



Blue Cross Animal Hospital

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Puppy – Recommendations for New Owners Part I – Veterinary Care

Congratulations on the arrival of your new furry family member. Owning a dog can be an extremely rewarding experience, but it is also a big responsibility that lasts the entire lifetime of the puppy. We hope this handout will give you the information needed to make some excellent decisions regarding the care of your puppy. We can also provide you with more detailed fact sheets for many of the subjects that are covered briefly in this handout, OR you can go directly to the home page of our website at www.bcahkitchener.com and search for handouts in the Educational Articles section of our Pet Health tab.

Our entire professional staff is here to help keep your puppy healthy and we invite you to contact us about any questions or advice via the telephone, email, or in person at the clinic.

When should my puppy visit the veterinarian?

Many breeders will have their litter of puppies checked by their veterinarian at two to three weeks of age, for an initial health check and deworming. Most then have the veterinarian give them their first immunizations and further deworming treatment at 6–8 weeks of age, prior to adoption. In the majority of cases, the new puppy owner will be responsible for ensuring that their pet receives the remainder of its vaccination boosters and any other treatments. New puppy owners often bring in the pup to their veterinarian for a check-up within 1–2 days of adoption, as part of the breeder's guarantee and/or recommendations. During that visit, the new pet owner will receive behaviour and training advice, and will recommend when to begin immunizations, deworming, heartworm, flea preventive treatments and get permanent identification with a microchip. It is important to follow your veterinarian's recommended exam schedule to ensure that your puppy receives proper protection and that you receive timely and appropriate advice.

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 puppy. In order to be effective, these vaccines must be given as a series of injections. Ideally, they are given at about 6 to 8, 12, and 16 weeks of age, but the recommended vaccines and schedule of injections may vary depending on your pet's individual needs.

The core vaccination schedule will protect your puppy from the common diseases of distemper, hepatitis, parvovirus, and rabies. The first three are generally included in one injection that is given at 6 to 8, 12, and 16 weeks old. In some cases, an additional booster vaccination will be recommended at 20 weeks of age. Rabies vaccine is given at 12 to 16 weeks of age. Other optional vaccinations are appropriate in certain situations. These may include Bordetella, Lyme, and Leptospirosis vaccines, based on current risks of those particular diseases in the Kitchener–Waterloo area and your puppy's lifestyle.

Why does my puppy need more than one vaccination?

When the puppy nurses its mother, it receives a temporary form of immunity through the *colostrum*, the milk that is produced in the first days after delivery of the puppies. Colostrum contains high levels of *maternal antibodies* that can provide passive protection against diseases that the mother has been exposed to, either naturally or by vaccination. This *passive* immunity is of benefit during the first few weeks of the puppy's life, but at some point, its levels decline and the puppy must be able to develop its own *active* long-lasting immunity. Vaccinations are used to provide this long-lasting protection.

However, as long as the mother's passive antibodies are present in the puppy's body, vaccinations are unable to stimulate the puppy's immune system because the mother's antibodies neutralize the vaccine.

Many factors determine when the puppy will be able to respond to vaccinations. These include the level of immunity in the mother at the time of birth, how many antibodies the nursing puppy absorbed, and the general health of the puppy. Since we do not know when an individual puppy will lose its short-term maternal immunity, we give a series of vaccinations. The goal is for at least two of these to fall into the timeframe 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 long-term immunity, which is critically important.

Rabies vaccine is an exception to this, since one injection given at the proper time is enough to produce long-term immunity due to the lack of maternal antibody interference.

How can I provide permanent identification for my dog?

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.

The microchip can be quickly and painlessly implanted during any regular veterinary appointment. Ideally, you should have your puppy identified with this permanent form of identification at its first puppy visit.

Do all puppies have worms?

Intestinal parasites are very common in puppies. Puppies can become infected with some types of intestinal worms 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 most intestinal parasites. **We recommend this exam for all puppies, especially during their first few veterinary office visits.**

Even if we do not get a stool sample, we recommend the routine use of a deworming medication that is safe and effective against most of the common worms of the dog. We do this because our deworming medication has little, if any, side effects and because your puppy does not pass worm eggs every day. A single random stool sample thus may not detect worms that are present but not shedding eggs at the time. Additionally, some of these internal parasites can be transmitted to humans.

It is important that the deworming treatment is repeated at the recommended schedule because it only kills the adult worms. **Within three to four weeks, the larval stages of the intestinal parasites will become adults and need to be removed.** Dogs remain susceptible to re-infection with hookworms, whipworms and roundworms throughout their life. Periodic deworming throughout the dog's life may be recommended for outdoor dogs.

