



INFORMATION SERIES

Puppies: Recommendations for New Owners

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Puppies: Recommendations for New Owners

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

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

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

A high quality diet is extremely important for growth, and there are two important criteria that should be met in selecting food for your puppy. We recommend a NAME-BRAND FOOD made by a national dog food company (not a generic brand), and a form of food MADE FOR PUPPIES. This should be fed until your puppy is about 80% of adult weight, usually 8-12 months of age. We recommend that you only buy food that has been certified by an independent organization as complete and balanced. In the United States, you should look for food that has been certified by AAFCO, an independent organization that oversees the entire pet food industry, using ANIMAL FEEDING TRIALS (look for the specific wording on the bag). Large breed dogs should only be fed a premium diet specifically designed for larger breeds..

Table foods are not recommended. Because they are generally very tasty, dogs will often begin to hold out for these and not eat their well-balanced food. If you choose to give your puppy table food, be sure that at least 90% of its diet is good quality commercial puppy food. We enjoy a variety of things to eat in our diet. However, most dogs actually prefer not to change from one food to another unless they are trained to do so by the way you feed them. Do not feel guilty if your dog is happy to just eat one food day after day, week after week.

During your pet's examination visits will provide you with specific diet recommendations that will help your puppy develop into a healthy adult. Also, see the Culpeper Star-Exponent columns on nutrition written by Dr. Watts for more detailed answers to pet food questions. A column index can be found on this web site.

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

It is very important that you provide stimulating play for your puppy, especially during the first week in its new home. Stalking and pouncing are important play behaviors in puppies and are necessary for proper muscular development. Your puppy will be less likely to use family members for these activities if you provide adequate puppy-safe toys. The best toys are lightweight and movable. These include wads of paper and rubber balls. Any toy that is small enough to be swallowed should be avoided. We can help you choose the safest toys for your pet loved one.

How do I discipline a puppy?

Disciplining a young puppy may be necessary if its behavior threatens people or property, but harsh punishment should be avoided. Hand clapping and using shaker cans or horns can be intimidating enough to inhibit undesirable behavior. However, remote punishment is preferred. Remote punishment consists of using something that appears unconnected to the punisher to stop the problem behavior. Examples include using spray bottles, throwing objects in the direction of the puppy to startle (but not hit) it, and making loud noises. Remote punishment is preferred because the puppy associates punishment with the undesirable act and not with you.

When should my puppy be vaccinated?

There are many fatal diseases of dogs. Fortunately, we have the ability to prevent several of these by vaccinating your pet. In order to be effective, these vaccines must be given as a series of injections. Ideally, they are given every 3-4 weeks from 6-8 weeks of age to 16-20 weeks of age, but this schedule may vary depending on your

pet's individual needs.

The core vaccination schedule will protect your puppy from several common diseases: distemper, hepatitis, parainfluenza virus, parvovirus, and rabies. The first four are included in a series of injection that usually begins between 6 to 8 weeks and continue until 16-18 weeks of age. Rabies vaccine is given at 12 to 16 weeks of age.

Most puppies will also receive "targeted" vaccines based on lifestyle. A bordetella vaccine protects against a common cause of "kennel cough." This vaccine is important before going to puppy obedience classes, stay in a boarding kennels, go to groomers, or spending time socializing with other dogs. Also, we require the vaccine for an overnight stay for spay or neuter surgery. Lyme vaccine is given to dogs that are likely to be exposed to ticks. Almost every dog in this part of Virginia is at risk for Lyme disease. It is the rare circumstance when we do not recommend vaccination. Leptospirosis is a serious bacterial disease that can pass to people. It is now the number one cause of acute kidney failure in dogs. Many dogs in this area are at risk. Exposure is through access to wildlife, livestock, other dogs, or water sources like creeks, streams, or ponds. For puppies, leptospirosis is usually mixed into some of the core vaccine series and will not actually be an additional shot. Please ask us more about any of these vaccines during your puppy's examination.

Why does my puppy need more than one vaccination?

When the puppy nurses its mother, it receives a temporary form of immunity through its mother's milk. This immunity is in the form of proteins called maternal antibodies. For about twenty-four to forty-eight hours after birth, the puppy's intestine allows absorption of these antibodies directly into the blood stream. This immunity is of benefit during the first few weeks of the puppy's life, but at some point, this immunity fails and the puppy must be able to make its own long-lasting immunity. Vaccinations are used for this purpose. As long as the mother's antibodies are present, vaccinations do not have a chance to stimulate the puppy's immune system. The mother's antibodies interfere by neutralizing the vaccine.

Many factors determine when the puppy will be able to respond to the vaccinations. These include the level of immunity in the mother dog, how much antibody has been absorbed, and the number of vaccines given to the puppy. Since we do not know when an individual puppy will lose the short-term immunity, we give a series of vaccinations. We hope that at least two of these will fall in the window of time when the puppy has lost immunity from its mother but has not yet been exposed to disease. A single vaccination, even if effective, is not likely to stimulate the long-term immunity, which is so important.

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

Do all puppies have worms?

Intestinal parasites are very common in puppies. In fact, 96% of all puppies carry roundworms. Puppies can become infected with parasites before they are born or later through their mother's milk. We follow the Centers for Disease Control and Companion Animal Parasite Council recommendations for puppy deworming. A roundworm dewormer should begin between 2 and 4 weeks of age and continue every other week until the puppy is 18-20 weeks old. We also recommend a microscopic examination of a stool sample for all puppies. The test helps us detect the presence of less common parasites that may not be eliminated with the roundworm dewormer. Since some of these internal parasites can be transmitted to humans, it is important to promptly pick up and dispose of your puppy's stool every day. Dogs remain susceptible to re-infection with hookworms and roundworms. Periodic deworming throughout the dog's life will occur with the regular use of heartworm preventives.

