

DOG- AND PUPPY-PROOFING BASICS

Preventable accidents are a leading cause of injury and death in dogs under eight years of age. You can greatly reduce the risk of accidents by taking a holistic approach to dog and puppy proofing—one that not only removes dangerous items from her environment, but also satisfies her natural urges for play, exercise, and socialization to relieve the stress and boredom that can lead to destructive behavior. This section shows you how to incorporate an easy-to-follow dog- and puppy-proofing plan, training tips, and other tricks and strategies to keep your pooch safe and happy—plus a few ideas on how to protect your home from the wear and tear of everyday dog ownership.



Keep in mind that although many of the safety tips in this section are separated into those for “dogs” and those more relevant to “puppies,” both apply to canines of all ages—especially those that refuse to mellow with age!

Evaluating Dog-Proofing Needs, Indoors and Out

Successful dog proofing varies from home to home and dog to dog. The key is to pay special attention to your dog’s individual characteristics and take extra precautions where necessary. For example, if your dog is food obsessed, secure trash and keep dangerous food items from reach at all times. If she’s an escape artist, focus on finding the perfect fencing solution. If your elderly dog is losing her vision or coordination, you might place gates around stairs, raised decks, and swimming pools. And for “mouthy” dogs, remove all choking hazards and toxic substances from her environment. Even if your dog is a model citizen, some level of dog proofing is necessary, as many accidents are the result of simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

INSIDE YOUR HOME

Get a Dog’s-Eye View. Start by getting down on your hands and knees and consider what life looks like from your dog’s point of view. Crawl from room to room and see what trouble you can get yourself into. Which wastebaskets and trash cans can you knock

over or put your snout into? What’s on the coffee table? What cupboards can you open, and what’s lying around on the floor in the kids’ room? Remember, you are bored, curious, and easily amused, and you have strong, sharp teeth and an unbelievable sense of smell. Remove or securely store anything toxic, sharp, chewable, or otherwise dangerous.

This exercise can also be a fun and educational activity to do with your children, as it will teach them about dog-related hazards and how to be a responsible pet owner, all while crawling around on the floor like an animal!

Secure Trash. Many dogs show a keen interest in kitchen garbage—and who could blame them? The kitchen trash is full of enticing food scraps, but it’s also home to a plethora of bacteria and toxin-producing molds from spoiled foods, which can cause stomach upset, food poisoning, and at their worst, seizures and other dangerous neurological effects. Other items like poultry bones, plastic wrap, and aluminum foil can cause choking, cuts, or intestinal obstruction. Make sure your kitchen garbage bin is a sturdy one with a tight-fitting lid. If possible, store it under the sink or behind a cabinet.

Wastebaskets in other areas of the home can also draw the attention of curious canines, and often contain hazards like razor blades, dental floss, and discarded medications and toiletries. Take similar precautions with these as well, and keep them in a closed cabinet.



Remove Food Hazards. Many types of “people food” can be dangerous to dogs, including raisins, grapes, chocolate, macadamia nuts, sugar-free gum, onions, and coffee grounds. Make sure everyone in your household knows these food hazards—especially if your dog likes to snatch off plates and counters when no one’s looking. See handout for a complete list of toxic foods, and make keeping them out of the dog’s reach part of your daily dog-proofing mind-set.

Identify Your Houseplants. They’re lovely to look at, but are they safe? Some common houseplants like pothos and aloe can be harmful to nibbling dogs. Refer to the Toxic Plant Guide handout for assistance in avoiding hazardous indoor greenery.

Check Tabletops. You wouldn’t think a dog would swallow loose change, but just about every veterinarian has a story about the poodle who thought she was a piggy bank. Some coins, such as pennies minted after 1982, contain high levels of zinc, which can cause

kidney damage and other ailments if swallowed. Other tabletop hazards include cigarettes, ashtrays and matches, potpourri and solid air fresheners, chewing gum, and jewelry.

Tidy Up for Safety. Many choking or swallowing hazards are the very items frequently left lying around the house—children’s toys and balls, game pieces, yarn, socks, shoelaces, hair ties, and sewing and craft supplies. Office supplies such as paper clips, pens, and staplers are also risky. While we may never know exactly what motivates some dogs to swallow non-food items, we do know it can be avoided by simply putting them away. (See lesson on GI obstructions for a list of common hazards.)

Safely Store Vitamins and Medications. Vitamins and medications meant for people, including prenatal vitamins and iron supplements, cold medicines, acetaminophen, diet pills, and antidepressants, can be very hazardous to dogs. Many coated pills and



liquid medicines have a sweet flavor, which makes them an enticing snack—and child-proof caps are no match for sharp canine teeth. Carefully store all pills, medications, inhalers, nicotine patches, and other items in securely closed cabinets or drawers. Never give “people” medications, over-the-counter remedies, or vitamins to your dog without veterinary approval.

