

# The Animal Medical Clinic

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## Recommendations for Owners of New Puppies

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

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

### Puppy Playing

Stimulating play is important during the first week. Stalking and pouncing are important play behaviors in puppies and are necessary for proper muscular development. If given a sufficient outlet for these behaviors with toys, your puppy will be less likely to use family members for these activities. The best toys are lightweight and movable. These include rope chews and rubber balls. Any toy that is small enough to be swallowed should be avoided.

### Discipline

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.

### Vaccinations

There are many diseases that are fatal to dogs. Fortunately, we have the ability to prevent many of these by the use of very effective vaccines. In order to be effective, these vaccines must be given as a series of injections. Ideally, they are given at about 7, 10, 13 and 16 weeks of age, but this schedule may vary somewhat depending on several factors.

The routine vaccination schedule will protect your puppy from six diseases: distemper, hepatitis, parainfluenza virus, parvovirus, leptospirosis and rabies. The first five are included in one injection that is given at 7, 10, 13 and 16 weeks old. Rabies vaccine is given at 16 weeks of age. Your puppy should receive kennel cough vaccine (Bordetella) if a trip to a boarding kennel is likely, if your dog will be groomed on a regular basis or if it will be placed in a puppy training class. Please advise us of these needs on your next visit.

### Why the Series of Vaccinations

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 antibodies. For about 24-48 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 that 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.

### **Intestinal Worms**

Intestinal parasites are common in puppies. Puppies can become infected with parasites before they are born or later through their mother's milk. The microscopic examination of a stool sample will usually help us to determine the presence of intestinal parasites. We recommend this exam for all puppies. If we can not get a stool sample, please bring one at your earliest convenience. Even if we do not get a stool sample, we recommend the use of Strongid T, a deworming product that is safe and effective against several of the common worms of the dog. It is given now and repeated in about 3 weeks. It is important that it be repeated in about 3 weeks because the deworming medication only kills the adult worms. Within 3-4 weeks, the larval stages will have become adults and will need to be treated. Dogs remain susceptible to reinfection with hookworms and roundworms. Periodic deworming throughout the dog's life may be recommended for dogs that go outdoors.

Tapeworms are the most common intestinal parasite of dogs. Puppies become infected with them when they swallow fleas; the eggs of the tapeworm live inside the flea. When the dog chews or licks its skin as a flea bites, the flea may be swallowed. The flea is digested within the dog's intestine; the tapeworm hatches and then anchors itself to the intestinal lining. Therefore, exposure to fleas may result in a new infection; this can occur in as little as two weeks.

Dogs infected with tapeworms will pass small segments of the worms in their stool. The segments are white in color and look like grains of rice. They are about 1/8 inch (3 mm) long and may be seen crawling on the surface of the stool. They may also stick to the hair under the tail. If that occurs, they will dry out, shrink to about half their size, and become golden in color.

Tapeworm segments do not pass every day or in every stool sample; therefore, inspection of several consecutive bowel movements may be needed to find them. We may examine a stool sample in our office and not find them, then you may find them the next day. If you find them at any time, please notify us so we may provide the appropriate drug for treatment.

### **Heartworms**

Heartworms are important parasites, especially in this climate. They can live in your dog's heart and cause major damage to the heart and lungs. Heartworms are transmitted by mosquitoes so your dog does not have to be in contact with another dog to be exposed. Fortunately, we have drugs that will protect your dog from heartworms. These drugs are very safe and very effective if given regularly. Sentinel™, Interceptor™ and Heartgard™ are tablets that are given once monthly. Revolution™ is a topical product that is applied monthly. Be aware that having a long haircoat or staying primarily indoors does not protect a dog against heartworm infection.

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. These products are very safe. You could overdose your dog by two or three times the recommended dose without causing harm. Therefore, it is always better to overdose rather than underdose.

## **Food for Puppies**

Diet is extremely important in the growing months of a dog's life, 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 or local brand), and a form of food MADE FOR PUPPIES. An excellent choice is Eukanuba Puppy Food (both Small Breed and Large Breed formulas are available). This should be fed until your puppy is about 12-18 months of age, depending on its size. We recommend that you only buy food that has the AAFCO certification. Usually, you can find this information very easily on the label. AAFCO is an organization that oversees the entire pet food industry. It does not endorse any particular food, but it will certify that the food has met the minimum requirements for nutrition. Most of the commercial pet foods will have the AAFCO label. Generic brands often do not have it.

Feeding a dry, canned, or semi-moist form of dog food is acceptable. Each has advantages and disadvantages. Dry food is definitely the most inexpensive. It can be left in the dog's bowl without drying. The good brands of dry food are just as nutritious as the other forms. As a rule, most veterinarians will recommend dry food for your puppy.

Semi-moist and canned foods are also acceptable. However, both are considerably more expensive than dry food. They often are more appealing to the dog's taste; however, they are not more nutritious. If you feed a very tasty food, you are running the risk of creating a dog with a finicky appetite. In addition, the semi-moist foods are high in sugar.

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 dog food. If you choose to give your puppy table food, be sure that at least 90% of its diet is good quality commercial puppy food.

We enjoy a variety of things to eat in our diet. However, most dogs actually prefer not to change from one food to another unless they are trained to do so by the way you feed them. Do not feel guilty if your dog is happy to just eat one food day after day, week after week.

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

In addition to table foods, it is also important that you not give certain other things to dogs. Bones of birds (chicken, turkey, etc.) are hollow and splinter easily producing very sharp pointed pieces of bones. These can easily pierce the esophagus, stomach, and intestines resulting in serious infection and death.