Tapeworms are another common intestinal parasite. Tapeworms require an intermediate host, meaning that tapeworms are not passed from dog to dog. Depending on the type of tapeworm, puppies become infected with them when they swallow fleas or when they eat contaminated raw meat or infected mice, birds or rabbits.

Dogs infected with tapeworms will intermittently pass small segments of the worms in their stool. The segments are white in color and look like grains of rice or cucumber seeds. They are about an eighth of an inch (1/8 inch or 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 or light brown in color. If you observe tapeworm segments on your dog's stool, please collect them and bring them into the clinic for identification so that we can provide the appropriate drug for treatment.

What can be done about fleas on my puppy?

Contrary to popular belief, the majority of the flea life cycle is spent off the dog; only the adult lives on the animal. The egg, larva, and pupa feed and develop in the environment. Therefore, flea control must include treatment of the environment as well as the pet. Many of the flea control products that are safe on adult dogs are not safe for puppies less than two to three months of age. Be sure that any flea product you use is labeled safe for puppies.

What are heartworms?

Heartworms are important parasites, especially in warm and humid climates where mosquitoes are prevalent. They live in the dog's bloodstream and cause major damage to the heart and lungs and often result in death. Heartworms are transmitted by the bite of mosquitoes. Heartworm preventatives are dosed according to your dog's weight. As the weight increases, the dosage should also increase. They are very safe and effective if used as directed. Many of these products also protect your dog against certain intestinal parasites and external parasites such as fleas.

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 violent and persistent scratching of the ears. Sometimes the ears will appear dirty because of a black material in the ear canal. The tiny mites can be seen with magnification, either directly in the ear with an *otoscope*, or by examining a sample of the ear discharge under a microscope. Ear mites spend the vast majority of their lives within the protection of the ear canal and transmission requires direct contact with an infected animal. Ear mites are more common in cats than in dogs.

In dogs, infections, not ear mites, are the most common cause of a dark discharge in the ear canals. It is important that we examine your puppy to differentiate between infection and ear mites. It is inappropriate for a veterinarian to dispense medication without an accurate diagnosis.

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

Diet is extremely important during the growing months of a dog's life. We recommend a NAME-BRAND FOOD made by a national dog food company (not a generic or local brand) and a diet MADE FOR PUPPIES. For optimal brain and eye development, the puppy food should contain high levels of DHA (docosahexaenoic acid), an omega-3 fatty acid. Food until the age of twelve to eighteen months, depending on its breed and size. If your dog is one of the large breeds, you should feed a puppy food formulated for large breed dogs. You should only buy brands that have been certified by an independent organization as complete and balanced. In Canada, look for foods that are labeled as having undergone rigid testing with *food trials*. Comparison of different brands of food merely by reading the labels is not sufficient. Feeding a dry, canned, or

semi-moist form of puppy food is acceptable as long as the label states that the food is intended for growth and/or development and is "complete and balanced." This means that the food is nutritionally complete and meets the needs of growth and development.

Each of the types of food has advantages and disadvantages. Dry food is definitely the most inexpensive. It can be left in the dog's bowl without spoilage for longer periods of time than canned or moist foods. Semi-moist foods may be acceptable, depending on their quality. The texture may be more appealing to some dogs, and they often have a stronger odor and flavor. However, semi-moist foods are often high in sugar and calories and should be carefully chosen based on their nutritional qualities rather than taste, packaging or consistency. Canned foods are a good choice to feed your dog, but are considerably more expensive than either of the other forms of food. Canned foods contain a high percentage of water, and their texture, odor, and taste are very appealing. However, canned food will dry out or spoil if left out for prolonged periods of time. Canned food is generally more suitable for meal feeding rather than free choice feeding.

Table scraps or people foods are not usually recommended for pets. Because they are usually very tasty, dogs will often begin to refuse their well-balanced dog food in favor of table food. If you choose to give your puppy table food, be sure that at least ninety percent of its diet is from a quality commercial puppy food. If not, follow a properly formulated recipe that has been developed by a formally trained veterinary nutritionist. Ask the veterinarians or staff at Blue Cross Animal Hospital to provide you with recipes or recommendations for home prepared diets.

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 eating the same food day after day, week after week.

Commercials for dog food can be very misleading. If you watch carefully, you will notice that commercials often promote dog food based on TASTE, SHAPE OR CONSISTENCY. 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 you read the labels of many of the gourmet foods, you will notice that they do not claim to be "complete and balanced." Also you should be aware that if a pet food is labelled "complete and balanced" but doesn't specify a lifestage (i.e. puppy, adult, senior), then by definition it becomes a puppy food and could lead to weight problems in your adult dogs. If your dog eats a gourmet food very long, it is at a risk of developing nutritional deficiencies and weight problems. If it requires a special diet due to a health problem later in life, it is also very unlikely to accept it.

