

How to Housetrain Your Dog or Puppy

Housetraining your dog or puppy requires far more than a few stacks of old newspapers – it calls for vigilance, patience, plenty of commitment and above all, consistency.

By following the guidelines outlined below, you can minimize house-soiling incidents. Virtually every dog, especially puppies, will have an accident in the house, and more likely several. Expect this – it's part of living with a puppy.

The more consistent you are in following the basic housetraining procedures, the faster your puppy will learn acceptable behavior. It may take several weeks to housetrain your puppy, and with some of the smaller breeds, it might take longer.

Establish a routine

Like babies, puppies do best on a regular schedule. The schedule teaches him that there are times to eat, times to play and times to potty.

Generally speaking, **a puppy can control his bladder one hour for every month of age.** So if your puppy is two months old, he can hold it for about two hours. Don't go longer than this between bathroom breaks, or he's guaranteed to have an accident. If you work outside the home, this means you'll have to hire a dog walker to give your puppy or new dog his bathroom breaks.

Take your puppy outside frequently – at least every two hours – and immediately after she wakes up, during and after playing, and after eating or drinking.

Pick a bathroom spot outside, and always take your puppy (on a leash) to that spot. While your puppy is eliminating, use a word or phrase, like "go potty", that you can eventually use before he eliminates to remind him what to do. Take him out for a longer walk or some play time only after he has eliminated.

Reward your puppy every time she eliminates outdoors. Praise her or give her a treat – but remember to do so immediately after she's finished eliminating, not after she comes back inside the house. This step is vital, because rewarding your dog for eliminating outdoors is the only way to teach her what's expected of her. Before rewarding her, be sure she's finished eliminating. Puppies are easily distracted: if you praise her too soon, she may forget to finish until she's back in the house.

Put your puppy on a regular feeding schedule. What goes into a puppy on a schedule comes out of a puppy on a schedule. Depending on their age, puppies usually need to be fed three or four times a day. Feeding your puppy at the same times each day will make it more likely that he'll eliminate at consistent times as well, and that makes housetraining easier for both of you.

Pick up your puppy's water dish about two and a half hours before bedtime to reduce the likelihood that she'll need to potty during the night. Most puppies can sleep for approximately seven hours without having to eliminate.

If your puppy does wake you up in the night, don't make a big deal of it, otherwise he will think it is time to play and won't go back to sleep. Turn on as few lights as possible, don't talk to or play with your puppy, take him out to do his business and return him to his bed.

Supervise your puppy

Don't give your puppy an opportunity to soil in the house. Keep an eye on her whenever she's indoors.

Tether your puppy to you or a nearby piece of furniture with a six-foot leash if you are not actively training or playing with him. Watch for signs that your puppy needs to eliminate. Some signs are obvious, such as barking or scratching at the door, squatting, restlessness, sniffing around or circling. When you see these signs, immediately grab the leash and take her outside to her bathroom spot. If he eliminates, praise him lavishly and reward him with a treat.

Keep your puppy on leash in the yard

During the housetraining process, your yard should be treated like any other room in your house. Give your puppy some freedom in the house and yard only after she has become reliably housetrained.

Confine your puppy when you can't supervise her

When you're unable to watch your puppy at all times, restrict her to an area small enough that she won't want to eliminate there. The space should be just big enough for her to comfortably stand, lie down and turn around. You can use a portion of a bathroom or laundry room blocked off with baby gates.

Or you may want to crate train your puppy and confine him in the crate. (Be sure to learn how to use a crate humanely as a method of confinement). If your puppy has spent several hours in confinement, you'll need to take him directly to his bathroom spot as soon as you let him out – and praise him when he eliminates.

Oops! Take mistakes in stride

Expect your puppy to have a few accidents in the house – it's a normal part of housetraining. Here's what to do when that happens:

- Interrupt your puppy when you catch him in the act of eliminating in the house.
- Make a startling noise (be careful not to scare him) or say "OUTSIDE!"
- Immediately take him to his bathroom spot, praise him, and give him a treat if he finishes eliminating there.
- Don't punish your puppy for eliminating in the house. If you find a soiled area, it's too late to administer a correction. Just clean it up. Rubbing your puppy's nose in it, taking him to the spot and scolding him, or any other punishment will often do more harm than good.
- Clean the soiled area thoroughly. Puppies and adult dogs are highly motivated to continue soiling in areas that smell like urine or feces. Check with your veterinarian or pet store for products designed specifically to clean areas soiled by pets.

It's extremely important that you use the supervision and confinement procedures outlined above to minimize the number of accidents. If you allow your puppy to eliminate frequently in the house, she'll get confused about where she's supposed to eliminate, which will prolong the housetraining process.

Make plans for when you're away

A puppy under six months of age cannot be expected to control his bladder for more than a few hours at a time (approximately one hour for each month of age). If you have to be away from home for more than four or five hours a day, this may not be the best time for you to get a puppy. Instead, you may want to consider an older dog who can wait for your return.

If you already have a puppy and must be away for long periods of time, you'll need to:

- Arrange for someone, such as a responsible neighbor or a professional pet sitter to take him outside to eliminate.
- Train him to eliminate in a specific place indoors. Be aware however, that doing so can prolong the process of housetraining. Teaching your puppy to eliminate on newspaper may create a life-long surface preference, meaning that even as an adult he may eliminate on any newspaper lying around the living room.

Paper train properly

When your puppy must be left alone for long periods of time, confine him to an area with enough room for a sleeping space, a playing space and a separate place to eliminate.

- In the designated elimination area, use either newspapers (cover the area with several layers of newspaper) or a sod box. To make a sod box, place sod in a container such as a child's small, plastic swimming pool. You can also find dog litter products at a pet supply store.
- If you clean up an accident in the house, put the soiled rags or paper towels in the designated elimination area. The smell will help your puppy recognize the area as the place where she is supposed to eliminate.