

Here's how to keep your companion canine happy and healthy.

Before You Bring Your Dog Home

You will need food, water and food bowls, leash, collar, training crate, brush, comb and canine chew toys.

Cleaning Up

Keep your dog on a leash when you are outside, unless he is in a secured (fenced-in) area. If your dog defecates on a neighbor's lawn, the sidewalk or any other public place, be sure to clean it up.

Feeding

Puppies 8 to 12 weeks old need four meals a day. Feed puppies three to six months old three meals a day. Puppies six months to one year need two meals a day. When your dog reaches his first birthday, one meal a day is usually enough. For some dogs (such as larger ones or those prone to bloat), it's better to feed two smaller meals. Premium-quality dry food provides a well-balanced diet and may be mixed with water, broth or some canned food. Your dog may enjoy cottage cheese, cooked egg, fruits and vegetables, but these additions should not total more than 10 percent of his daily food intake.

Puppies should be fed a high-quality brand-name puppy food two to four times a day. Please limit "people food," because it can result in vitamin and mineral imbalances, bone and teeth problems and may cause very picky eating habits, as well as obesity. Have clean, fresh water available at all times. Wash food and water dishes frequently.

Exercise

Every dog needs daily exercise to keep mentally and physically stimulated. The proper amount depends on the breed type, age and health status of your dog. Providing enough exercise will improve your dog's health and prevent household destruction and other behavior problems common in underexercised dogs.

Grooming

You can help keep your dog clean and reduce shedding with frequent brushing.

Check for fleas and ticks daily during warm weather. Most dogs don't need to be bathed more than a few times a year. Before bathing, comb or cut out all mats from the coat. Carefully rinse all soap out of the coat, or dirt will stick to soap residue.

Handling

Small dogs, sometimes referred to as "lap dogs," are the easiest to handle. The larger breeds, such as German Shepherd dogs, are usually too large to lift. If you want to carry a puppy or small dog, place one hand under the dog's chest, with either your forearm or other hand supporting the hind legs and rump. Never attempt to lift or grab your puppy or small dog by the forelegs, tail or back of the neck. If you do have to lift a large dog, lift from the underside, supporting his chest with one arm and his rear end with the other.

Housing

Your pet needs a warm, quiet place to rest, away from all drafts and off the floor. A training crate is ideal. You may wish to buy a dog bed, or make one out of a wooden box. Place a clean blanket or pillow inside the bed. Wash the dog's bedding often. If your dog will be spending a great deal of time outdoors, you will need to provide her with shade and plenty of cool water in hot weather and a warm, dry, covered shelter when it's cold.

Licensing and Identification

Follow your community's licensing regulations. Be sure to attach the license to your dog's collar. A dog license, ID tag, implanted microchip or tattoo can help secure your dog's return if he becomes lost.

BEHAVIOR

All dogs are descended from their wild cousin, the wolf, and share many traits seen in wolves. Dogs, and puppies in particular, are denning creatures and feel more secure in small, snug areas with low roofs—thus

the success of the training crate. As pack animals, dogs do not enjoy being alone. Each pack needs a leader. Ideally, all human family members should be ahead of the dog in the pack order. Your dog should not be the leader, as this can result in aggression or other dominance displays.

Training

A well-behaved companion animal is a joy. But left untrained, your dog can cause nothing but trouble. Teaching your dog the basics—"sit," "stay," "come," "down," "heel," "off" and "leave it"—will improve your relationship with both your dog and your neighbors. If you have a puppy, start teaching him manners as soon as possible! Begin with basic sit and stay commands. Use little bits of food as a lure and reward. Puppies can be enrolled in obedience courses when they have been adequately vaccinated. Contact your local humane society or SPCA for training class recommendations.

HEALTH

See a veterinarian if your dog is sick or injured. Take him for a full check-up, shots and a heartworm blood test every year.

Dental Health

Puppies replace their baby teeth with permanent teeth at between four and seven months of age. Clean their teeth with a dog toothpaste or a baking-soda-and-water paste once or twice a week. Use a child's soft toothbrush, a gauze pad or a piece of nylon pantyhose stretched over your finger. Some dogs are prone to periodontal disease, a pocket of infection between the tooth and the gum. This painful condition can result in tooth loss and is a source of infection for the rest of the body. Veterinarians can clean the teeth as a regular part of your dog's health program.

