted by strangers
- Meeting young children (under your close supervision!)
- Meeting a dog-friendly cat
- Meeting vaccinated adult dogs
- Experiencing visitors arriving and leaving your home
- Visiting other people’s homes
- Traveling in a car
- Hearing the phone ring, loud music, and TV noises
- Hearing laughter and clapping
- Seeing and hearing trucks, bikes, scooters, and buses
- Hearing the washing machine, dryer, and vacuum
- Hearing thunder, fireworks, and sirens
- Getting their paws wet, taking baths, and becoming accustomed to water

BEHAVIOR AND TRAINING



POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

It's important to start training your dog as early as possible, to instill good behaviors from the beginning. Positive reinforcement training is the most effective training method for both puppies and older dogs.

What is positive reinforcement?

Positive reinforcement focuses on rewarding your pet for good behavior, rather than punishing bad behavior. Giving rewards, whether in the form of treats, verbal praise, or a loving touch, when your pet obeys you or behaves well in specific ways encourages your pet to repeat these actions or behaviors when given the command. Good behavior becomes inextricably linked with a reward.

How dogs think

Before you embark on training your pup, it may be helpful to know a few things about what's going on in their furry head.

First, remember that genetics and behavior both tell us that dogs are pack animals. Around 15 weeks, puppies begin developing awareness of pack hierarchy. A set hierarchy – that is, knowing who the “boss” is, and where they themselves rank in the pack – gives puppies a sense of stability, which in turn gives them comfort.

It's important that your dog knows and accepts that they are in a loving pack, in which you are the leader and they are the follower.

For this to happen, you must begin training as soon as your dog first enters your home. Although there are some differing opinions on how to set the stage for obedience and order, many experts agree on the following recommendations:

- **Do not let your dog sleep in your bed.** Instead, give them their own bed or crate as a place they can turn to for comfort and safety.

- **Don't reward unwanted behavior.** On the surface, this may sound silly – who gives treats for bad behavior? But keep in mind that your attention is actually considered to be a treat. So don't acknowledge your dog when they initiate play or demand attention at undesirable times. Otherwise, they'll be learning how to get what they want, whenever they want.
- **Puppy school or dog training classes are great for laying the groundwork for training and basic commands.** Once your dog can sit and stay, these actions can be called upon at any time, which can help prevent many behavioral problems. But these and other skills need to be positively reinforced and continued at home for successful outcomes.

How to use positive reinforcement techniques

At the exact time that your pup displays the behavior you want, praise and immediately give a treat. It's helpful to find out what motivates your dog most. Some dogs are highly food-motivated, whilst others prefer a short play session, a favorite toy, verbal praise or physical affection.

If giving a food-based treat, it should be small and low-calorie, since you will be giving a lot of them out: trainer treats, or bits of cut up carrot, apple, banana, bell pepper, cucumber, strawberry, or blueberry. Positive reinforcement is only effective if it's constant, predictable, and reproducible.

Keep in mind that verbal punishment can result in fear or aggression toward people or things associated with the negative experience. That's why we prefer positive training methods. And you should never physically punish your pet, no matter what: not only can it induce anxiety, it's also cruel, leads to a negative relationship with your pet, and can result in bites (and escalate from there!).

Finally, know that all dogs (like people) learn at a different pace. So be patient, consistent, and persistent.

Positive Training Takeaways

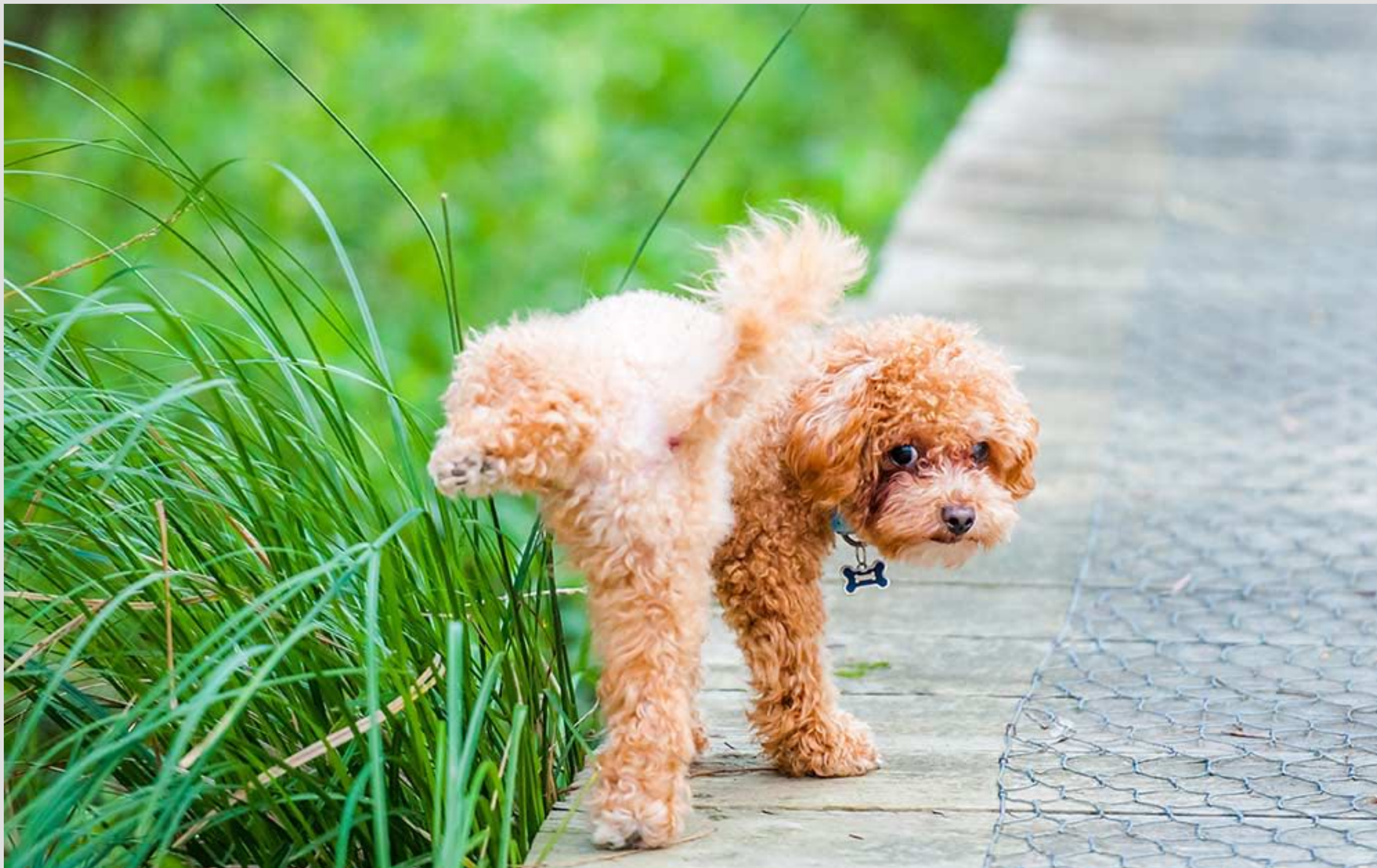
1. Reward positive behaviors (with praise, treats, and toys).
2. Ignore unwanted behaviors and demands for attention.
3. Never physically punish your pet. (If your dog can sit, get them to stop the unwanted behavior by having them sit; then reward them for responding to your command.)
4. Be patient and consistent. It's the best way to reinforce good behavior.

Remember, for your dog to be happy and comfortable in your home, a dependable hierarchy in which you are the "leader" is important: it makes your dog feel safe and stable. But if you want to be the pack leader, that means that you have to be the one to call the shots. By rewarding good behavior and completely ignoring unwanted ones, you can train your dog to be obedient to your commands – and show them who's boss – in a way that's agreeable for both of you.



HOUSETRAINING

The key to successful housetraining is repetition and reward. If you're patient and consistent, it shouldn't take you more than a month or two to teach your dog how to urinate and defecate outdoors.



1. Choose a spot.

Picking a dedicated location for your dog to go really depends on your individual situation. Is it outside in the yard? A specific street corner, or a pee pad in the laundry room? Regardless of where you choose, that's the spot you should take your dog whenever it's time to eliminate.

2. Be consistent.

In the beginning, you'll want to take your dog to the chosen spot every two hours. Once you're there, say the same thing to them every time, whether it's "Go potty," "Time to pee," or "Do your business." You may want to associate going to the potty spot with certain events: the start of a walk, before or after a meal, after a play or nap session. A marker or visual aid can also help.

While you're still teaching your dog where and when to go, don't change the chosen location; this will confuse them. Using the same spot will build up an odor that your pet will detect and want to re-mark with their waste.

3. Praise and reward!

Remain quiet and still while your dog is eliminating – no distractions. But immediately after your pup

pees or poops in the right spot, provide lots of praise and a special treat. They'll come to associate the desired behavior with the treat, and that's the best way to encourage them to go in the right place.

4. Be attentive and aware.

Learn your dog's signals that they want to go outside, such as sniffing, whining, or pawing at the door.

Ultimately, providing a set routine is the most important factor for success. Being consistent about timing, location, key phrases, and rewards will provide structure and a relaxed, steady environment that will be very helpful with housetraining.

Especially when you're still trying to establish this routine, close supervision is essential, and confinement can be helpful. Close supervision means you can observe their signals, while confinement to a small area will limit the locations in which they can possibly have accidents. Plus, they'll be close enough for you to pick up if you notice them trying to eliminate in an undesirable location.

Accidents happen: how to respond

Remember, as the human in this situation, it's up to you to be vigilant and help your dog get to the right bathroom spot. But accidents do happen and are simply a part of the learning process. Just keep in mind that there's a right way and a wrong way for you to respond.

If you witness your dog in the act of having an accident indoors, remember that you should NEVER physically punish them in response. This could make them afraid of eliminating in front of people altogether. A loud clap, spray from a water bottle, or verbal command such as a firm "No!" is a more acceptable expression of disapproval.

Immediately after they stop eliminating in the wrong spot, quickly take them to their established bathroom spot. Once they successfully pee or poop there, reward them with lots of praise and treats.

If you did not catch them in the act, ignore the accident altogether, as this particular opportunity to correct their behavior has passed. Clean the area thoroughly and try to neutralize it with sprays or a cleaning solution, because leaving trace odors of urine or feces will confuse your dog: only the

"right" locations for eliminating should smell like waste. Dogs do not like to eliminate in their sleeping or eating areas, so placing food bowls or bedding in previously soiled areas (after you've cleaned up) will discourage future accidents in those locations.

Houstraining is considered "complete" after your dog has gone 4 to 8 weeks without an accident. Until then, it might be helpful to keep them within view at all times, or when you can't supervise them, in a small area such as a crate.

CRATE TRAINING

We encourage crate training for a number of reasons, but primarily because it provides a safe space for your dog when you have to leave them unsupervised. This is comforting for your pet and gives you peace of mind, as well.

Child-proof gates, secure cupboards and garbage cans, and clearing or covering electrical equipment are good ideas when it comes to securing your home and pet, but you should consider using crate training in conjunction with those safeguards.



Another bonus? Animals do not like to urinate or defecate where they sleep, especially if it's a small space.

This will encourage your dog to "hold it" until you're able to take them to an established elimination spot.

Just remember that you never want your dog to "hold it" for too long, as it's not healthy for them.



How to crate train:

1. Pick the right crate size.

Choose a crate that's big enough for your dog to stand up and turn around in when the door is closed. However, it shouldn't be so big that they feel free to urinate and defecate in it. Think cozy, but not claustrophobic.

2. Pick a quiet place for the crate.

The crate should be kept in a quiet, calm part of your home, where there's not a lot of activity. A den, spare bedroom, or area with no windows may be ideal. Of course, not all of us have that option, so be creative when establishing a separate, quiet area for your pet's crate.

3. Introduce your dog to the crate.

Use a command such as "Go to bed" (or even simply "Crate") as you guide your dog into the crate, and use the same command every time. Do this after an exercise or play session, not when they have a lot of energy or playfulness. Tempt them inside using toys and treats, and once they're in, give them lots of praise and treats as a reward. Positive reinforcement at every turn! When you're just starting out, you'll want to stay nearby – you need to practice crating before leaving them in the crate on their own for real.