Keep Cleaning Supplies Out of Reach. Household cleansers, bleach, drain cleaners, laundry soap, fabric softener sheets, and dishwashing detergent are just some of the household supplies that may contain harsh and caustic agents that can burn, poison, or otherwise injure a dog (or human, for that matter!). To protect your pooch, wipe up spills, close bottles tightly, and store behind high or lockable cabinet doors, and choose nontoxic alternatives whenever possible.

safety tips

bolting out the front door

Many dogs will bolt out an open front door because they see it as a rare and exciting opportunity to explore outdoors, or cut loose and burn off pent-up energy. Unfortunately, a dog that bolts can be hit by a car, attacked by another dog, or lost. One way to prevent this is to desensitize your dog to the open door, making it “no big deal.” Start exposing your puppy or new dog as early as possible to the door opening and closing. Do it twenty times a day (when there is no traffic or other danger in case she slips by you). Have friends come in and out, knocking and ringing the doorbell, entering and exiting without fanfare. In time, an open front door will become a boring thing to your dog.

Alternatively, use baby gates to create a “dog-safe zone” in your house, blocking off your dog’s access to opening doors.

Baby gates are an effective way to confine your dog to safe areas of the home—and thanks to a variety of attractive new designs, they needn’t be an eyesore.



DOGGIE DAMAGE CONTROL: SCRATCHING AT THE DOOR

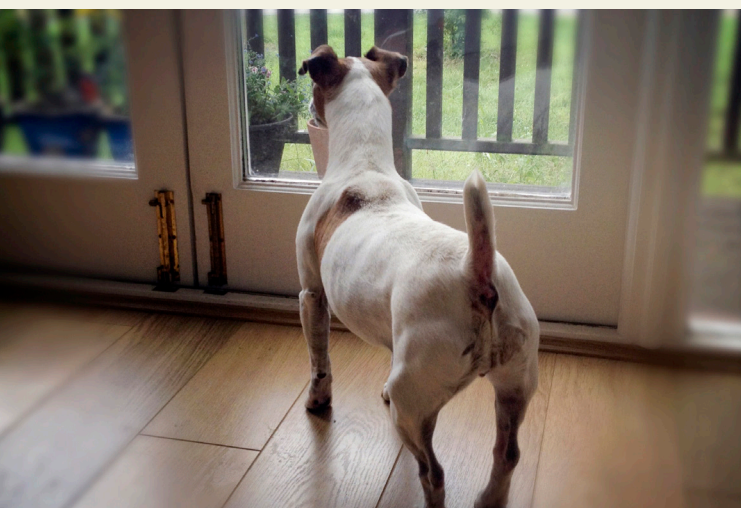
Door scratches are a common complaint among dog owners. Fortunately, there are several methods of addressing this problem.

The first and simplest solution is to install a pet door. Many trainers agree that dogs are happiest when they can go indoors and outdoors as they please—provided the outdoor area is safely fenced. There are now pet doors available to suit nearly every style: a standard wooden door, a glass slider, French doors, and so on.

Some dogs will scratch at the front door after you've left the house. To prevent door damage, **use self-sticking door covers or protective plastic door shields.**

Training your dog not to scratch in the first place is optimal. Try attaching a training mat (also known as a Scat Mat) along the area where the dog scratches. These battery-operated plastic sheets or strips discourage scratching by delivering a safe yet uncomfortable static charge when touched by the dog's paws. After the dog realizes that scratching leads to discomfort, you can remove the training mat.

To hide scratches that already exist on your door, **use a commercial scratch remover for wood.** You can also use a wax crayon or wood putty pencil that best matches the door color and work it into the scratch marks, using a hair dryer to soften the wax as needed. After filling in the scratches, buff with a soft cloth.



SAY NO TO RAT BAIT

Rat bait is one of the most dangerous substances a dog can get into. Dog owners should never use these poison pellets—even in places like the attic. If it's anywhere in the home, there's no guarantee it can't wind up somewhere else—especially since rats are known to drag the bait back to their nests, which could be accessible to curious canines. A smarter alternative is to use humane traps, or, if they are in the attic or another area your dog can't access, traditional snap traps or electronic traps.

Unplug Paper Shredders. Paper shredders, often in the home office, can pose a danger to dogs and puppies. Shredders left on "automatic" mode can catch a wagging tail or roving tongue. Although these accidents are rare, keep your paper shredder off the floor, on the desk, turned off, or unplugged when not in use.

IN THE GARAGE AND BACKYARD

Mend Fences. The first step in dog proofing your yard is to make sure the area is securely enclosed. Check your fencing for holes or gaps, and make any necessary repairs to prevent your dog from getting out (and others from getting in). While many dogs are content to stay on their home turf, other restless souls will dig, jump, or wiggle their way out of even the best fences.

Weed Out Poisonous Plants and Other Garden Hazards. Consult the Toxic Plant Guide handout. Some common backyard plants that are extremely dangerous include sago palm and oleander, and even toadstools and some wild mushrooms can cause problems if consumed. Remove anything that might pose a risk to grazing canines.

Compost piles or bins should always be blocked off from pets. The growing popularity of home composting has resulted in an increase of “compost poisoning” caused by the fermentation of meat, dairy products, and other foods—none of which should be in compost bins—that produce clostridial toxins, molds, and bacteria such as salmonella, which can be very harmful to a dog.