How important are heartworms?

Heartworms are important parasites, especially in certain climates. Approximately six thousand dogs are diagnosed in the state of Virginia every year. They live in the dog's bloodstream and cause major damage to the heart and lungs. Heartworms are transmitted by the bite of mosquitoes. Fortunately, we have drugs that will protect your dog from heartworms. These drugs are very safe and effective if given regularly. We can help you choose the best product for your pet's needs and lifestyle.

Heartworm preventatives are dosed according to your dog's weight. As the weight increases, the dosage should also increase. Please note the dosing instructions on the package.

How do I insure that my puppy is well socialized?

The socialization period for dogs is between four and twenty weeks of age. During that time, the puppy is very impressionable to social influences. If it has good experiences with men, women, children, cats, other dogs, etc., it is likely to accept them throughout life. If the experiences are absent or unpleasant, it may become apprehensive or adverse to any of them. Therefore, during the period of socialization, we encourage you to

expose your dog to as many types of social events and influences as possible.

What can be done about fleas on my puppy?

Fleas do not stay on your puppy all of their time; occasionally, they jump off and seek another host. Therefore, it is important to kill fleas on your new puppy before they can become established in your house. Many of the flea control products that are safe on adult dogs are not safe for puppies less than four months of age. Be sure that any flea product you use is labeled safe for puppies. We can provide you with age and weight-specific, veterinary-quality flea control products that are safe for your pet and highly effective at keeping your pet flea-free.

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

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

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

Yes. Many puppies experience episodes of hiccuping that may last several minutes. This is normal and will not last but a few weeks or months. All puppies have a characteristic odor to their breath that is commonly called "puppy breath." It is also normal and will last only until the puppy matures.

Can I trim my puppy's sharp toe nails?

Puppies have very sharp toe nails. They can be trimmed with your regular finger nail clippers or with nail trimmers made for dogs and cats. If you take too much off the nail, you will cut into the "quick" and bleeding and pain will occur. If this happens, neither you nor your dog will want to do this again. Therefore, a few points are helpful:

If your dog has clear or white nails, you can see the pink of the quick through the nail. Avoid the pink area, and you should be out of the quick.

If your dog has black nails, you will not be able to see the quick so only cut 1/32" (1 mm) of the nail at a time until the dog begins to get sensitive. The sensitivity will usually occur before you are into the blood vessel. With black nails, it is likely that you will get too close on at least one nail.

If your dog has some clear and some black nails, use the average clear nail as a guide for cutting the black ones.

When cutting nails, use sharp trimmers. Dull trimmers tend to crush the nail and cause pain even if you are not in the quick.

You should always have styptic powder available. This is sold in pet stores under several trade names, but it will be labeled for use in trimming nails.

What are ear mites?

Ear mites are tiny parasites that live in the ear canal of dogs (and cats). The most common sign of ear mite infection is scratching of the ears. Sometimes the ears will appear dirty because of a black material in the ear canal; this material is sometimes shaken out. The instrument we use for examining the ear canals, an otoscope, has the necessary magnification to allow us to see the mites. Sometimes, we can find the mites by taking a small amount of the black material from the ear canal and examining it with a microscope. Although they may leave the ear canals for short periods of time, they spend the vast majority of their lives within the protection of the ear canal. Transmission generally requires direct ear-to-ear contact. Ear mites are common in litters of puppies if their mother has ear mites or if they are in a dirty environment.

Ear infections are the most common cause for the production of a dark discharge in the ear canals. It is important that we examine your puppy to be sure the black material is due to ear mites and not infection. Please do not ask us to just dispense medication without having the opportunity to make an accurate diagnosis.

Why should I have my female dog spayed?

Spaying offers several advantages. The female's heat periods result in about two to three weeks of vaginal bleeding. This can be quite annoying if your dog is kept indoors. Male dogs are attracted from blocks away and, in fact, seem to come out of the woodwork. They seem to go over, around, and through many doors or fences. Your dog will have a heat period about every six months.

Spaying is the removal of the uterus and the ovaries. Therefore, heat periods no longer occur. In many cases, despite your best efforts, the female will become pregnant; spaying prevents unplanned litters of puppies.

It has been proven that as the female dog gets older, there is a significant incidence of breast cancer and uterine infections if she has not been spayed. Spaying before she has any heat periods will virtually eliminate the chance of either. If you do not plan to breed your dog, we strongly recommend that she be spayed before her first heat period. This can be done anytime between five and nine months of age.

Why should I have my male dog neutered?

Neutering offers several advantages. Male dogs are attracted to a female dog in heat and will climb over or go through fences to find her. Male dogs are more aggressive and more likely to fight, especially with other male dogs. As dogs age, the prostate gland frequently enlarges and causes difficulty urinating and defecating. Neutering will solve, or greatly help, all of these problems that come with owning a male dog. The surgery can be performed any time after the dog is five months old.

If I choose to breed my female dog, how old should she be?

If you plan to breed your dog, she should have at least one or two heat periods first. She will then be more physically mature allowing her to be a better mother. We do not recommend breeding after five years of age unless she has been bred prior to that. Having her first litter after five years of age increases the risk of complications during the pregnancy or delivery. Once your dog has had her last litter, she should be spayed to prevent the reproductive problems older dogs have. Please see us for detailed breeding information if you are considering breeding your pet.

Can you recommend something for pet identification?

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

This client information sheet is based on material written by Ernest Ward, DVM.

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