4. Ignore bad behavior.

Especially when you're just starting out, your dog will probably vocalize, whine, and scratch. Do not acknowledge this behavior or let them out in response, because it will teach them that whenever they want to be let out of the crate, they should repeat this undesirable behavior.

If your dog stops the bad behavior when you tell them to, you may release them from the crate and provide praise and treats. This step

requires patience – both for you and your pup!

5. Be consistent & observant.

When your dog is in their crate for longer periods (i.e. when they're not under your direct supervision and need to be in their crate), make sure you let them out every few hours to take them to their special bathroom spot. If you ever see them showing signals that they need to go outside, don't ignore this.

6. Prepare yourself for possible anxiety.

If your pup is very anxious and showing no progress with crate training, you can try a special dog calming collar such as Adaptil. These collars release pheromones (natural chemicals released by animals) that have a soothing effect. You won't be able to smell them, but some dogs find them to be calming.

7. Never use your crate for punishment.

Do not use the crate as a "sin bin" or place for punishment. It is meant to be a safe space for your pet where they can rest; they should want to go there. Using it for punishment will create a negative association with the crate, and they will begin to resist being confined there.

TRAINING YOUR DOG TO COME BACK (RECALL)

Teaching your dog good recall skills is essential. Knowing they'll come back when called means you can give them more freedom to roam and sniff on walks without putting them in undue danger. In fact, recall is a skill that may even save their life one day.

A Step-by-Step Guide to Training Recall

Step 1: Introducing recall

Start in a quiet, familiar environment, like your home. Standing close to your dog, and making sure they're focused on you, show them you have a reward in your hand. Then call "Come!" as enthusiastically as you can.

When they come, give them the treat, along with lots of praise and pets. The goal is to teach your dog that coming to you is the best, most fun thing imaginable, and good things happen when they come back.

Step 2: Increase distance

Keep repeating the exercise over the next few days and weeks, gradually increasing the distance they must cross to get to you.

If at any stage your dog doesn't respond correctly, reduce the distance between you until they're successful, then increase again slowly. Also, try to practice at random times, when your dog doesn't expect it, to get them accustomed to coming when called at all times.

Step 3: Add distractions

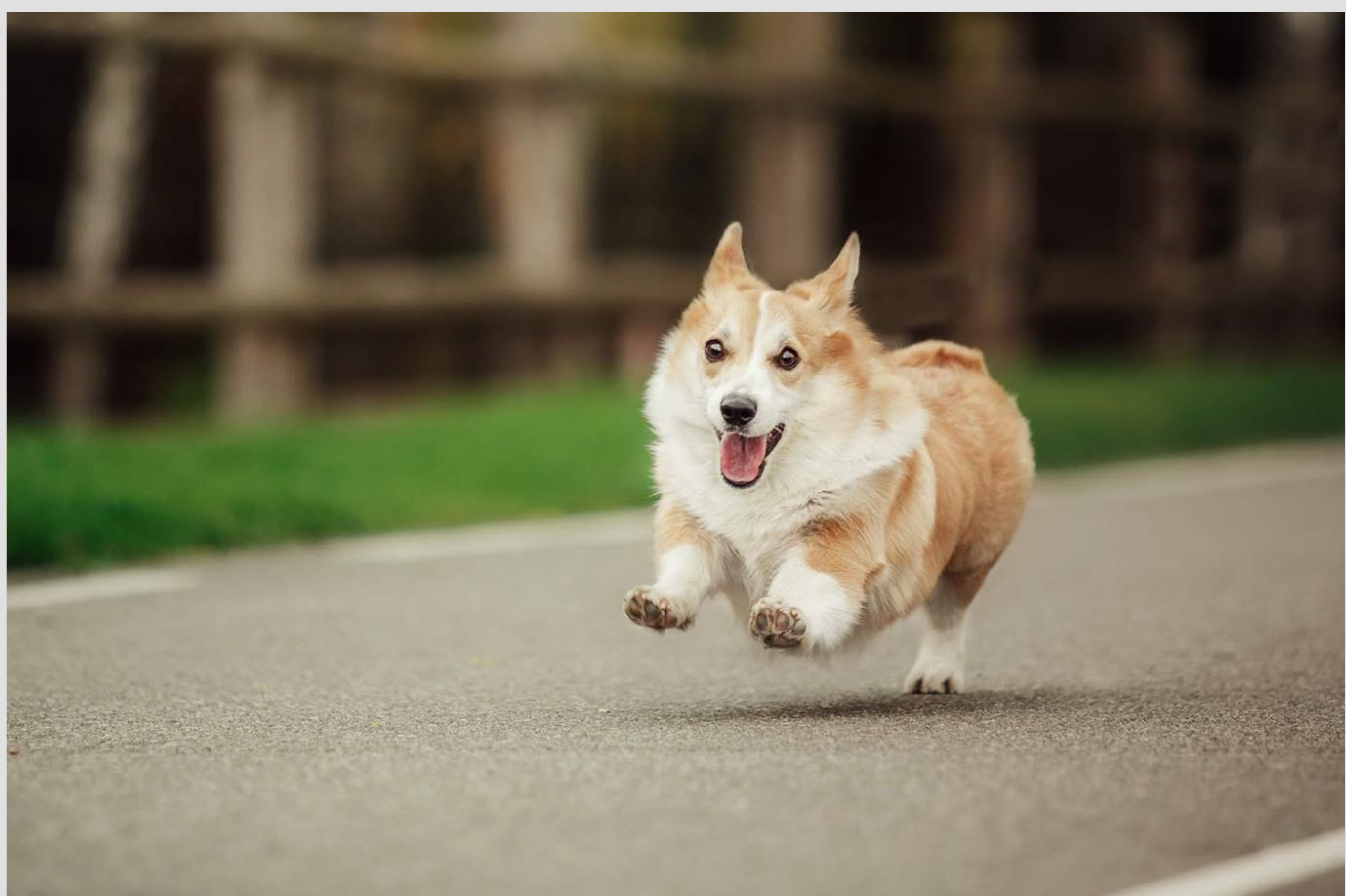
When your dog is coming every time you call, you can move your practice sessions outside and begin adding

distractions, like other people and other dogs that your dog has to pass on their way back to you. Note: Make sure this is done in a safe, enclosed area, like a fenced yard!

Keep your dog on a long leash while practicing recall outside until you're sure they'll come back when you call, obeying any local laws regarding leash lengths. Never practice off-leash recall exercises anywhere there is even a remote chance that your dog could get hit by a car.

More Tips for How to Achieve Perfect Recall

- **Use high-value treats and toys as a reward.** With lots of competing interests and distractions, you need to really motivate your dog to come to you. The usual biscuit may not cut it! Try a very small chunk of cheese or something else you know your dog loves.
- **Set your dog up to win.** Help your dog feel successful by waiting until they've had a quick run around and is already coming back towards you before calling them to come.



- **Don't repeat yourself.** Calling “Come! Come! Come!” over and over again will just teach your dog that they don't have to listen the first time you call. If your dog doesn't respond, take a step back in your training until you're successful.
- **Don't call your dog for “negative” reasons only.** If you only ever recall your dog to put their leash back on and go home, they'll quickly learn that “come” means the fun is over. To avoid creating this negative association, make sure to recall your dog a few times during each play session, reward them, and then allow them to go and play again.

Recall in an emergency

If you ever need your dog to come back urgently in an emergency, don't chase them. They'll likely think it's a game and keep running away from you. Instead, try running away from them to incentivize them to chase you.

Alternatives to off-leash

Some dogs just aren't great at coming back, and no matter how much training you do, you may not feel comfortable letting them off the lead. That's okay! Trust your instincts. Dogs still enjoy on-leash walks, and you shouldn't feel like you're depriving them—you're being a responsible dog parent and doing what's best for them.

Fenced-in dog parks also offer a great opportunity for dogs to run around, play, and socialize, without any worry that they'll get too far away.

Teaching recall can take months, so stay patient. Just remember to keep praising every success, no matter how small.

Finally, one important note to keep in mind: under no circumstances should a dog ever be allowed off the leash if they are being walked anywhere near cars. Off-leash walking is to be reserved for hiking trails, enclosed parks, and other completely safe locations. Remember that no matter how good your dog's recall skills are, no dog can be trusted to come back when called 100% of the time. Better to play it safe than sorry!



SEPARATION ANXIETY

Separation anxiety is distress displayed by dogs when left alone. Dogs get separation anxiety when they are not capable of comforting themselves. For some dogs, this happens when a physical illness causes moderate to severe discomfort, while others may develop separation anxiety after a change in environment.

Moving, changes in routine, introducing new family members or pets, and other adjustments can all trigger separation anxiety. Dogs recently adopted from shelters may also develop separation anxiety (although paradoxically, the separation anxiety tends to develop 1-2 months after being brought home).

The signs and symptoms of separation anxiety in dogs are mostly behavioral.

SEPARATION ANXIETY SYMPTOMS

- Excessive panting and salivation
- Excessive barking or howling
- Destructive behavior
- Urination or defecation around the house

Dogs with separation anxiety tend to vocalize when they are left alone by barking, whining, or howling. Panting and salivation are also common.

These signs can begin before separation if dogs learn to anticipate their owner's departure.

Vocalization can cause owners trouble with neighbors or landlords, and accidents within the house, as well as destructive behaviors like chewing on door frames, can cause lasting property damage. Some destructive behavior can even lead to veterinary emergencies. Consuming foreign bodies like clothing, cloth, or garbage may require surgical intervention, adding to dog and owner stress. Dogs with separation anxiety may also chew, bite, or lick at themselves excessively, which can lead to infection.

Preventing or treating separation anxiety

Many of the steps taken to treat separation anxiety can actually be helpful in preventing it developing in the first place.

These include:

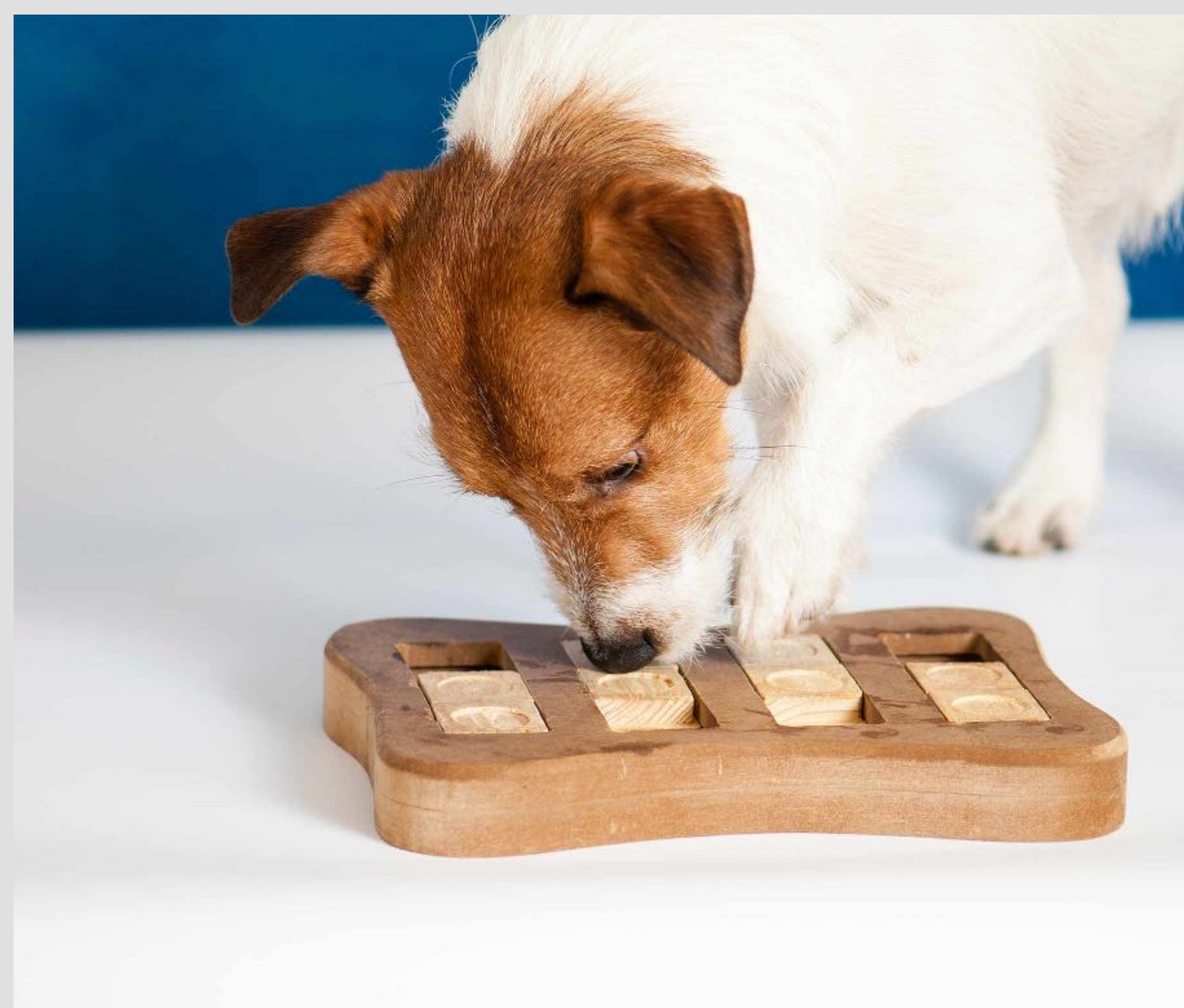
- **Socializing dogs and encouraging positive experiences with alone time** through crate training or other techniques. Having a "safe place" like a crate will help your dog comfort themselves in your absence, and also lowers their chances of engaging in destructive behavior.
- **Discouraging certain needy behaviors** like scratching or excessively seeking attention, to help them become more self-sufficient.
- **Establish positive associations with your absence.** When you leave your dog alone, give them a special treat, stuffed Kong, or another high value reward that they don't get at any other time.
- **Give them something to do to fill the time.** Slow feeding bowls or puzzle toys can provide your dog with a tasty distraction while you are gone.
- **Stay calm when leaving and returning home.** Although it may be hard to ignore your dog's exuberant greeting, giving them too much attention at these times can heighten your dog's anxiety around arrivals and departures.