Secure Chemicals, Paints, and Automotive Supplies.

Scan the garage to see what products are within a dog’s reach, and store anything dangerous such as paints, motor oil, turpentine, insecticides, ice-melting products, and swimming pool treatment supplies on high shelves or behind closed cabinet doors.

Conduct a Ground Inspection. Sweep up nuts, bolts, screws, nails, and other sharp objects that can be harmful if stepped on or swallowed. Check the area under your car for any puddles—only a few licks of dripped motor oil, radiator fluid, or antifreeze can be disastrous (as little as 2 tablespoons [30 ml] of sweet-tasting antifreeze can kill a 20-pound [9 kg] dog!) Store sporting equipment such as golf balls and racquetballs out of reach. In particular, these smaller, slippery balls are choking hazards, and golf balls and paintball pellets can be toxic if swallowed. Finally, make sure large, heavy items such as bicycles, skis, and kayaks are secured so they can’t fall over on cavorting canines.

Remove Rodent Traps and Baits. Rodent baits are designed to attract their victims with a sweet taste and smell, which can attract unlucky dogs as well. Check under your house, in garden sheds, and in the corners of your garage for old traps or baits that may have been left by a previous occupant.

Use Caution When Working with Dangerous Equipment or Products. It’s great fun to have your dog keep you company while doing home improvement and maintenance projects. But there are certain times when it’s best to work solo, like when you’re using power tools, lawn mowers, and caustic chemicals—on these occasions, keep her inside so she can’t get underfoot and injure you or herself.

safety tip safe party planning

Many dogs love a good people party and view it as an opportunity to score lots of extra attention, not to mention a jackpot under the hors d’oeuvre table. Other dogs can become overwhelmed by the noise, bustling activity, and influx of strangers into the home. For dogs in the latter category, provide a safe, quiet place for them to stay during the festivities, whether it’s an upstairs bedroom, a friend or neighbor’s house, or a boarding facility. If you allow your dog to mingle among the guests, be sure all dangerous foods and alcohol are out of reach and that gates are kept closed—and be extra diligent during kids’ parties, where the cake spills, the toys fly, and doors are left open in the midst of the collective sugar-induced frenzy!



DOGS AND FIREWORKS

For many dogs, fireworks are no cause for celebration. The loud noise and vibrations can be so intensely terrifying that with every such holiday or festival, animal shelters are inundated with lost pets who have dug, chewed, and clawed their way out of their homes and yards to run for cover. Other dogs remain inside but injure themselves trying to scratch and burrow their way into closets, through screen doors, and under furniture to hide. If your dog is afraid of fireworks, take care to ensure her sanity and yours by following a few simple guidelines.

Never take your dog with you to the fireworks display—you may think she'll feel safer with you, but it will only bring her closer to the fear-inducing stimulus. Leave her at home, in her crate if possible, with the curtains drawn and windows closed.

Fill a Kong or other durable toy with plenty of treats and surround her with other items of comfort, such as her favorite blanket or clothing with your scent on it. Turn on the television or play soothing music on the radio to help drown out the noise.

Natural calming remedies can also be helpful. You can now buy dog biscuits containing valerian root (a natural sedative) or Bach's Rescue Remedy. For extreme cases, consult your vet about a prescription sedative. Be sure to give whatever remedy you're using at least an hour before fireworks are expected to start so they have time to take effect.

Finally, consider boarding your dog or leaving her with a friend that lives in a quieter location.



DOGGIE DAMAGE CONTROL: VOMIT ON THE CARPET

Why is it that whenever dogs have to vomit, they head straight for the carpet? We may never know the answer, but at least we know a few tricks to clean up the mess.

When cleanup is necessary, act fast, since stomach acids in vomit can discolor carpet. Use a spoon or the edge of a butter knife to lift solid matter, or try “plucking” it up with paper towels. **Do not attempt to scrub or wipe up the mess!** This will only push the vomit deeper into the carpet fibers.

Next, douse the area with baking soda to absorb the moisture and stain-causing acids. Wait for it to dry completely, then vacuum it up thoroughly. Now you can begin blotting—not wiping—the remaining stain: Mix ½ cup (146 g) salt to 2 quarts (2L) water, and blot the soiled area with a sponge. Rinse the sponge thoroughly between blottings. After sponging, apply a carpet spot remover following the label directions. Rinse with cool water, blot with a towel, and allow the area to dry completely.

Choose Nontoxic Household and Garden Products

So, just how important is choosing the right products for the home and garden? Consider this: On any given day a dog may nibble crumbs off the kitchen floor, romp through the yard, curl up on her favorite rug, lick her paws, and take a nap. At the same time, she also ingested floor cleaner, weed killer, carpet deodorizer . . . and so on. Practically every product used to clean the house or treat the garden will, in some quantity, wind up in a dog’s system by way of ingestion, inhalation, or skin contact. Household products are a major source of home toxins—some of which can outright kill a dog if consumed. The easiest strategy is to use as many nontoxic, all-natural products as possible, and even then they must be stored securely out of reach when not in use. And remember, many pet-safe garden products still recommend waiting after application before allowing a pet into the treated area. Always follow the package instructions.