Fleas and Ticks

During the warm season, it's important to inspect your dog for fleas and ticks daily. Use a flea comb to find and remove fleas. There are several new methods of flea and

tick control. Your veterinarian can tell you about these and other options.

Heartworm

This parasite lives in the heart and is passed from dog to dog by infected mosquitoes. Heartworm infections can be fatal. Because it is important to detect infections from the previous year, your dog should have a blood test for heartworm every spring. A once-a-month pill given during mosquito season (which varies in different areas of the country) will protect your dog. If you travel south with your pet during the winter, your dog should be on the preventive medicine during the trip. In some warmer regions, veterinarians recommend preventive heartworm medication throughout the year.

Neutering

Females should be spayed (ovaries and uterus removed) and males neutered (testicles removed) by six months of age. Spaying before maturity significantly reduces the risk of breast cancer, a common and frequently fatal disease of older female dogs. Spaying also eliminates the risk of pyometra (an infected uterus), a very serious problem in older females that requires surgery and intensive medical care. And spaying protects your female pet from having unwanted litters. Neutering males prevents testicular and prostate diseases, some hernias and certain types of aggression. Please note that neutering does not affect a dog's protectiveness. A neutered dog protects his home and family just as well as an unneutered dog.

Medicines and Poisons

- Never give your dog medication that has not been prescribed by your veterinarian.
- Do not give your dog chocolate.
- Make sure your dog does not have access to rat poison or other rodenticides.
- If you suspect that your dog has ingested a poisonous substance, call your veterinarian or the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center (APCC)

at (888) 4ANI-HELP for 24-hour animal poison information. A consultation fee applies.

Vaccinations

- Puppies should be vaccinated with a combination vaccine (called a 5-in-1) at 2, 3 and 4 months of age and then once annually. This vaccine protects the puppy against distemper, hepatitis, leptospirosis, parvovirus and parainfluenza. A puppy's vaccination program cannot be finished before four months of age. Rottweilers, Doberman pinschers and American Staffordshire and pit bull terriers should be vaccinated until five months of age. If you have an unvaccinated dog older than four or five months, your pet will need a series of two vaccinations given two to three weeks apart, followed by a yearly vaccination. Do not walk your puppy or your unvaccinated dog outside or put her on the floor of an animal hospital until several days after her final vaccination.

- Since laws vary around the country, contact a local veterinarian for information on rabies vaccination. In New York City, for example, the law requires that all pets older than three months of age be vaccinated for rabies. The first rabies vaccine is to be followed by a vaccination a year later, and then once every three years.
- Other vaccines for dogs are appropriate in certain situations. Your veterinarian can tell you about them.
- Vaccines will protect your animal from specific viral and bacterial infections. They are not a treatment. But if your pet gets sick because he is not properly vaccinated, the vaccination should be given after your companion animal recovers.

Worms

Even in urban areas, dogs are commonly exposed to worms and possible infestation. Microscopic eggs produced by intestinal worms in infected dogs are passed in their feces, providing a source of infection for other dogs. There are several types of worms and a few microscopic parasites that commonly affect dogs.

Because most of these cannot be seen in feces, a microscopic fecal evaluation is the only satisfactory way to diagnose intestinal worms and other parasites. Most puppies, even from healthy mothers in good homes, carry roundworms or hookworms. All puppies should be dewormed by a veterinarian regardless of fecal evaluation.

Additional Information:

- The average life span of a dog varies from 8 to 16 years, depending on breed type, size, genetics and care.
- For more information, visit the dog care section on our web site: www.aspc.org
- Contact ASPCA Public Information, 424 East 92nd St., New York, NY 10128, (212) 876-7700, ext. 4650, for a list of free behavioral materials.
- For questions about animal behavior, call (212) 876-7700, ext. 4423.

Recommended Reading:

- "The ASPCA Complete Dog Care Manual"
- "The ASPCA Complete Guide to Dogs"
- "The ASPCA Pet Care Guide for Kids—Puppies"
- "The ASPCA Dog Training Manual," by Dr. Bruce Fogle

You can order these ASPCA books by calling The ASPCA Humane Education Department at (212) 876-7700, ext. 4410.