- **Switch up your routine when leaving home.** If you follow the same routine, your dog will pick up on this and notice those departure cues: the sound of your keys, putting on shoes, or grabbing a bag. Mix things up so your dog doesn't associate these signals with you leaving and subsequently with anxiety.
- **Increase exercise and play before leaving.** Frequent exercise can help tire your dog out and stimulate them physically and mentally prior to time spent alone.
- **Never punish your dog for displaying anxiety or for any behaviors experienced during periods of anxiety.** Punishment is ineffective and only increases your dog's stress levels.

If you're worried your dog may be experiencing separation anxiety, contact us to discuss – we can help you come up with a plan of action.

If necessary, we can suggest anti-anxiety medications that may help, along with calming aids like pheromone collars such as [Adaptil](#) or products like the [Thunder Shirt](#).

Treating separation anxiety takes time, and some dogs never learn to reliably comfort themselves. During the training process, consider using alternative measures like pet sitters, doggy daycare centers, or dog walkers.



NUTRITION

FEEDING SCHEDULES

Generally, puppies should be fed three times a day up to 12-16 weeks, and then slowly weaned to twice daily feedings. Older dogs should be fed twice a day.

To avoid an upset stomach, it's best not to make any sudden changes to your dog's diet. If possible, find out what food they have previously been eating, and buy a small supply to slowly transition them onto your preferred food.

How to transition

Slowly decrease the amount of old food, while increasing the amount of new food over about a week. For example, if your pup needs 2 cups of food a day, try the following:

TRANSITIONING FOODS

- **1st day:** 2 cups of previous food
- **2nd day:** 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups previous, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup new
- **3rd day:** 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups previous, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup new
- **4th day:** 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups previous, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup new
- **5th day:** 1 cup previous, 1 cup new
- **6th day:** $\frac{3}{4}$ cup previous, 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups new
- **7th day:** $\frac{1}{2}$ cup previous, 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups new
- **8th day:** $\frac{1}{4}$ cup previous, 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups new
- **9th day onwards:** 2 cups new food

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT FOOD FOR YOUR DOG

Whether you're a new puppy mom or a seasoned dog dad, providing the right nutrition for your pet can be complicated. There's a wealth of misinformation out there, from fad diets to false marketing and confusing pet food labels. Here are

a few tips and recommendations to help make the right choice for your pet.

1. Look for an AAFCO statement under the ingredients list.

If your pet's food bag has a statement from the AAFCO (the Association of American Feed Control Officials), it's a sign that you are off to a good start. This statement is an indicator of nutritional adequacy – it means your pet's diet is balanced and complete. It's trickier to find on canned and wet food, but rest assured it is still there!

INGREDIENTS: Brewers Rice, Whole Grain Corn, Chicken Meal, Pea Protein, Egg Product, Pork Fat, Corn Gluten Meal, Chicken Liver Flavor, Dried Beet Pulp, Lactic Acid, Pork Liver Flavor, Soybean Oil, Potassium Chloride, Iodized Salt, Dicalcium Phosphate, vitamins (Vitamin E Supplement, L-Ascorbyl-2-Calcium Pantothenate, Riboflavin Supplement, Vitamin B12 Supplement, Pyridoxine Hydrochloride, Biotin, L-Trptophan, Taurine, minerals (Ferrous Sulfate, Zinc Oxide, Copper Sulfate, Manganous Oxide, Calcium Iodate, Sodium Selenite), Mixed Tocopherols for freshness, Natural Flavors, Beta-Carotene.

GUARANTEED ANALYSIS

Crude Protein	Min.	22.5%	225 g/kg
Crude Fat	Min.	11%	110 g/kg
Crude Fiber	Max.	2%	20 g/kg
Moisture	Max.	10%	100 g/kg
Calcium	Min.	0.7%	7 g/kg
Calcium	Max.	1.3%	13 g/kg
Phosphorus	Min.	0.6%	6 g/kg
Phosphorus	Max.	1%	10 g/kg
Potassium	Min.	0.6%	6 g/kg
Magnesium	Min.	0.05%	0.5 g/kg
Magnesium	Max.	0.14%	1.4 g/kg
Thiamine	Min.	2 ppm	2 mg/kg
Cobalamin (Vitamin B12)	Min.	0.05 ppm	0.05 mg/kg
Omega-3 Fatty Acids*	Min.	0.1%	1 g/kg
Omega-6 Fatty Acids*	Min.	2%	20 g/kg

* Not recognized as an essential nutrient by the AAFCO Dog Food Nutrient Profiles.

CALORIE CONTENT (calculated): 3615 kcal ME/kg; 369 kcal ME/cup

AAFCO STATEMENT: Animal feeding tests using AAFCO procedures substantiate that Prescription Diet™ i/di™ Canine provides complete and balanced nutrition for maintenance of adult dogs and growing puppies.

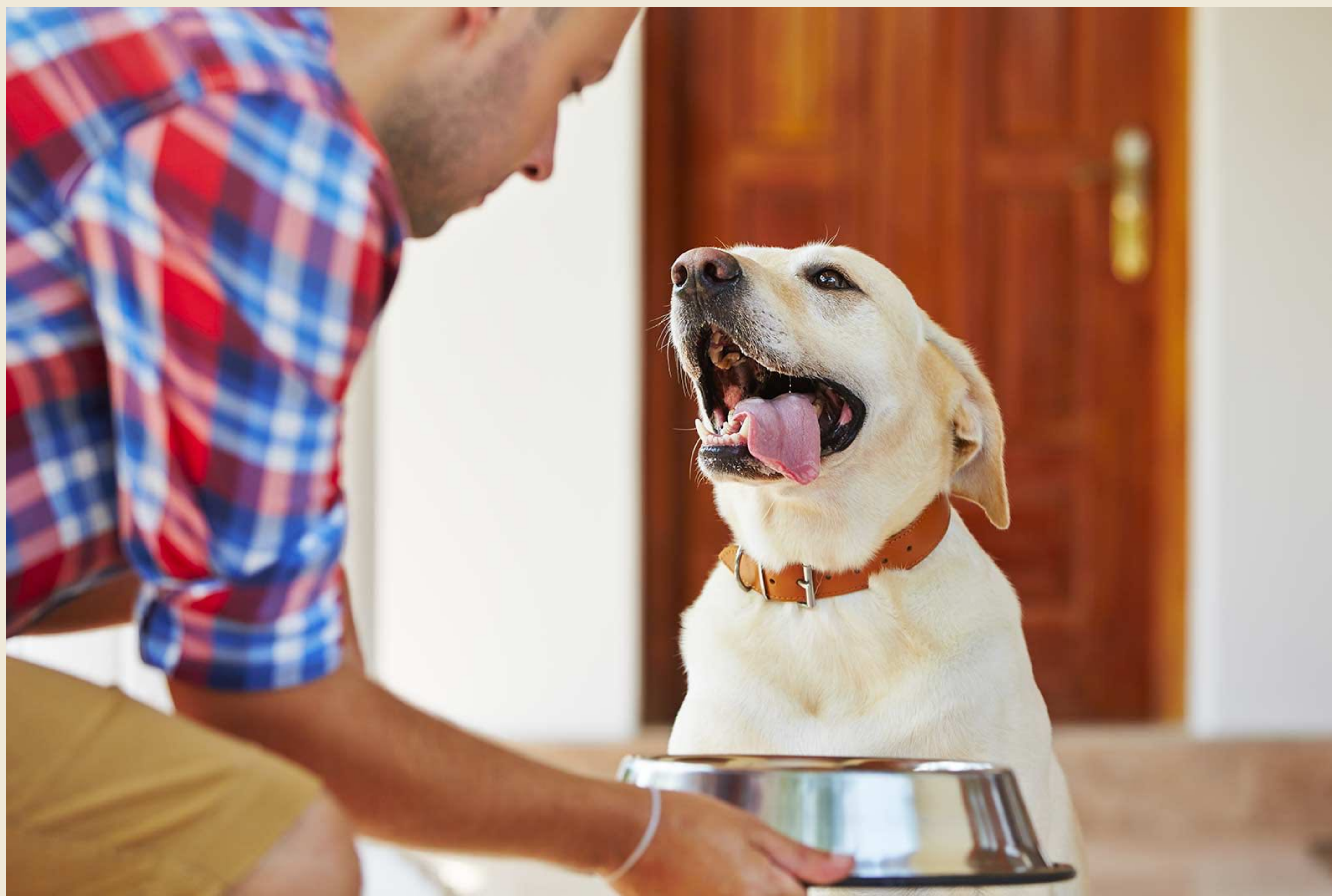
2. Don't dwell on the ingredients.

The ingredients list on a bag of pet food is complex, but it's not just science that goes into these labels. It can be a powerful form of marketing where manufacturers list ingredients to catch your eye that may not add nutritional value for your dog.

Ask your vet to clarify any confusing terms for you. "Human-grade" has no medical meaning, and "meat byproduct" can include organ meats but nothing crazy like hair, horns, teeth, or hooves. Don't overthink it!

3. Assess the manufacturer.

This is where our doctors at Small Door are here to help. If you have not researched where your pet's



food is manufactured, you may be missing key indicators of good nutrition. Here are some questions we ask:

- Where is the food manufactured? Generally, a good manufacturer owns the plants where their food is produced.
- What quality control measures are taken? This looks at quality of ingredients, consistency and nutritional value of the end product.
- Do they employ at least one full-time, qualified animal nutritionist, and does this doctor formulate the diets?
- Do they conduct and publish research in peer-reviewed journals?
- Can they provide nutritional values for any nutrient, beyond what's listed on the label?

These are just a few of the questions we ask pet food manufacturers to ensure that we are recommending the best diets to our members.

Specific requirements for puppies, large and small breeds

- **Puppies need puppy food.** What you feed your dog as a puppy is really important for their growth and development. Puppies need more calories, fat and a different vitamin and mineral balance than adults. Puppy foods account for these specific nutrition needs. We recommend feeding puppy food until your dog reaches their adult size – around 12 months old for small to medium breeds and 14 to 18 months for large and giant breeds. When picking out a puppy food, look for the AAFCO statement and make sure it says that the diet meets the nutritional profiles for puppies or all life stages.
- **Is your dog a large breed?** Large and giant breed dogs need a more precise calcium to phosphorus ratio for their growing big bones. If you have a large breed puppy, make sure their puppy food is labeled to include large breeds.
- **Is your dog a toy or small breed?** Use the steps above and select a “small bite” kibble size. Dog foods often have versions made specifically for small dogs and their tiny mouths, to make chewing easier and make sure they don't choke.