## **Feeding Schedules**

There are several "right" ways to feed puppies. The most popular method is commonly called "meal feeding." This means that the puppy is fed at specific times of the day. A measured amount of food should be offered three to four times per day for 5-12 week old puppies. What is not eaten within 20 minutes is taken up. If the food is eaten within 3-4 minutes, the quantity is probably not sufficient. Puppies fed in this manner generally begin to cut themselves out of one of those meals by 3-4 months of age. If a meal is ignored for several days, it should be discontinued.

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

## **Housebreaking**

Housebreaking should begin as soon as your puppy enters his new home. How long the training must continue depends on both the puppy and you. Some pups learn sooner than others. Your dog wants to please you. But a puppy's memory is short, so your patience is important. A home with a badly trained puppy is not a happy home for you or the puppy.

- We advocate "Crate Training". Your puppy should be confined to a crate at night and during the day when you cannot actively supervise him or her. We do not recommend using a small room as a substitute for a crate. .
- The secret to housebreaking is repetition and positive reinforcement.
- Pick one area in the yard where you would like you puppy to eliminate. This should not be an area where your puppy plays.
- The first thing in the morning, the puppy should be taken to this "bathroom" area in the yard. Give your puppy a command to go to the bathroom just once, such as "Go Potty" or "Hurry Up". Let him sniff about. The moment he has relieved himself give him the command once again, pat him on the head and immediately bring him into the house. Do not let him play about. The toilet period and play period should be definitely separate in the puppy's routine.
- The puppy should then be fed. In a short while the puppy will become uneasy and walk in circles sniffing at the floor. The puppy should then be scooted and coaxed to the bathroom area outside as quickly as possible.
- This routine should be repeated every hour or two throughout the day, especially after meals and naps.
- When the puppy is taken out to play, it is wise to leave the house by another door and avoid taking him near his bathroom area if possible. Never play with your pup until after he has been taken out and has eliminated.
- There will of course be some "accidents" in the house. Never let one of these slip by unnoticed; punishment more than 1-2 minutes after the offense is too late. Scold (do not hit) the puppy if you catch him in the act and rush him to the bathroom area. Then scrub the area of mishap thoroughly until all odor is gone. Sprinkle the area with red pepper or vinegar.
- Positive reinforcement of proper urine and bowel habits is just as important as properly applied discipline. When your puppy urinates or defecates in the correct place, spend several minutes stroking and praising him.

### **Socialization of Puppies**

The Socialization Period for dogs is between 4 and 12 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.

### **Three Curious Things about Puppies**

Puppies may be observed to make unusual sounds or movements during their sleep. This is called "activated sleep." It probably occurs because your puppy is dreaming and trying to participate in the dream. This behavior lasts a few months but rarely continues into adulthood.

Puppies also have "puppy breath." There is a characteristic smell about a puppy's breath. It is not particularly offensive or desirable. It is much like the smell of a new car. It is present a few weeks then disappears.

Puppies also frequently have episodes of hiccups. They may occur for 10-20 minutes at a time then spontaneously disappear. They are probably related to swallowing of air when eating and do not produce any significant distress to your dog. They will stop as your puppy gets a little older.

### **Flea Control**

Fleas do not stay on your puppy all of their time; occasionally, they will 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 4 months of age. Be sure that any flea product you use is labeled safe for puppies.

There are four products that are given only once per month; some can be used in puppies as young as 6 weeks. Sentinel™ is a tablet that causes the adult fleas to lay sterile eggs. It also prevents heartworms and intestinal worms when given monthly. It is very effective, but it does not kill adult fleas that usually live 2-3 months. Advantage™, Frontline Top Spot™, and Revolution™ are the monthly products that kill adult fleas. They are liquids that are applied to the skin at the base of the neck. They are very effective and easy to use.

## **Chewing**

One of the characteristics of puppies is chewing. Puppies are trying their new teeth so chewing is a normal behavior. The puppy's baby teeth are present by about 4 weeks of age. They begin to fall out at 4 months of age and are replaced by the adult (permanent) teeth by about 6 months of age. Therefore, chewing is a puppy characteristic that you can expect until about 6-7 months of age. It is important that you do what you can to direct your puppy's chewing toward acceptable objects. You should provide items such as rawhide chew bones, nylon chew bones, and other chew toys so other objects are spared.

## **Trimming Toenails**

Puppies have very sharp toenails. 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 get into the quick; 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:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. If your dog has some clear and some black nails, use the average clear nail as a guide for cutting the black ones.
4. When cutting nails, use sharp trimmers. Dull trimmers tend to crush the nail and cause pain even if you are not in the quick.
5. 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.

## **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.

Ear infections may also cause 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.

## **Spaying Females**

Spaying offers several advantages. The female's heat periods result in about 2-3 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 6 months.

Spaying is the removal of the uterus and the ovaries. Therefore, heat periods no longer occur. In many cases, despite of your best effort, 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 after she is 6 months old.

## **Neutering Males**

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. Dogs that have not been neutered have a higher incidence of urinary bladder and prostate cancers. 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 6 months old.

## **Breeding**

If you plan to breed your dog, she should have at least one or two heat periods first. This will allow her to physically mature allowing her to be a better mother without such a physical drain on her. We do not recommend breeding after 5 years of age unless she has been bred prior to that. Having her first litter after 5 years of age increases the risk of problems during the pregnancy and/or delivery. Once your dog has had her last litter, she should be spayed to prevent the reproductive problems older dogs have.

## **Pet Identification**

The latest in pet retrieval is microchipping. This tiny device is implanted with a needle so the process is much like getting an injection. Our scanner can detect these chips; humane societies and animal shelters across the country also have scanners. A national registry permits the return of microchipped pets throughout the United States and Canada. We recommend it.