For more natural and economical cleaning alternatives, white vinegar, baking soda, lemon juice, and club soda are impressively effective. Potent cleaning recipes using these kitchen staples can be found in a number of books and on many websites.



DOG PROOFING AT-A-GLANCE

- **Remove Poisons.** Remove toxic plants. Keep hazardous foods, vitamins, and medications out of reach. Secure household cleansers, paints, antifreeze, and other toxic substances on high shelves or in closed cabinets. Remove all rat bait or snail bait from your property.
- **Remove Choking/Obstruction Hazards.** Keep common choking and obstruction hazards away from your dog. Offenders include bones, balls, rocks, squeakers/non-durable dog toys, toys meant for children or smaller pets, socks, underwear, and panty hose.
- **Secure Trash.** Make trash cans and wastebaskets inaccessible by keeping them in cabinets or in cans with tight-fitting lids. Block access to compost piles.
- **Address Physical Safety.** Repair holes and gaps in fences. Ensure gates close properly. Fence off swimming pools. Take care when using lawn mowers and power tools around pets. Remove rodent traps in accessible areas. Unplug paper shredders when not in use.
- **Take Preventive Measures.** Give your dog plenty of exercise, provide her with a variety of safe chew toys to keep her occupied, and teach her basic safety commands such as “stay,” “come,” and “leave it.”



Extra Precautions for Puppies

When it comes to finding trouble, puppies take top prize. The world is a new and curious place for these fuzzy youngsters, and they are hardwired to learn about all its wonders by sniffing, chewing, investigating, and eating anything that isn't nailed down. Some of the most common accidents for puppies are poisoning, choking, and intestinal obstruction. From obvious temptations such as people food to perplexing objects such as rocks and paper clips, the dangerous items that can find their way into puppy tummies are endless.

Other accidents that are more likely to affect puppies include drowning, falls, and electric cord shock.

But, if this all sounds ominous, take heart. While puppies left to their own devices are certainly prone to accidents, most all of them can be prevented through diligent puppy proofing, proper supervision, and positive, age-appropriate training.

ESSENTIAL PUPPY-PROOFING TACTICS

Secure Electrical Cords. A live electrical cord (such as lamp, telephone, and computer cords), combined with a puppy's desire to chew, can cause serious injuries ranging from mouth burns to heart failure. Some ways to prevent electric cord accidents are using cord protectors (which can be found in computer and electronics stores), unplugging cords when not in use, spraying the cords with bitter spray, or taping them up along the wall.

Eliminate Dangling Objects. Dangling cords from draperies and blinds can be attractive to a playful puppy, so tie the cords up on pegs to prevent pups from becoming caught or strangled. Remove or fold

up the corners of dangling tablecloths—if heavy items are on top of the table, these can be pulled down on the puppy. The same goes for long vines from hanging houseplants in pots.

Fence Off the Pool. Fence off or otherwise prevent access to pools, hot tubs, and garden ponds when you're not there to supervise your pup. Not only can drinking chlorinated or algae-containing water wreak havoc on their young tummies, drowning is also a major concern.

Use Child-Proofing Gadgets. Install latches on low cabinets containing harmful cleansers and chemicals. Use outlet covers on electrical sockets, which can catch their toenails or cause burns if licked. Place baby gates at the top and bottom of stairs until your puppy can safely navigate them without clumsiness. And make sure upper decks, balconies, and other raised areas of your home cannot allow your puppy to fall.

See What's Hiding under the Bed. Look under the beds, sofas, and other furniture and remove any wayward items like buttons, coins, string, safety pins, toys, socks, plastic bags, and candy wrappers.

Remove Temptation. Puppies are well known for pilfering small electronics like remote controls and cell phones. Not only are these items choking and intestinal obstruction hazards, they also contain batteries, which are highly toxic if swallowed. To protect your belongings and your pooch, store these items safely out of reach. Keep open purses, backpacks, and gym bags zipped up and out of the way, as they contain a wide range of nonconsumable no-nos.



multiple-pet households



If you share your home with more than one pet, be sure to keep toys belonging to puppies, small dogs, and cats away from larger dogs—they can be a choking hazard.

Beware of Reclining Chairs. Reclining chairs that are left open in the “reclining” position can trap a puppy that crawls inside, so be sure these types of chairs are upright when not in use.

Start Training Early. Enroll in a puppy class, buy training books and videos, and do all you can to learn positive training methods to teach your pup “come,” “stay,” “leave it,” “drop it,” and other safety-minded commands. Establishing the foundation for good communication with your puppy now will benefit you both for years to come. The whole family should participate in training for consistency. And above all, be patient, diligent, and understanding. The more time, effort, and love you put into your puppy, especially in the first couple years, the greater the chances she will mature into a beautifully behaved dog you can take anywhere without worry.