RECOMMENDED FOOD AND TREAT BRANDS

Here are some pet food brands that our doctors recommend to suit many different lifestyle choices. Many of these brands also have great puppy food formulas. Please note that we do not have a vested financial interest in any of these foods. They meet the necessary nutrition requirements from AAFCO, adhere to strict quality controls, and employ veterinary nutritionists:

- Hill's Pet Nutrition
- Royal Canin
- Purina One and Pro Plan
- Farmina Pet Foods
- Wellness Complete Health
- Merrick brands (Merrick, Castor and Pollux, Organix, Pristine)
- Acana
- NomNomNow (fresh pet food)
- Just Food For Dogs (fresh pet food)
- Spot and Tango (fresh pet food)
- Sundays (Freeze-dried food)
- Balanceit, used to formulate a home-cooked diet with the balanceit or ivi blend supplements
- Vegetarian options: Royal Canin Vegetarian and Purina ProPlan HA Vegetarian



DIETS TO THINK THROUGH

At Small Door, we're here to help tailor your pet's diet to your lifestyle as best as possible. It's important to prioritize your pet's health, and there are some diets that are worth thinking through before you commit:

Grain free diets

Some 'boutique' and consumer-oriented pet food companies have suggested that grain free diets are beneficial to your furry friends, particularly to dogs. It has even been compared to the benefits of gluten free diets in people, which just isn't accurate.

Grain free diets have been linked to an increased risk of a heart disease, called dilated cardiomyopathy, in dogs. We don't know enough to say why this is, but we do know that we should not be feeding dogs grain free foods.

Raw meat-based diets

The raw diet is another one influenced by pop culture. It consists of feeding raw meats, sometimes supplemented with raw fruits,

vegetables, and eggs. The thought process behind this diet is: dogs' ancestors ate raw meat, so now our pets should. Our dogs, however, are not their ancient predecessors, and we need to consider how their nutrition has evolved.

There are no scientific studies that prove the health benefits claimed by supporters of this diet. In fact, there are many studies showing the opposite: nutritional imbalances, diet-induced hyperthyroidism and bacterial infections.

Raw diets can be dangerous for you and your dog. They pose increased contamination risks from Salmonella and other bacteria, so they're not only a risky choice for pets, but also a public health risk.

Vegan and vegetarian diets

These diets require careful consideration and can have some pitfalls. There are a few safe, healthy vegetables for dogs to eat. But they still need to get enough protein in their diets, so vegan and vegetarian lifestyles may not suit them. Talk things through with your veterinarian before making this change.

CALORIE COUNTS

If your dog requires a specific calorie count, we recommend discussing with us rather than using an online calculator, as the calculation involves many factors and can be quite complex.

TREATS

As for treats, we recommend those with a limited and easily understandable ingredient list. As a substitute, try these low-fat and low-calorie human foods: cut up carrots, apple, banana, bell pepper, cucumber, strawberries, blueberries, and ice cubes. If you want to keep your pet busy with a tasty treat, freeze some peanut butter or low-sodium chicken broth (or even your pet's wet food) inside a Kong toy.



FOOD DANGERS

The fact that chocolate is bad for dogs is common knowledge, but you may be surprised to learn that a number of other common human foods are also toxic or dangerous for dogs. Make sure to keep the following out of your dog's reach, and contact us immediately if you're concerned your dog may have ingested any:

- Chocolate
- Raisins and grapes
- Onion and garlic
- Pits from stone fruit (apricots, peaches, cherries etc.)
- Avocados

- Coffee (grounds & beans), tea and other caffeine sources
- Alcoholic drinks
- Anything that contains xylitol (a sugar-free sweetener), like gum or candies
- Anything high in fat, sugar or salt
- Raw eggs, raw meat and raw fish
- Bones
- Uncooked yeast dough
- Macadamia nuts and walnuts

For common food issues, like an upset stomach or if your dog isn't eating, view our advice on pages 36-39.



EXERCISE

EXERCISE NEEDS

Dogs need exercise to maintain happy and healthy lives, just like people do. Your dog's exercise needs will vary depending on their age and breed. So, it's important to tailor their exercise according to their stage of life.

WHY DOGS NEED EXERCISE

- **For their physical health:** Dogs need exercise to stay in shape. Exercise results in tip-top body condition, from a healthy weight and muscle tone to a healthy metabolism.
- **For their mental stimulation:** Dogs need as much physical exercise as they do mental exercise. Physical activity plays a big part in dogs' mental states and provides stimulation for both the body and brain.
- **To reinforce positive behaviors and reduce unwanted ones:** Just as exercise affects dogs' physical and mental wellbeing, it also impacts their behaviors. With ample exercise, dogs are satiated, leading to fewer destructive behaviors.
- **To find a balance:** Lack of exercise, as well as too much of it, can result in poor health and habits for your dog. Aim to find a happy medium.

EXERCISE FOR PUPPIES

Puppies have unique exercise needs. They are eager and active, but they are also brand new to the world and to exercising. This means that while they have huge amounts of energy, they don't have the stamina to match.

- **Start with shorter play sessions.** Puppies get large bursts of energy followed by long periods

of rest and napping. To hold their attention and introduce them to exercise, hold a few short walks or play sessions throughout the day.

- **Don't overwork your puppy.** If they're sleeping, let them sleep. Too much exercise can be harmful to your new best friend's developing mind and body. Wait until your puppy's bones and joints are fully grown, at around one year old, before making them your running partner. This is especially important for large breed dogs, as too much strain from exercise can damage their delicate cartilage.
- **Be mindful of your pup's safety.** Puppies should not be overexposed to the outside world until they are fully vaccinated and their immune system is armed and ready. We recommend having the majority of your play sessions indoors. Carrying your pup outside before they are fully vaccinated is a great way to introduce them to the sights and smells of their new home and to tire them out.
- **Learn your puppy's breed.** Regardless of their stage of life, some dog breeds are genetically and physically built to exercise more than others. Your 10-week-old Husky, while they may grow to 50 lbs, is still a small puppy right now. Don't take them on a strenuous hike that they'll be able to tackle in a year or two.
- **Make sure you are the one to initiate play** and exercise sessions, not your puppy. This will prevent them from becoming over-demanding and hyperactive.



EXERCISE FOR ADULT DOGS

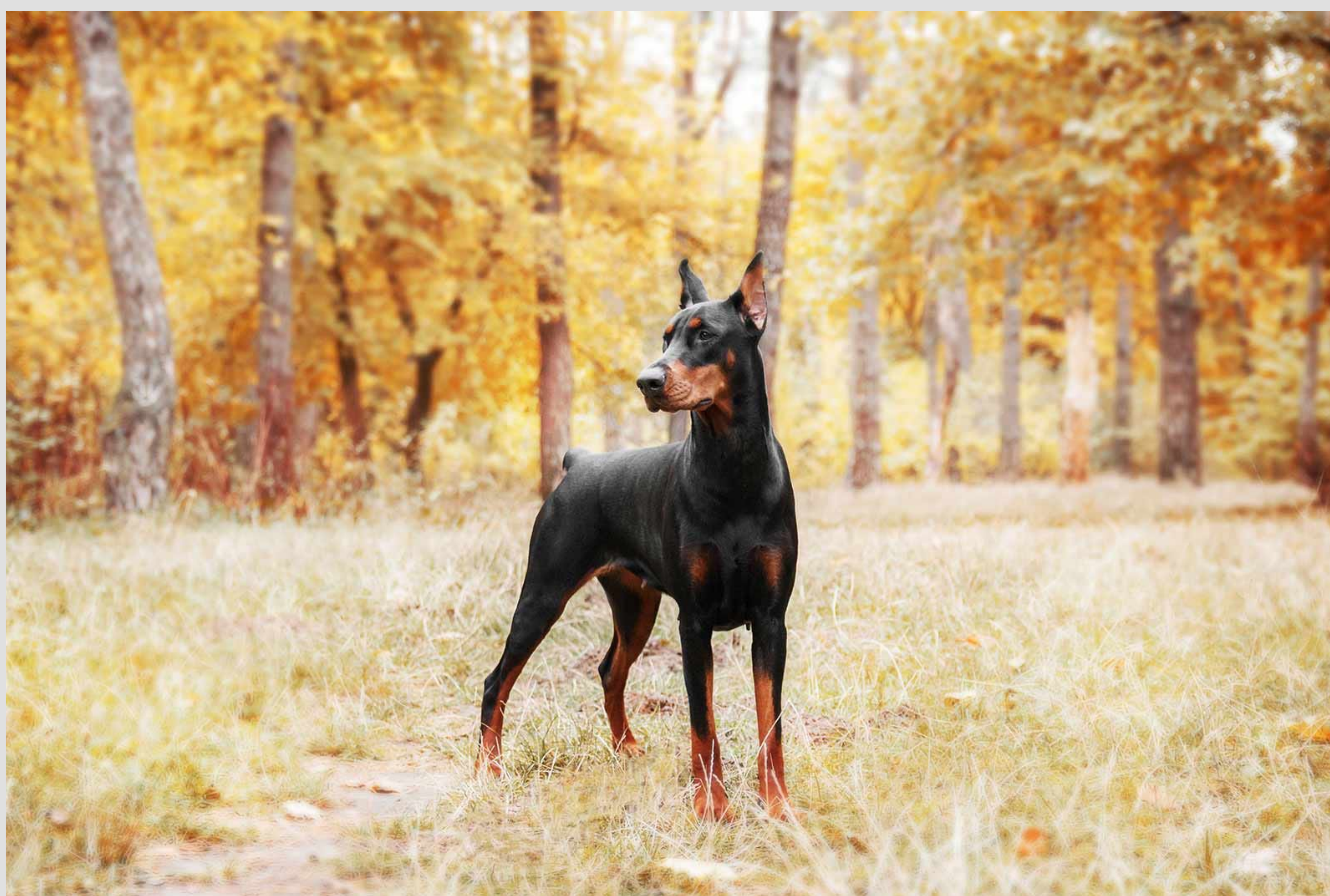
When it comes to exercising adult dogs, it's crucial to consider their breed and lifestyle. Adult dogs can perform a larger variety of exercises than puppies and seniors, so mix things up and have fun. In general, dogs need a minimum of 30 minutes of exercise each day.

- **Less active breeds** should get 30 to 60 minutes per day. This can be as simple as a few leisurely walks and some indoor playtime. Make sure you listen to your dog, as these breeds can tire out rather quickly.
- **Flat-faced breeds:** A.k.a. brachycephalic, dogs like Pugs, Bulldogs, and Shih Tzus have a lower exercise tolerance due to their breathing constraints. Extreme caution should be taken with these breeds in hot weather. Even 10 minutes in the sun on a hot summer's day can be more than they can handle, as they often cannot breathe well enough for adequate heat exchange.
- **Toy and small breeds:** These little guys can't take on as much as larger breeds. They are best suited to smaller amounts of exercise throughout the day.

- **Large and giant breeds:** The biggest of the breeds are prone to joint and hip issues. Try a range of exercise that won't put continual strain on their legs, like brief hikes and fetch sessions. If you have a breed that enjoys swimming, this is a great low impact exercise for your dog.

What tires out a little Pomeranian will barely warm up an eager Border Collie. High energy breeds need vigorous physical and mental exercise, typically 60 to 90 minutes everyday. Adapt their workout regime to what they do best.

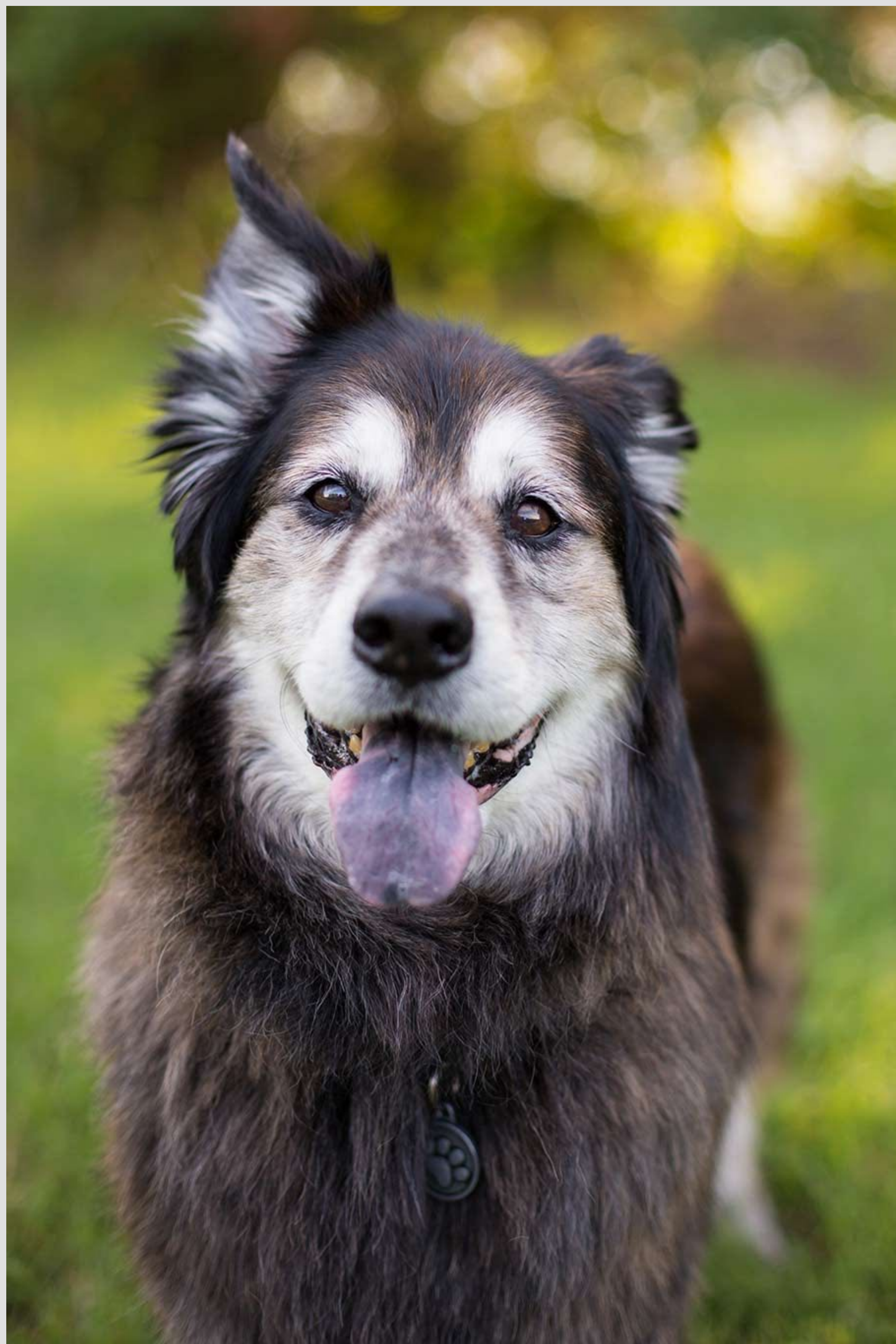
- **Sporting breeds:** Retrievers, Pointers, Setters, and Spaniels. These dogs are made for intense activities. Try taking them for a run, hike, or swim.
- **Herding breeds:** Collies, Shepherds, and Sheepdogs. They are incredibly intelligent and easily bored. Set up a game of hide-and-seek using treats to put them in their element.
- **Working breeds:** Huskies, Bernese Mountain Dogs, Boxers, and Rottweilers just to name a few. They thrive with long, consistent exercise. Spend an hour with them at the dog park, or go for a longer hike.



EXERCISE FOR SENIOR DOGS

The physical and mental health of senior dogs can be forgotten because of their mobility limitations. Set your senior dog up for success by giving them consistent exercise throughout their life. This way, they'll stay as healthy as possible into old age.

- **Break up exercise.** Senior dogs still need at least 30 minutes of exercise each day. Offer shorter walks and play throughout the day.
- **Choose low-impact activities.** At their stage in life, senior dogs need more relaxation than stimulation. Go on walks, not runs. If you have access to a pool or water, go for a swim. It's a great activity that is gentle on their brittle bodies.



- **Evaluate your dog's weight.** If your senior dog is overweight at all, consider a diet change or more consistent exercise. Being at a healthy weight will help reduce as much physical strain as possible.
- **Look into physical therapy.** Just like it can help in people, physical therapy can relieve pain and discomfort that your senior dog is experiencing. Water therapy, massage therapy, heat therapy, and cold therapy are just some of the types out there.

EXERCISING YOUR DOG SAFELY

However old your dog, it's important to mention that you shouldn't let them off the leash in an unfenced location until they've mastered recall in areas of high-distraction.

Dog parks and dog runs can be an incredible tool for pet owners, allowing your pup to play with others and run around in safety. However, it's crucial that again, you don't take your dog to a dog park until you know they will always come back to you when called – just in case.

You should also ensure your dog is always within sight when you're at the dog park. Even if your little one loves playing with other pups, others may not be so friendly. Watch out for signs of distress or aggression from your dog and others around them, so you can call your dog back to you straight away before things escalate.

WELLNESS

MENTAL STIMULATION

Just as dogs need physical exercise, they also need mental stimulation to stay fit, healthy and happy. From tracking scents outside, to concentrating hard on obedience training, or attempting to get kibble out of a puzzle toy – tough mental concentration results in a tired, happy dog.

A dog who lacks stimulation (of either the physical or mental type) often ends up letting out their pent-up energy in an undesirable manner, such as chewing their owner's socks or destroying a piece of furniture. This is why it's so important to ensure your dog gets plenty of stimulation.

IDEAS FOR MENTAL STIMULATION

1. Practice short bursts of obedience training each day (5-10 min sessions)
2. Move onto tricks when your dog is a pro
3. Make your dog work for their food with a stuffed Kong or a food-dispensing puzzle toy (see our Toys section below)
4. Play hide and seek
5. Play 'nose games' like find the treats
6. Consider teaching them agility

TOYS

While some may consider toys a luxury, they actually play an important role in maintaining your dog's behavior and wellbeing.

There are hundreds of different types of dog toys on the market. A top tip is to learn your dog's preferences and habits, to avoid wasting money on toys that will collect dust, or be ripped apart in seconds.



The types of toys you might consider include:

- **Chew toys:** Dogs have a strong natural instinct to chew, and by giving them appropriate chew toys, you reduce the likelihood of your own items getting destroyed. If your dog is an aggressive chewer, then soft, stuffed toys are best avoided as the stuffing and/or squeaker can pose an obstruction risk if they swallow it and it becomes lodged in their intestines. Hard rubber or reinforced, tough nylon/fabric toys are better suited for these dogs:
 - [Kong Extreme](#)
 - [Tuffy's Mega Ring](#)
 - [Outward Hound Invincible Snake](#) – an option for aggressive chewers who love squeaky toys
- **Playtime toys:** Some dogs love to chase things, so balls and frisbees are a good bet here. (If your dog is also a chewer, make sure you only bring these toys out during active playtime.) Dogs that love to chase and shake things will also often love these stuffing-free toys that are perfect for that 'prey' instinct:
 - [ZippyPaws Skinny Peltz](#)
- **Tug toys:** If your dog loves to play tug-of-war, consider rope toys. Unless your pup is a big chewer, rope toys can be fairly durable, and some types may be machine washable. However if your dog likes to chew, rope toys are not recommended; your dog may ingest the rope, which can wrap around their intestines and cause serious harm. In this situation, consider a tough rubber tug toy, such as:
 - [Invincible Chains](#)

- **Comfort toys:** Plush toys, squeaky toys and blankets may help to soothe and bring a sense of security to some dogs, particularly those who suffer from separation anxiety.
- **Interactive toys:** Puzzle toys and feeders can provide great exercise and mental enrichment for dogs while being fun:
 - [Outward Hound Hide a Squirrel](#)
 - [Trixie Activity Flip Board](#)
 - [Nina Ottoson Puzzle Toys](#)

ROTATE YOUR DOG'S TOYS

Just like children, dogs like new things. By rotating your dog's toys, you can make the toys seem much more interesting! Stash some of your dog's toys in a cupboard for a couple of days, and then swap them over to give your dog something new to play with.

DANGEROUS CHEWS

With regard to chews such as rawhide, bully sticks and artificial chews such as nylabones, there are

several points to note. The first is that very hard objects can wear away the tooth enamel over time, exposing sensitive nerve endings and causing discomfort for your animal, as well as a pathway for tooth infection.

The second is that many bully sticks and pigs' ears have been associated with recalls due to Salmonella contamination, which poses a health risk for both pets and humans alike.

Lastly, there is a danger of pieces breaking off and being swallowed by your pet, posing a choking hazard or a blockage in the digestive tract – a serious health concern.

SAFE DENTAL CHEWS

Alternative chew products we recommend are those that have been vetted by the Veterinary Oral Health Council as not damaging to teeth. Some of our favorites include:

- [Purina Pro-plan dental chewz](#)
- [Tartar Shield Soft Rawhide Chews](#)



GROOMING

Some dogs require more extensive grooming than others, depending on the texture of their coats, lifestyle and health. Breeds with long, curly or thick hair, dogs with skin conditions and those that spend a lot of time getting messy outdoors will naturally be more demanding when it comes to bathing & brushing.

At your first appointment, we can provide advice in terms of how often you should be bathing and brushing your dog. You may also decide to use a professional groomer, or learn how to groom your dog at home.

Whenever you do need to bathe your pet, make sure you use a pet-specific shampoo, as human shampoos may irritate your dog's skin. And after the bath, dry them as thoroughly as you can, concentrating on the ears and any skin folds to avoid infections.

Regardless of the type of coat your dog has, all dogs should be regularly brushed, as brushing helps to spread natural oils through your dog's coat, helping to keep their fur in good condition, and keep their skin healthy.

In general, short-coated dogs should be brushed once a week, whilst long-coated dogs or dogs whose fur is thick and tangle-prone should be brushed daily.

NAIL TRIMMING

Trimming your dog's nails is very important. Overgrown nails can become stuck in blankets and carpets, leading to the nail becoming caught and becoming injured as the dog tries to free itself.



Overgrown nails can also be uncomfortable for dogs as they will cause deviation of the toes as the nails hit the floor which also gives them less traction on wooden or tile floors. Very long, curly nails can even turn on themselves and become embedded in the dog's pad, which is extremely painful and will cause a nasty infection.

Ideally, nails should be trimmed every 4-6 weeks, however this can vary according to the surface your dog spends a lot of time walking on. If you walk your pet on soft surfaces, their nails will need to be trimmed more frequently compared to city dogs that spend a lot of time walking on concrete, which acts as a natural nail file.

There are different types of nail trimmers you can try; your dog may prefer one type over another. The two main types are:

- [Nail clippers](#)
- [Nail grinders](#)

Nail grinders can be a great choice, as they create a soft edge on the nail and are less intimidating for owners concerned about trimming their pets nails too short. That being said, many dogs do not like the vibration of the grinder on the nail or the noise they can make.

How to trim your dog's nails

Before you reach for the clippers, get your dog comfortable with you touching their feet and nails. Try to make it a positive experience, using high-value rewards, so your dog is more likely to accept the process with no anxiety.

When you're ready to start trimming, look for a vein down the middle of your dog's nail. If cut, the vein will cause bleeding and pain. If trimming white nails, the vein should be easily visible; simply avoid the tip of the pink vein by cutting or grinding lower than this.

Black nails can be a bit trickier as this vein is not visible. For these nails, we recommend trimming the hook or curved portion only (the skinny tip of the nail, not the thicker portion). Some dogs will not have this hook. In these cases, turn their paw over and look from the underside. You can often tell the part that is safe to trim (the portion that is slightly hollow) from the 'meatier' bulk of the nail.

When you start trimming, don't feel like you have to trim all the nails at once. If you can only do 2 or 3 at a time before your pet loses patience, you can always go back another day. The trick is to keep the experience positive, both for your pet and you!

There are pet-nail-specific clotting powders that you can apply in the event that you trim a nail too short and see bleeding. You can also use flour or cornstarch in a pinch. If you do cut too short, don't panic. Nails can bleed a lot, but your dog is not going to bleed to death! Contact us; we can take a look to see if your pet needs medical care.