The Benefits of Crating. Teaching a puppy to be comfortable in her crate is an invaluable safety measure for her and a huge convenience for you. There will be many times you’ll want to keep her out of the way for her own protection. You could be doing home repairs, painting a room, or carrying hot food. There could be

a natural disaster or unexpected airline flight. No matter what may come up, you’ll be able to quickly and easily put her in her crate without any fuss or worry. To make your pup’s crate a pleasant, inviting place, **never use a crate as punishment!**

To get her started, begin feeding all meals inside the crate. Place her favorite toys inside, or a shirt with your scent on it. Place the crate in an area of the house with a lot of activity, such as the kitchen, so she still feels like part of the family. Sit on the floor next to her open crate and play with her, tossing her toys inside. Praise her whenever she enters the crate on her own. Then when she’s ready, fill a durable toy with a little peanut butter or other treats and place her in the crate with it, closing the door. When introduced properly, most puppies love their crate and think of it as a secure, cozy “den.” If you have trouble crate-training your puppy or adult dog, consult a trainer for further advice.



PUPPY PROOFING AT-A-GLANCE

- **Address Chewing Dangers.** Secure electrical cords in cord protectors or unplug when not in use. Look under beds, tables, and sofas for choking hazards. Zip up backpacks and purses. Keep cell phones, remote controls, and other electronic gadgets out of reach.
- **Fence Off the Pool and Other Hazards.** Block access to swimming pools, spas, and ponds unless the pup can be supervised. Use baby gates and other methods to ensure the puppy can't fall from balconies, high decks, and stairs.
- **Eliminate Dangling Objects and Physical Hazards.** Secure cords from draperies and blinds, which are a strangulation hazard. Avoid dangling tablecloths with heavy objects on top of the table. Remove dangling houseplants. Keep reclining chairs in the upright position when not in use.
- **Use Child-Proofing Gadgets.** Install latches on low cabinets housing toxic cleansers and other products. Use outlet covers on exposed outlets. Place baby gates where needed to avoid falls or prevent the pup from wandering into dangerous territory.
- **Commit to Training.** Teach safety commands such as “stay,” “come,” “down,” and “leave it.” Train the pup to be comfortable when crated.



DOGGIE DAMAGE CONTROL: HOUSE-TRAINING ACCIDENTS

For many a puppy and some adult dogs too, mastering peeing and pooping outdoors is a “work in progress.” In the meantime, the occasional accident on the carpet is to be expected. While cleaning up the mess requires little effort, it’s important to do it properly, as even the slightest odor left behind can attract the dog or other pets back to the area to repeat the incident all over again.

The most important tool in your arsenal is an enzyme cleaner made especially for pet stains, which can be purchased at pet supply stores (buy a big bottle—you’ll need it). The enzymes break down the odor-causing proteins in the dog waste, eliminating odor.

First remove any solid waste and thoroughly blot up the urine. A sanitary pad or absorbent paper towels will remove as much wetness as possible. Next, apply the enzyme product **very liberally**—completely saturating the stain. Check the area several hours later and reapply lightly if it’s already beginning to dry out—this allows the enzymes plenty of time to soak in and do their job. Then wait for the area to dry completely, which can sometimes take up to a full week (speed the process up with an electric fan if desired). Once dry, follow with your favorite carpet stain remover to get rid of any leftover discoloration (make sure it’s safe to use on your carpet). Keep your pets away from the area until it’s completely dry.

CHEWING ON FURNITURE

If you have a puppy, you may be all too familiar with chewed table legs. One strategy to curtail this behavior is to spray your wood furniture, electric cords, and other off-limits items with bitter apple, a nontoxic deterrent spray available at pet supply stores. However, be warned that some puppies and dogs actually like the taste of the spray! If this is the case with your pooch, there are many other varieties of deterrent spray you can try. Purchase a few small bottles to use as testers until you find one that works.

The Importance of Play and Exercise

Dogs need daily play and exercise for their health and well-being, and to burn off excess energy. Aside from the obvious benefits, a tired, satisfied, happy dog is far less likely to go looking for trouble. For this reason, giving your dog the regular activity she needs is not only a great way to bond, it’s also a vital aspect of dog proofing. In fact, many top trainers believe a lack of proper exercise accounts for most destructive behavior.

And it’s not just physical exercise that matters—dogs also need outlets for mental and social stimulation, just like people. By way of comparison, consider your typical day: You go to work, run around doing your daily activities, interact with other people, perhaps go to dinner or hit the gym. If it’s the weekend, you may go for a bike ride, do errands, go to a party, or see a movie.

Now compare these activities to their doggie equivalents: Did your dog take a nice long walk, hike, or romp with her favorite human? Did she stimulate her mind with a challenging game, toy, or new trick? Did she herd sheep, retrieve ducks, or track a scent through the woods? Did she play with her favorite dog pals? If so, chances are, at the end of the day she’ll be curled up in her bed snoring contently, too exhausted to chew up your shoes or surf the kitchen counter.