EAR CLEANING

Some dogs' ears naturally stay clean and healthy, and rarely need their ears cleaned. Other dogs need regular cleaning to prevent dirt building up, which can cause infections. Dogs who spend a lot of time in the water, and breeds with long dangling ears, like Basset Hounds and Cocker Spaniels, are particularly susceptible.

It's important to regularly check your dog's ears, to make sure you catch any issues before they become serious. Learn what your dog's ears look and smell like when they're healthy (light pink, relatively odorless, clean and not inflamed). Well-socialized dogs generally love having their ears stroked, but if your dog ever pulls away from your touch, their ears may be causing them pain. If you notice your dog pawing at their ear or shaking their head, this also indicates a potential problem.

HOW TO CLEAN YOUR DOG'S EARS

1. Using a vet-approved ear cleaning solution, squeeze enough solution into your dog's ear to fill the canal and massage their ear gently for around 30 secs to loosen wax/debris deep in the canal. Try not to touch the applicator to your dog's ear, to avoid transmitting bacteria.
2. Let your dog shake their head to remove the solution (this may be a little messy!)
3. Take a cotton ball or piece of gauze and gently wipe their ear canal. Make sure not to use Q-tips or anything with a pointed tip, as they can push dirt deeper or cause damage to the ear drum.

If your dog seems to be in pain at any time, stop and contact us for advice. Also, be careful not to clean your dog's ears too frequently, as this can also cause irritation and lead to infection. Your vet can advise the most appropriate frequency for your dog's breed and lifestyle. Also, cleaning an infected ear can be very painful, so if you suspect an infection, it's best for us to examine your pet.

MEDICAL CARE

When it comes to your dog's health, the old saying, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure", definitely holds true. Ensuring your pet gets regular wellness care (also known as preventative care) is the key to them living a long, healthy life. Wellness care covers everything from vaccinations, heartworm, flea and tick prevention, nutrition, dental care and regular evaluations of your pet's overall health, risks of disease or other health problems.

The cost of prevention is often a fraction of the cost of treating a disease or problem once it has become more advanced, and early diagnosis and treatment of developing problems or diseases typically increases the likelihood of a successful outcome.

At Small Door, we take an integrative approach to wellness care, and will provide personalized recommendations for your pet's healthcare, nutrition, lifestyle and exercise habits during your dog's regular wellness exams.

VACCINATIONS

Why we vaccinate

Vaccines, also known as shots, work by exposing your dog's immune system to an incomplete or inactive strain of infectious agents. This helps their body build immune cells that are specifically designed to respond effectively when the real thing comes along.

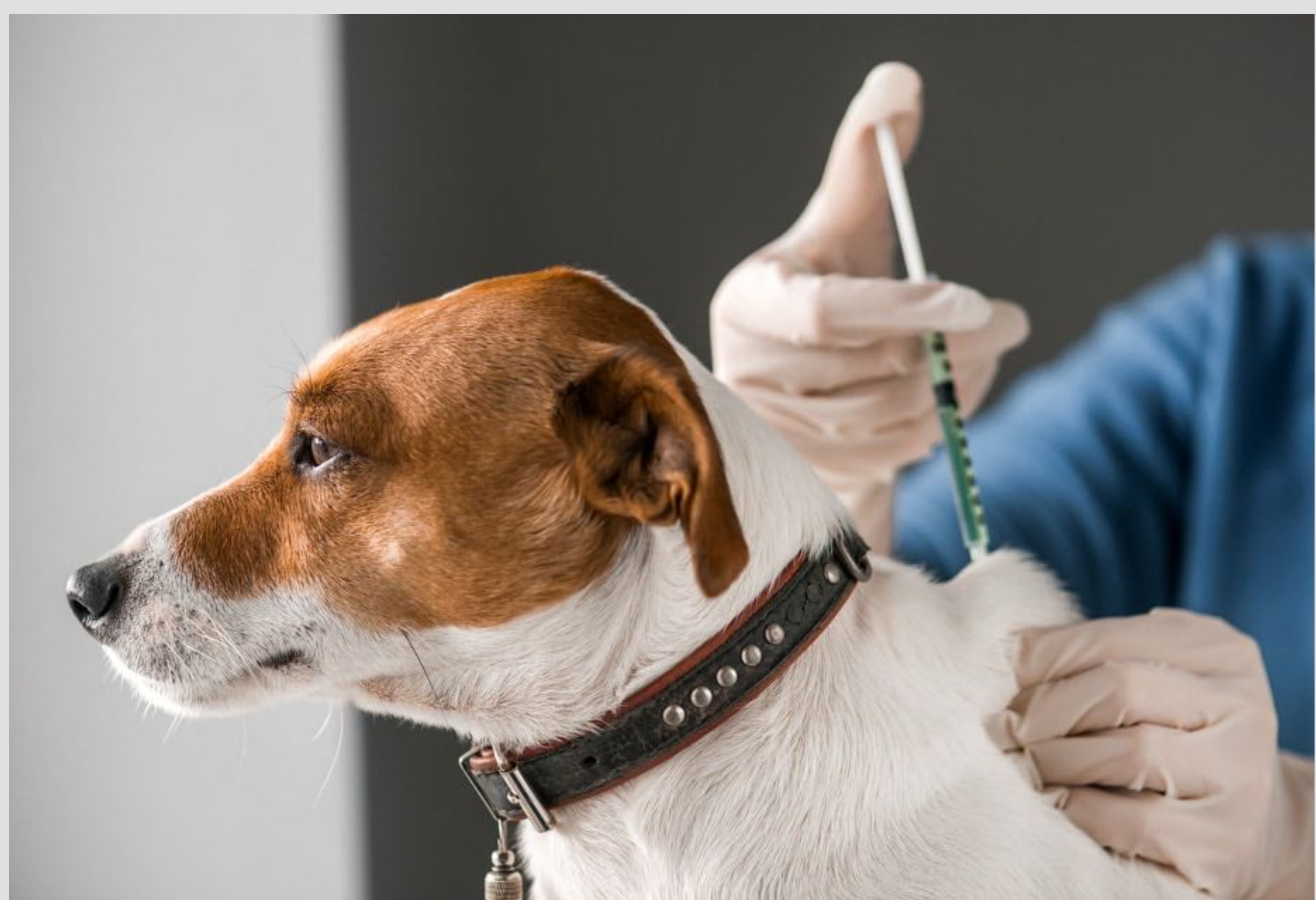
In recent years, vaccines have at times been called 'dangerous' for a number of reasons – but there's little to no scientific evidence to

support this claim. And in fact, the diseases they prevent are irritating at best, and potentially deadly at worst. Vaccines are also relatively painless, easy, and cost-effective to administer.

Puppies (along with old or immune-compromised dogs) are especially vulnerable to diseases because they have underdeveloped immune systems. That's why we begin vaccinating at a young age. Puppies also initially receive some immune protection from their mother, but this doesn't last for very long. This maternal immunity can also interfere with the vaccines we administer, and make them less effective. So, to make sure puppies acquire a high enough level of antibodies to be effective, we have to vaccinate them multiple times – in other words, administer boosters.

Dog vaccines

You may have heard the terms 'core' and 'non-core' used to describe vaccines. Core vaccines are those considered essential for your dog's health, whilst non-core vaccines are optional, and may be recommended for your dog depending on their lifestyle. During your wellness exam, our doctors will discuss which vaccines are right for your dog.



DOG VACCINES

Core vaccines

- **Rabies:** legally required in most states.
- **DHPPi:** a combination vaccine that protects against Distemper, Parvovirus, Parainfluenza and Infectious Hepatitis.
- **Leptospirosis:** protects against a dangerous bacterial infection. Whilst some vets do not consider this a core vaccine, at Small Door we strongly recommend it for most dogs, as leptospirosis is prominent in the areas we operate.

Non-core vaccines

- **Bordetella:** prevents kennel cough, and is required by dog boarding and daycare facilities.
- **Lyme:** protects against Lyme Disease carried by ticks and can be useful for dogs that visit areas with high tick exposure.
- **Canine Influenza Virus:** protects against dog flu.

VACCINE REACTIONS

The whole point of vaccinating is to stimulate the immune system and prepare the body to defend itself when exposed to the actual disease. As such, a small subset of animals can experience undesirable reactions. The majority of these are mild and will resolve quickly with time and mild supportive care.

A little bleeding at the site directly after the vaccination is normal, as is a mild decrease in appetite and energy. Your pet may be a little sore at the vaccination site for a few days, or have a small lump there, but that's normal, too.

If your pet experiences any of the following reactions after a vaccination, please contact us:

- Vomiting
- Facial swelling, hives, or excessive itching
- A lump at the vaccination site that lasts more than a couple of weeks
- Excessive lethargy or a refusal to eat, especially if it lasts more than a day



PREVENTATIVES

Preventatives are regular (usually monthly) medications that you should give your dog to protect them from fleas, ticks and heartworm. There are a number of different brands and types of preventatives, including pills/chewables, topical medications and injections. Whichever type you choose, they need to be applied year-round in order to keep your dog safe.

Fleas are common year-round. They live on dogs, feeding on their blood and laying eggs in their fur. The eggs fall off of your pet and into the nooks and crannies of your house before hatching. When dealing with a flea problem, not only does your pet need to be treated but the environment as well. Washing your pet's bedding in hot water, vacuuming and home 'bombs' or foggers are all strategies to help remove and/or kill flea eggs – all of which are labor-intensive and why prevention is superior to reaction.

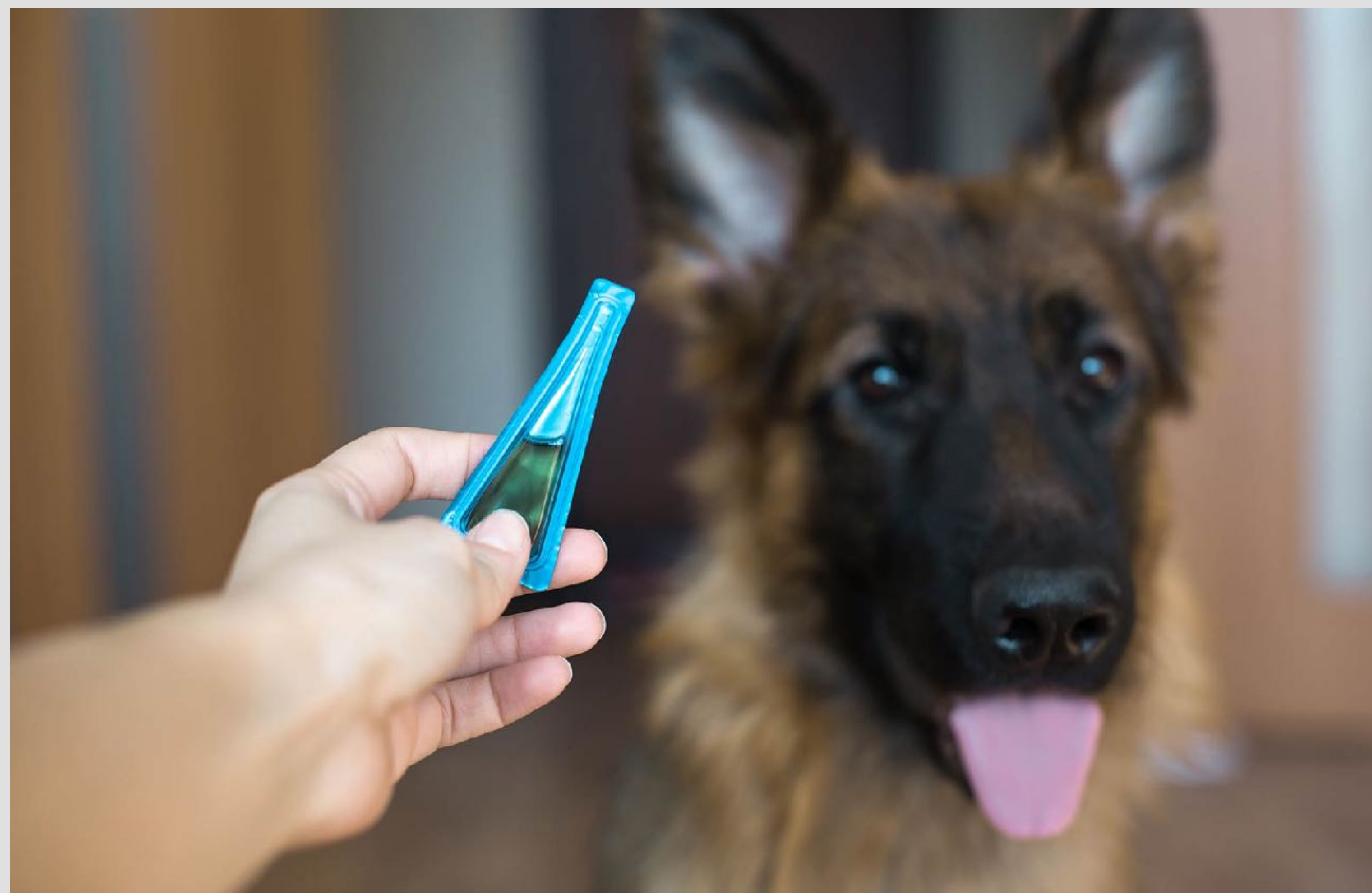
Ticks are most active during the warmer months and hibernate when it's very cold out. However, it is important to note that they're active during a wide range of temperatures, so just because it's winter, doesn't mean your dog is not at risk.

Fleas and ticks aren't just pesky irritations – the harm they cause can go far beyond mere

itchiness. Ticks can transmit Lyme disease to dogs and humans (amongst other tick-borne illnesses), while skin allergies caused or exacerbated by fleas can lead to sores and infection. Fleas can also transmit an internal parasite, the tapeworm, which can cause malnutrition and weight loss in your pet. Furthermore, the cost of eradicating flea infestations from your home can be quite high.

Heartworm disease is a serious and potentially fatal infection in pets. It is transmitted by baby worms carried by mosquitoes. When the mosquito bites a pet, the worm enters the bloodstream of the pet and can grow up to a foot long as it matures, taking up residence in the heart and lung blood vessels, damaging the internal organs. It's a serious, progressive disease, with few early signs of infection, so prevention is extremely important.

It's also necessary to test your dog each year for heartworm. While heartworm preventatives are highly effective, they are not 100% foolproof. Not following a strict schedule of administering preventatives raises your dog's risk of infection. Sometimes pills are not swallowed, or they may be thrown up. Topical creams can be washed or licked off. Administering heartworm preventatives to a heartworm positive dog can also cause a severe, life-threatening reaction, depending on the extent of the infestation. This is a key reason heartworm testing is so important.



Spending a minute or two, once every month, to administer preventatives can save you a lot of time, hassle, pain, and money down the road. At your first appointment, we'll discuss the different types of preventatives with you, and determine which suit your dog best.

WELLNESS CARE SCHEDULES

After you've brought your new dog home, we generally recommend letting them settle in for a few days before bringing them to the vet. Taking them for a wellness exam within the first week is ideal.

From then on, the frequency of wellness exams will depend on your dog's age and health. During puppyhood, frequent check-ups are important to ensure they're developing normally, and to provide them with all of their puppy vaccines. For adult dogs, wellness exams are recommended every six months, whilst senior dogs and those with chronic health conditions may require check-ups more often.



PUPPY SCHEDULES

The exact timing of puppy appointments and vaccines may differ depending on how old your pup was when you brought them home, what care they have already received and the vaccines you choose to give them, but the below is a rough guide to when we should see them. We try to space out vaccines to reduce the likelihood of reactions.

- **8 weeks** – First Puppy Visit: Distemper vaccine (one of three), Bordetella vaccine, fecal testing and deworming
- **12 weeks** – Second Puppy Visit: Distemper vaccine (two of three), Leptospirosis vaccine (one of two), Rabies vaccine, fecal testing and deworming
- **16 weeks** – Third Puppy Visit: Distemper vaccine (three of three), Leptospirosis vaccine (two of two), fecal testing and deworming
- **Prior to spay/neuter (between 6-9 months):** bloodwork and fecal testing

Adult schedules

If they are otherwise healthy, we like to see adult dogs for wellness exams twice a year. We conduct a thorough nose-to-tail exam that looks at everything from their weight, body condition, temperature, teeth and gums, ears, eyes, heart, lungs, down to their paws.

During these exams, we will administer any vaccine boosters they require, and once a year, we'll conduct bloodwork to detect any developing health conditions as early as possible, plus fecal, heartworm and tick-borne testing to check for parasites. We can also trim your dogs' nails for you during these appointments.

Senior schedules

As your pup gets older, we may need to see them more often to keep an eye on any health problems. We'll discuss any specific requirements and make a plan together to ensure your dog is making the most of their golden years.

Vaccine schedules remain the same as adult dogs. For healthy seniors, we typically test bloodwork every 6-12 months, whilst dogs with health conditions may need to be tested every 4-6 months or more frequently.

SPAYING AND NEUTERING

Unless your dog is already spayed/neutered, you may have to make a decision about whether to spay or neuter your pet. While this is a personal decision, we can talk it over with you to make sure you have all the information to make an informed decision.

Why do we spay and neuter?

Overpopulation is a large problem, with millions of unwanted pets still in shelters, and millions of healthy dogs having to be euthanized every year. Spaying and neutering has been statistically proven to decrease the number of homeless pets. It also has a number of health and behavioral benefits for your dog.

Spaying at a young age has been shown to reduce the occurrence of mammary (breast) cancer and



VACCINE BOOSTERS

Adult and senior dogs need regular vaccine boosters to maintain immunity:

- Rabies – every three years
- Distemper – every three years
- Bordetella – every year
- Leptospirosis – every year
- Canine influenza – every year
- Lyme disease – every year

uterine infections (also known as pyometra). Heat cycles (menstruation) also typically occur about every 6 months in mature female dogs. Spaying eliminates heat cycles and the messes in your home associated with them.

Neutering prevents testicular cancer and may prevent some prostate diseases.

Both spaying and neutering may also help prevent or alter unwanted behaviors, such as aggression, urine marking and 'roaming' (where dogs wander off in search of a mate).

As with any type of surgery, there are small risks associated with the anesthetic and surgery itself. Your veterinarian will discuss these risks with you based on your pet's health.

When is the best time to spay?

Most dog spays and neuters are performed between 6 and 9 months of age. Some recent studies have shown that spaying and neutering large breed dogs when they're older and their bones are more mature may be beneficial. We can discuss the right age for your pet's surgery together.

DENTAL HEALTH

Like humans, dogs can develop oral diseases like periodontal disease and gingivitis, caused by the buildup of tartar and plaque on your dog's teeth and underneath their gums. Over time, these conditions can lead to pain, inflammation, infection, tooth decay, and tooth and bone loss. You can reduce the amount of plaque and tartar in your dog's mouth by regularly brushing your dog's teeth with a doggy toothpaste.

Keep in mind that oral health isn't just about preventing tooth decay. The more serious issues have to do with periodontal disease. Plaque and bacteria can enter your dog's bloodstream, which can affect other organs like your dog's heart, liver, and kidneys. Maintaining good oral hygiene for your dog will reduce this risk and improve your dog's overall health.

How often should you brush your dog's teeth?

Ideally, you should brush your dog's teeth every day. Regular tooth-brushing removes particles of food and bacteria that cause plaque and tartar development, and gives you a regular opportunity to inspect your dog's mouth. This can help you catch problems like fractured teeth or gum issues before infections set in.

Finding the right toothbrush

There are several different types of toothbrushes suitable for dogs. The most common are:

- Finger brushes
- Children's toothbrushes

Finger brushes are rubber or silicone brushes that slide over your finger like a finger puppet. These brushes are suitable for all dogs and can be great for training, as you have more control over the brush. However, enthusiastic dogs may bite down on it accidentally – with your finger inside.

Perhaps the best toothbrush for dogs is a regular human toothbrush. Children's toothbrushes or small-headed toothbrushes with soft bristles work

well for large and small breed dogs alike. The soft bristles clean canine teeth without causing discomfort. Some dogs even seem to enjoy electric toothbrushes!

Dental chews are sold in most pet stores and can be used as an occasional treat, but they don't clean as effectively as regular toothbrushes or finger brushes, and add unnecessary calories to your dog's diet. Consult your veterinarian about how to make dental chews a part of your dog's oral hygiene practice. As with all chews, they should be given under direct supervision only to minimize the risk of your pet swallowing large chunks, causing a choking hazard.

Toothpaste for dogs

Human toothpaste is dangerous for dogs and should never be used to brush your dog's teeth. Some human toothpastes even contain the sweetener xylitol, which is safe for humans but extremely toxic to dogs, even in very small amounts. Instead, use a pet toothpaste. They're safe, specially designed for animals, and come in flavors your dog will enjoy, like peanut butter or chicken.



HOW TO BRUSH YOUR DOG'S TEETH

Just like any new activity, teeth brushing requires patience and training. Luckily, the taste of doggy toothpaste acts as its own reward. It's designed to be ingested, so you don't need to worry about convincing your dog to spit it out – much more difficult is convincing your dog not to chomp on the toothbrush itself!

Before you start, here's what you need to know:

- Focus on the outside of your dog's teeth, not the inside as this is where the majority of tartar tends to accumulate.
- Use slow, gentle strokes
- Do not force your dog's mouth open – this can make them frustrated and you may lose their cooperation

First, let your dog taste a small amount of toothpaste. Most dogs will find this enticing enough to hold their attention. Then, using your finger only as the 'brush', gently rub the toothpaste onto your dog's teeth and gums to get them accustomed to the process.

Once your dog is used to this, which may take a week to a month, you can progress to using a piece of gauze to rub against the teeth, getting them used to the rubbing feeling. Next, put a pea-sized amount of toothpaste on your toothbrush or finger brush. Gently lift one side of your dog's upper lip and brush in small, circular motions for a few strokes. Stop, praise your dog, and repeat these steps until you have brushed the outside of all their teeth.

Some dogs enjoy brushing more than others. Your dog may tolerate brushing immediately, or it may take days or even weeks to get them comfortable. Take things slow to keep the experience stress-free for your dog: you may find that you are only able to brush a few teeth or make one pass over their teeth when you first begin. This is totally normal.

We encourage you to brush your dog's teeth before either breakfast or dinner. This way they learn that after having their teeth brushed, they get the 'treat' of their meal, providing positive reinforcement to the activity of tooth brushing.

Unfortunately, some dogs never learn to tolerate tooth-brushing. Wiping a piece of gauze over these dogs' teeth two to three times a week can still remove plaque and bacteria and improve oral health. You can also ask your veterinarian for assistance at your next check-up.

Watch our [tooth brushing demonstration video](#) to see this process in action.



Does my dog still need a dental cleaning if I brush their teeth?

Yes. Brushing reduces the amount of tartar, plaque, and harmful bacteria in your dog's mouth, but it doesn't entirely eliminate them. Even with brushing, your dog will still need dental cleanings periodically, just as people do. Your vet can thoroughly clean your dog's teeth and gums, and also look for cavities, fractures, and other dental issues.

Brushing your pet's teeth is worth it.

It may not be fun for either of you, but brushing your pet's teeth will pay off in the long run, saving you money and saving your pet a lot of pain. And remember, if you're having trouble with tooth-brushing, contact us for more tips and advice.

MICROCHIPPING

If your dog has not yet been microchipped, we recommend getting it done as soon as possible after you bring them home. Microchipping vastly increases the likelihood of reuniting with a lost dog, as collars and ID tags are not foolproof. It's equally important to make sure the microchip record is kept up to date with your current contact information.

PET INSURANCE

While pet insurance is a personal decision, we do recommend that pet parents strongly consider getting it for their dog. For \$30 or so per month, it could save you thousands of dollars in treatment costs, and knowing that your pet's vet bills are covered in the event of unexpected illness or injury can provide great peace of mind.