PHYSICAL EXERCISE

All adult dogs need sufficient daily exercise tailored to their age, breed, health, and physical condition. Ask your vet or trainer how much and what type of exercise is right for your dog, then get cracking!

As a general rule, healthy pure and mixed breeds that fall into the sporting, working, herding, or hound categories, along with most terriers, should get a daily total of *at least* one hour—preferably more—of activity such as walking, hiking, a short jog, swimming, fetch, or catch—broken up into two or three sessions throughout the day and evening.

Older dogs, giant breeds, or with those with shorter legs require activities with low impact on their joints, so avoid jumping and running.

Toy and many nonsporting breeds need less physical exercise, and may be content with a moderate walk and indoor games.

Short-nosed breeds, such as pugs and bulldogs, can have difficulty breathing if overworked. They're also more susceptible to heatstroke and should not exert themselves in warm weather.

With all types of dogs, be mindful of the climate whenever you exercise outdoors, carry water on longer outings, and avoid hot or cold temperature extremes.

Do not feed your dog immediately before or after hard exercise, which can cause stomach upset and is a possible contributor to bloat, a life-threatening condition (see lesson on Bloat). And always watch your dog to make sure she's not overdoing it in an effort to keep up with you. Chances are, you will find just the opposite, and your pooch will wear you out.





Special Exercise Needs for Puppies

Puppies have different exercise requirements than adult dogs due to their developing bones, joints, and skeletal system. You should never run or jog with your puppy (beyond a short, playful romp), or engage in any lengthy high-impact activity—especially with large-breed puppies, which are often prone to hip dysplasia, osteochondrosis, and other developmental conditions that can worsen with excessive stress to the bones and

joints. Most of your pup's exercise needs can be met with several energetic play sessions and shorter walks on a leash throughout the day. Adding in a couple of brief training sessions will further tire her out. And although you may be tempted to cuddle and play with your puppy all day, remember she also needs plenty of undisturbed sleep, just as a human baby does. (In fact, it's perfectly normal for a younger puppy to snooze away over half the day.)

SOCIAL INTERACTION

Dogs are pack animals and need social interaction with other dogs at regular intervals. They benefit by just being “out in the world,” accompanying their humans on errands and family outings that expose them to new situations, noises, and people. You can satisfy your dog’s social needs by taking her to the dog park, hosting play dates with friends’ dogs, or letting her burn off some serious energy at a cage-free doggie day-care facility once or twice a week. Just be sure your dog is having fun and is not stressed out or overwhelmed by the presence of too many dogs at once, which is obviously counterproductive to positive socialization (consult a professional trainer if your dog exhibits aggressive or fearful behavior). Find the activities that suit her best and stick with those options. Combined with obedience training and leash etiquette, keeping your dog socially active will make her a good canine citizen and a pleasure to be with wherever you go.

MENTAL STIMULATION

As the highly intelligent creatures they are, dogs can easily become bored and frustrated without daily activity to challenge their minds. Luckily, there are many fun and creative ways to play with your dog that can be integrated into your spare time around the house. Here are a few ideas:

Tricks

Spend ten minutes a day teaching your dog a new trick, or practicing old ones. Use treats, keep it fun, and lavish her with praise when she gets it right. A variety of books, websites, and DVDs can give you all the pointers you need.

Games

Try these games or invent your own to match your dog’s special interests or talents. The ultimate goal with any game should be bonding, fun, and a little challenge. If your dog doesn’t seem to be enjoying herself or won’t play along, don’t force it.



Hide and Seek. When your dog isn't watching, go to the farthest part of the house and hide in a closet, behind a door, or behind a sofa or chair. Call out your dog's name and "Come!" and let her search the house for you. Praise her when she finds you and give her a treat to up the excitement. If your dog likes squeaky toys, sneak off with a toy and squeak it until she finds you. Then give it to her as a reward for her excellent detective work.

Where's the Cookie? Hide your dog's favorite treat somewhere in the house and the next time you see her looking bored, ask her enthusiastically, "Where's the cookie? Where's the cookie?" Let her run around the house with you searching together for the prize, then eventually lead her close enough so she can find it.

Circus Dog. Hold a hula hoop so that the bottom edge is touching the ground. Toss a treat through and encourage your dog to step through the hoop to get it.



Repeat a few more times, then raise the hoop slightly off the floor and toss a treat through again, gradually raising the hoop higher and higher until your dog is leaping like a gazelle.

Bubble Time. This one is simple: Blow bubbles for your dog (using bubbles made especially for dogs, sold at pet supply stores, or nontoxic children's bubbles.) Watch her leap in the air to try to catch them, and praise her for each successful pop.

Crazy Cardboard Roll. Take the empty cardboard cylinder from a roll of paper towels and talk to your dog through it. Go ahead, ham it up a little, and run around the house to see if she'll chase you. The sound of your distorted voice will drive her wild with curiosity!

Toys

Dog toys have become an art form in recent years, with various brands developing more challenging and durable toys than ever before. From puzzles to treat dispensers to plush toys designed to be ripped apart and put back together again, they provide endless ways to stimulate and entertain. Be sure to supervise your dog with all but the most durable toys, and play along when possible to make it bonding time as well.



THE WELL-STOCKED TOY BASKET

Providing your dog with her very own basket brimming with fun, interesting toys is not only a great way to spoil her, it's also an important part of successful dog and puppy proofing. The key is to make the toy basket a more interesting draw than the garbage can or the shoes you left next to the sofa. Experiment with different toys to see which ones your pup likes best—balls, chew toys, rope toys, interactive toys—just make sure each one is safe and durable enough for her to play with without supervision. Try hiding treats in some of the toys and sneaking them into the mix. This will help teach your dog that checking her basket can often lead to fun surprises. An added benefit to having a toy basket is that it comes in handy when you want to tidy up quickly and need a place to toss all the dog toys lying around the house!

Canine Sports

Canine sports provide physical, social, and mental stimulation all in one outing. Better still, they can also provide an immensely satisfying outlet for your dog's natural breed-specific instincts. Activities include agility, flyball, flying disc, freestyle, water sports, lure coursing, nosework, and sheep herding. There is literally

something for every type of dog, big or small, pure and mixed breeds alike. To choose the right activity for your dog, consider her age, breed, and physical condition, start slowly, and above all, remember to keep it fun.



FINDING YOUR DOG'S PASSION

Most dogs are naturally gifted in specific activities like swimming or agility, but it's often hard to pigeonhole pooches by their breed or size—they will surprise you with their special talents, or lack thereof! The chart below is a starting point for finding your dog's true passion. If you have a mixed breed, all the better—you may have a multit talented star on your hands.

Agility

Australian shepherd
Belgian sheepdog
Border collie
Miniature schnauzer
Mixed breeds
Papillon
Shetland sheepdog
Standard poodle

Swimming

Flat-coated retriever
Golden retriever
Labrador retriever
Newfoundland
Portuguese water dog

Fetching

Border collie
Chesapeake Bay retriever
German shepherd
Golden retriever
Labrador retriever

Jogging

Dalmatian
Irish setter
Pointer
Rhodesian ridgeback
Vizsla
Weimaraner

Flyball

Australian cattle dog
Border collie
Canaan dog
Jack Russell terrier
Mixed breeds
Shetland sheepdog
Whippet

Tricks and Obedience

Bichon frise
German shepherd
Golden retriever
Labrador retriever
Papillon
Toy poodle

Separation Anxiety and Other Causes of Stress

Many dogs feel secure and comfortable when left alone and are perfectly happy to sleep or play with their toys for hours. But dogs that are stressed or suffer from separation anxiety can be destructive to themselves and your belongings. They may chew at their feet or tail, dig under or jump over the fence, scratch on the door, destroy objects in the home, howl, whine, and act overly excited upon your return. If your dog shows signs of separation anxiety, the following strategies can help her become a more relaxed and happy camper while you're away.

PREPARING/CONDITIONING

Give your dog plenty of exercise before you go.

This will help release any pent-up energy that might translate into anxious behavior in your absence. When you're finished exercising and she's tired and resting, wait fifteen to thirty minutes for her to settle, give her a couple of treat-stuffed toys to occupy her, then casually stroll out the door. Don't make a big fuss over saying good-bye—just go. Then drive around the block and come home five or ten minutes later.

Return as casually as you left. Ignore the dog for a few moments while you put away your keys, wallet, and coat. Then give her a low-key greeting. Keep your voice calm and happy. Don't baby her if she's acting overly emotional—this will only reinforce the anxious behavior.

If this exercise works well, repeat it a couple of times per day, gradually extending the duration of your absences to fifteen minutes, a half hour, an hour, and so on. Each time you return home to a calm dog that has behaved well in your absence, reward her good behavior with plenty of attention (after you've settled in) and perhaps a fun activity.

Some dogs with separation anxiety start freaking out the moment you pick up your car keys. If this is the case with your dog, there are two things you can try: one is to pick up your keys, put on your coat, and grab your purse or wallet, then just hang around the house or watch TV—without leaving. Repeating this several

times a day can help desensitize the dog to these departure triggers. Another idea is to put your coat, keys, and purse/wallet in your car a couple hours before you leave, or even the night before. Then proceed with leaving her as described above.

EXAMINE THE ENVIRONMENT

Whenever a dog shows signs of stress or anxiety, it's important to examine her environment to make sure this isn't contributing to the problem. One thing many trainers agree on is that a dog should always have access to the house. Ideally, this means having a dog door leading to a safe fenced area of the yard, so she can come and go as she pleases. Dogs that are locked outside in their owners' absence tend to be more stressed than those who have access to their "home environment" near their bed, toys, and the places their human pack mates live.

Similarly, dogs that are locked in a crate for hours can also develop anxiety from confinement. Aside from the short-term crating of puppies for the purpose of house-training, dogs should not be locked in their crates for long periods, especially those prone to stressful behavior. A better scenario is to leave the crate door open so the dog can retreat there by choice, without feeling confined.