Different pet insurance policies can vary greatly, so it's important to always read the details thoroughly, research and compare policies before

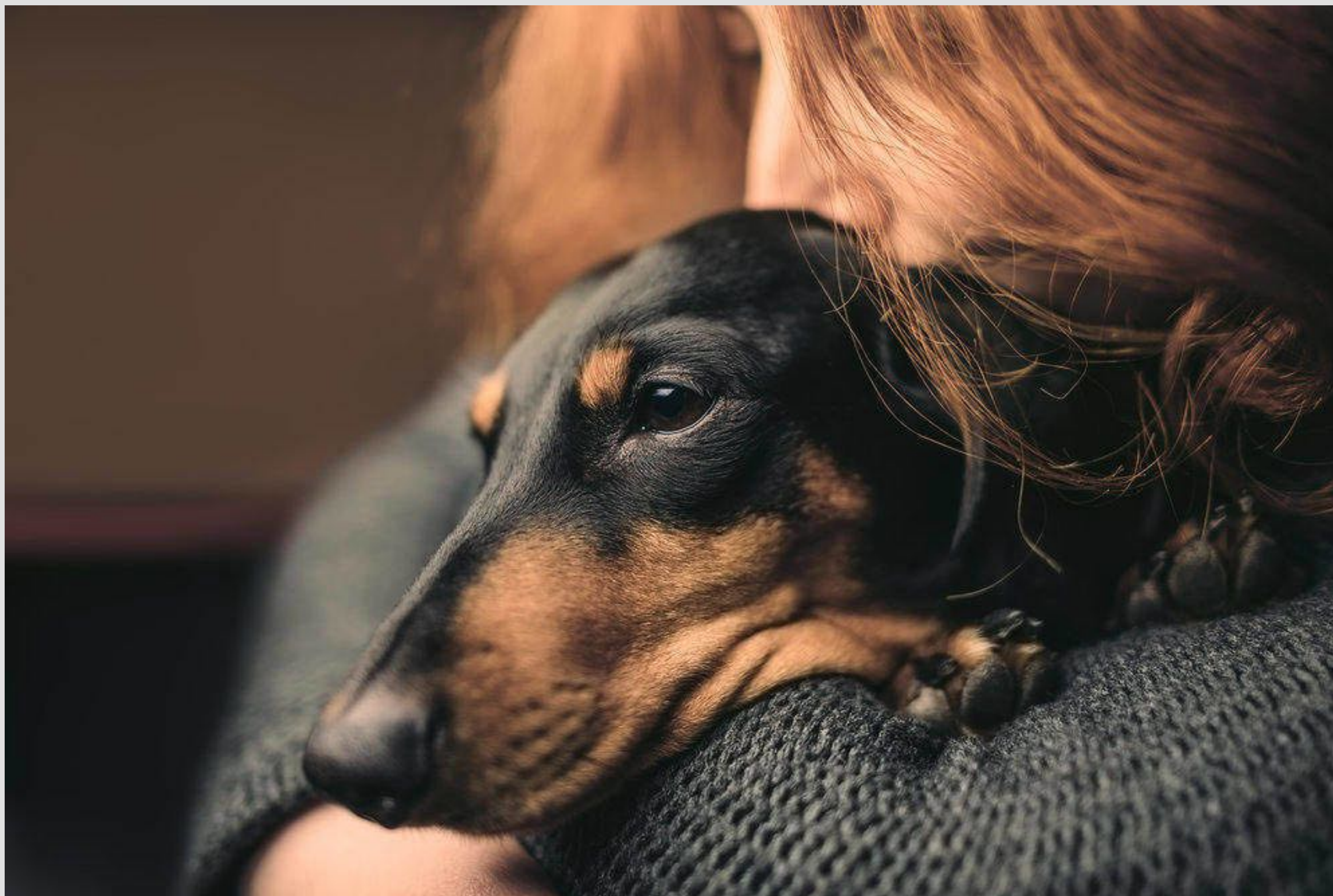
purchasing. A good resource you can utilize is www.pawbamacare.com where you can compare insurance plans to better understand your coverage needs.

How does pet insurance work alongside Small Door membership plans?

Pet insurance is designed to help cover the cost of the unpredictable, and so typically covers (either the total or a percentage of) expenses related to injuries or illnesses.

It typically does not cover wellness or regular preventative care to keep your pet healthy, such as annual vaccines, exams, wellness bloodwork or other testing, or monthly flea, tick and heartworm preventatives. That's where Small Door plans come in.

If you have any questions about whether pet insurance is right for your dog, reach out to us – we're more than happy to help chat you through the decision.



DEVELOPING A POSITIVE VET EXPERIENCE

At Small Door, we do everything we can to help your dog have stress-free visits, and even enjoy coming to see us. If your dog does get anxious easily, there are also a number of things you can do to help develop a positive vet experience.

- **Socialization is crucial.** Acclimating your dog to different sounds, smells, people, and animals as early as possible can help them create positive behavior traits. And that translates to easier, more positive vet trips for you, your dog, and your vet.
- **Get it out before the visit.** This goes for both energy and potty! Engage in some vigorous play with your dog or go for a nice long run with them before you head to the practice, to use up any excess nervous energy. Also (provided your dog doesn't need to provide a urine sample at the practice), give them a few extra potty breaks on the way, to help minimize stress for them.

- **Use a carrier.** If your dog is small enough, use a carrier to transport them. The carrier will protect your pup from other pets and distractions, and provide a safe space where they're comfortable. Lining the carrier with a blanket or toys that smell like home can also help calm your dog in an unfamiliar setting. (Of course, if your pet hates their carrier, that's a different story. You can be the judge of whether they'd be calmer in your arms.)

- **Create positive associations with the practice.** If you're ever walking by the practice one day, bring your dog in! We love saying hi to all of our members, and we can give your dog some cuddles and treats to help them associate the practice with positive experiences, to make them feel more comfortable when they need to stop by for an exam.

- **Join us for events.** This also creates positive associations with the practice that are not related to medical needs.

If you know your dog gets very distressed by vet visits, contact us. We can help make special arrangements, like organizing your visit for an off-peak time; taking your dog straight through to the exam room instead of spending a few minutes in the waiting room; or discussing whether anti-anxiety medications and calming collars may be appropriate.



COMMON PROBLEMS, AND WHEN TO SEEK HELP



From time-to-time, your dog may experience minor episodes of vomiting, diarrhea, or go off their food temporarily, but this does not always mean there is cause for concern. With their inquisitive nature, dogs may often snaffle a piece of food off the street that doesn't agree with them. Puppies can also be particularly prone to stomach upsets. But nonetheless, incidences like this are worrying.

Remember – as a Small Door member, we're here for you 24/7 via the app. You can chat to us for immediate advice whenever you have concerns about your dog. We can discuss your dog's symptoms and help you determine whether it's safe to monitor them at home, or whether you should bring them in for an exam.

If you ever notice signs of sickness, or your dog begins behaving differently, we want to hear about it, even if you think your dog is completely fine. However, we hope the below helps to put your

mind at ease in terms of what may be considered normal, and what may signify a medical concern.

Vomiting

Vomiting is never fun for your dog, but thankfully it isn't always a cause for concern. If your pup has only vomited once or twice, and otherwise seems bright and and stable, it's safe to keep a close eye on them and wait to see how things develop. We recommend not giving any food for the next few hours (water is fine), and when you do reintroduce food, try a small portion of something fairly bland to see if they can hold it down. Boiled chicken and rice/pasta in a 50:50 ration is a good option for a few days until their GI system is back on track.

If however, your dog has vomited more than a few times, is vomiting blood, is retching without bringing anything up, seems lethargic, isn't eating or there's a chance they may have swallowed something they shouldn't have (e.g. a sock), you should bring them in to be evaluated.

Diarrhea

As with vomiting, if your dog has only had diarrhea a few times and seems otherwise bright and stable, it's safe to keep a close eye on them. The same recommendations apply in terms of food and water.

If you notice any lethargy, blood, persistent diarrhea (more than 3-4 times within 24 hours), or straining, you should bring them in to be evaluated.

Not eating

Puppies in particular are notoriously picky with food, and it's quite normal for dog's appetites to come and go somewhat as they are growing, or on a particularly warm day. If they're otherwise acting normally and are still playful, bright and alert, it's safe to keep a close eye on them.

You can try playing with your pup's diet a little to entice them to eat. You could try mixing in a topper such as steamed or boiled chicken breast, softening their kibble with some hot water about 30 minutes before feeding or try a soft food from the same brand. If they are teething, the soft food may be more comfortable for their mouth or they may prefer the texture of the wet food. As with any food change, make sure to make the change

slowly over about a week to avoid any tummy upset.

If you notice any vomiting, diarrhea, other concerning symptoms, or your pup hasn't eaten anything for over two days, we should examine them.

Eaten chocolate, grapes, raisins, sugar-free products containing xylitol

These are all items that are toxic for dogs, and as individual sensitivity may vary, there is no real 'safe amount' that all dogs can consume. We recommend you contact us immediately for advice regarding your particular situation.

Coughing

Dogs can cough for a number of different reasons, and some are more serious than others. If you notice any lethargy, distress, labored breathing or fast breathing, a blue tinge to the tongue/gums, or they aren't eating, we should see them as soon as possible.

Lump or bump

There are many reasons a pet may have developed a lump ranging from an allergic reaction, a pimple, or something more serious. If the lump is at the site of a recent vaccine (within the last two weeks), it

may be a small reaction to the vaccine, which is not a cause for concern.

If the lump appears painful, your dog seems bothered by it, or you've noticed it has changed in size or appearance, you should bring your dog in for an exam.

Nail cut too short

Nails that are broken or cut too short can seem to bleed a lot, but don't panic, as it's usually not as bad as it seems. If the nail is still



bleeding, you can try putting a pea sized amount of flour or cornstarch on a paper towel or cotton ball, then applying it to the bottom of the nail and holding it there for a few minutes. Make sure not to rub the flour in, as this disturbs the clotting process. You can repeat this a few times and often it'll stop the bleeding on its own.

If the bleeding doesn't stop after five minutes, the cut nail is still dangling/attached and you can't remove it, or your dog seems to be in pain, you should bring them in so we can help.



few minutes, and while adorable, do not appear to bother most dogs!

Not urinating

If your dog is urinating less than usual, this may be due to environmental factors (a hot day, or insufficient water intake). Make sure they have plenty of fresh water and encourage them to drink. You can also offer them an ice cube or two – most dogs love them as a crunchy treat!

If your dog is not urinating at all, you notice any straining, blood in the urine, or your dog seems to be in pain or uncomfortable (pacing/straining/whining/licking at hind end), you should bring them in as a matter of urgency. 'Blockages' such as bladder stones or UTIs can have serious consequences, and are best treated as soon as possible.

Hiccups

Hiccups are involuntary contractions of the diaphragm – the muscle that separates the chest from the diaphragm. They can be brought on by eating or drinking too fast, energetic play or fast breathing. They can be quite tickly but are not anything to be concerned about, and are more common in puppies due to their high energy and excitement levels. Most hiccup spells only last a

CONCERNING SYMPTOMS

In general, if your dog displays any of the below, we'd like to hear about it:

- Lethargy (without known cause, e.g. a long walk that has tired them out!)
- Repeated episodes of vomiting or diarrhea
- Not eating or eating less than usual for two days or longer
- Excessive thirst
- Difficulties urinating or urinating more than usual
- Not pooping, or unusual stool
- A new lump (without known cause, e.g. vaccination site) or change to an existing lump
- Changes to eye appearance
- Sudden weight loss
- Excessive scratching

EMERGENCIES

If your dog experiences any of the following, contact us immediately, while on your way to the practice, or emergency hospital during out-of-hours:

- Wounds, possible broken bones or internal injuries from a blow or a fall
- Sudden collapse, difficulty breathing, labored breathing, or unconsciousness
- Seizure
- Bleeding from mouth, nose, or eyes
- Possible poisoning from consuming something toxic
- Swallowed an inedible object
- Repeated vomiting, vomiting blood or retching or trying to vomit with nothing coming up
- Extreme pain (whining or shaking)
- Hard and swollen abdomen
- Straining, unable to pass urine
- Unable to stand, wobbly, or dragging limbs
- Sudden disorientation
- Pale colored gums
- Unable to deliver puppies (over two hours between puppies)

Hopefully you'll never need to contact us in the event of an emergency, but if you do, **we're here 24/7 on the app.**

We hope this guide has helped you feel confident about the first few days and weeks with your new furry family member. Feel free to reach out to us at any time if you have questions. We can't wait to meet you both at the practice soon!

Talk soon,
Small Door



small door
VETERINARY

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