Don't leave your dog alone for more than five or six hours. Dogs are social pack animals, and as such, they can feel isolated, stressed, and lonely if left for long periods. Have a friend or dog walker stop by, come home at lunch, or enroll your dog in doggie day care. While you're away, leave the television or radio on to re-create household noise.

With patience and consistency, separation anxiety can be greatly reduced in many dogs. The amount of time it takes varies from dog to dog, and some dogs, such as rescues (who often have very justifiable fears of abandonment), require extra care. Consulting a professional trainer or behaviorist is often the best course of action for dogs with extreme separation anxiety. As a last resort, consult your veterinarian about anxiety medication.

Keeping Toy Breeds Safe

Toy breeds require extra diligence where safety is concerned. While larger dogs can withstand falling off the bed or being tripped over, these common mishaps can seriously hurt or even kill a toy breed. The following guidelines can help to protect your pint-size pup.

Keep Her Off High Furniture. Many toy breeds injure themselves falling off furniture. To prevent this, give your dog her own fluffy bed on the floor in your bedroom. Do not let her sleep up on the bed with you. If you absolutely can't follow this rule, at the very least be sure the floor is carpeted and the bed is as low to the ground as possible, and place pet stairs next to the bed (sold at pet supply stores).

Elsewhere in the house, don't let your dog on any high furniture she can't climb down from herself—unless you are holding her carefully. Allow children to hold the dog only while seated on the floor.

Walk This Way. Use a body harness instead of a neck collar on your daily walks. Toy breeds have very delicate necks, and the trachea can be injured by the tension of standard neck collars. When walking through tall grass, gardens, or brush, check that your dog's eyes are protected from thorns, foxtails, and other sharp objects.

Keep Track of Her Whereabouts. Keep an eye on your dog around the house, especially when visitors are present. Toy dogs can be accidentally tripped over and even sat upon. Outside, use caution in places that may have coyotes and other wild predators—some wild animals near suburban areas become so brazen they'll attempt to attack a small dog despite the presence of a human.

Supervise Play. A toy breed can suffer broken bones if roughhousing goes too far while playing with children or larger pets. Teach children how to gently handle the dog, and supervise play between the other furry members of your household.





Use Crates and Carriers for Safety. Provide your dog with a comfortable, properly sized crate and teach her to be content while confined. There will be times you'll need to crate her to keep her away from hazardous activity in the home, such as home repairs, parties, and other occasions when she might get underfoot. In the car, always use a secured pet carrier, seat-belt harness, or small dog car seat.

Say Yes to Sweaters. More so than hardier breeds, toys need extra protection in frigid weather to help prevent hypothermia. So go ahead and buy (or make) that fancy sweater, and she can strut her stuff without shivering.

Dogs and Children

Children under ten are the most common victims of serious dog bites, and the majority of these bites are not from strange, vicious dogs running loose in the streets. Most bites happen in the home or another familiar setting with a known, otherwise gentle dog that has been unintentionally provoked. Conversely, children can also injure dogs. So for everyone's protection, children should be taught how to safely interact with all dogs. Also, observe your dog's own tolerance and comfort with children. The following guidelines can help.

Supervise Contact. Monitor the interactions between your child and dog until you can fully trust both of them together. If you sense your dog is uncomfortable around children, don't push it. Consult a trainer for advice.

Teach Proper Play and Petting. Show your child the proper way to pet a friendly dog: by gently stroking or scratching her under the chin, on the chest, or along her body. Teach your child to avoid reaching over the dog's head or patting them on the head, which makes some dogs uncomfortable.

Dogs and babies make an adorable combination—but even trustworthy dogs should be supervised around babies this young.



Teach kids the following “Doggie Don’ts”:

- Don’t disturb the dog when she is eating, sleeping, or in pain.
- Don’t yell, scream, hit, kick, tease, or lunge at the dog.
- Don’t take away the dog’s bone or toys.
- Don’t poke the dog’s eyes or ears, or pull her tail.
- Don’t feed the dog “people food” or anything else without asking.
- Don’t play or lie down in the dog’s bed.

Provide a Quiet Place for Your Dog. Dogs need a private area of their own that is off-limits to the kids, such as a crate, bed, or quiet corner of a room. This is a safe place for dogs to retreat from the noise and commotion of children’s rambunctious activity when they’re feeling overwhelmed.

Educate Kids about “Strange Dogs.” Start by teaching them that a strange dog is any dog they’re not certain is friendly, or any dog belonging to someone they don’t know. Explain the importance of behaving differently around these dogs, since some of them might not be as nice as their own. (See tip box at right.)



**ADVICE FOR CHILDREN ABOUT
INTERACTING WITH “STRANGE DOGS”**

- Always ask permission before petting a strange dog. Then, extend your hand with your palm down to let the dog sniff before petting under the chin.
- Do not look a strange dog directly in the eyes.
- Never run away from a strange dog—instead, stand still with your arms at your sides. If you are knocked down, curl into a ball and cover your face.
- Older children can be taught to recognize the signs of an aggressive dog: growling, snarling, barking with teeth bared, hackles up, snapping, lunging, or raising the tail when approached.