How often should I feed my puppy?

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 four times per day for five to twelve week old puppies. What is not eaten within thirty minutes is taken up. If the food is eaten within three to four minutes, the quantity is probably not sufficient. Puppies fed in this manner generally begin to cut back on one of those meals by three to four months of age and perhaps another one later. Usually the puppy will appear less hungry at one of its meals; if this occurs for several days in a row, it is time to discontinue that meal. Two meals per day is the optimal feeding schedule for adult dogs.

"Free choice feeding," means that food is available at all times. This is an acceptable method when feeding dry food, and works for some dogs. However, other dogs tend to overeat and become overweight or obese. If your dog continues to gain weight after reaching its optimal size (at around twelve to eighteen months of age), this method of feeding should be discontinued.

What is normal play behavior of a healthy puppy?

It is very important that you provide stimulating play for your puppy, especially during the first week in its new home.

Running, chasing and fetching are important play behaviors in puppies and are necessary for proper muscular development. Chewing and biting are common ways for puppies to investigate new things. Your puppy will be less likely to use family members or their possessions for these activities if you provide adequate puppy-safe toys. The best toys are lightweight, pliable and durable, without attachments such as eyes that can be bitten off and swallowed. Any toy that is small enough to be swallowed should be avoided. We can help you choose the safest toys for your new puppy.

How should I discipline a puppy?

Disciplining a young puppy may be necessary if its behavior threatens people or property, but harsh or physical punishment should be avoided. Hand clapping and using shaker cans or horns can be intimidating enough to inhibit most undesirable behaviors. However, *remote punishment* is preferred. Remote punishment consists of using something that appears unrelated 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 interruption or punishment with the undesirable act and not with you.

How do I housebreak my new puppy?

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 are housebroken faster than others. Your dog wants to please you. But a puppy's memory is short, so your patience is important. A home with a poorly trained puppy is not a happy home for you or the puppy.

The simplest way to housebreak a puppy is to use "crate-training". The puppy's bed may be a box or crate, open at one end and slightly larger than the puppy. If the crate is too large, the puppy may defecate or urinate in a corner of the crate rather than go outside when training occurs. If the crate is smaller, the puppy will more likely do its "business" outside rather than soil its bed. You may place a box or other space-occupying object in the back of the crate to make it smaller and remove it as the puppy grows in size. Enclose the bed or crate in a small area, such as a laundry room. Cover this area with newspapers to be used at night, or when your pup is left unsupervised.

Another common housebreaking tool is creating a "scent post." A scent post is naturally created when your puppy urinates and defecates in any place. This is one of the reasons puppies will return to the area of an "accident" in the house and repeatedly urinate or defecate in that area. The solution is to locate the scent post in the place you want it. To create a scent post, take the puppy to the area in the yard where you want them defecate and urinate. Leave a small amount of feces in this area. The first thing in the morning, the puppy should be scooted to the scent post. This is so he can learn his way to the door and the scent post. Let him sniff about. The moment he has relieved himself, 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 separated in the puppy's routine.

After relieving himself, the puppy should 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 scent post 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 scent post. 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 during the first few weeks. If you catch the puppy "in the act", you can verbally scold him (do not hit the puppy) and rush him to the scent post. Scolding him even 5 minutes after the offense is too late – the puppy will only associate the scolding with your presence at the same time as the "accident", not your displeasure at the mishap. Any soiled areas in the house must be scrubbed thoroughly until all odors are gone. Your veterinarian will recommend cleaning products that will help neutralize any scent from urination or defecation.

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.

Puppy Proofing Your Home

All puppies like to investigate objects by touching, chewing and tasting them. Puppies love to explore, so we need to protect them from household items that are dangerous if swallowed. Here is a list of dangerous items found around the home that you should keep your puppy away from:

- * string, ribbon, yarn, sewing supplies and other small household items
- *Paper clips, erasers, staples, rubber bands, plastic bags, and twist ties
- *Coins, small board game pieces, fragile keepsakes, and ornaments
- *Medications, vitamins, pill bottles, dental floss, razors and cotton balls
- *Household and automotive chemicals ("pet-safe" antifreeze is available)
- *Toxic houseplants, including philodendron, mistletoe and poinsettia
- *Toxic garden plants, including lily, azalea, daffodil, tomato and hydrangea

More Ways To Keep Your Puppy Safe

- *Provide pet-safe puppy toys to keep your puppy occupied
- *Use covered trash cans in your house and garage
- *Keep kitchen countertops clean and clear of food items to reduce temptation
- *Keep household chemicals and poisonous substances in a locked cabinet
- *Keep toilet lid down so your puppy doesn't fall in or drink from the bowl

*Secure electrical cords and wires and keep them out of sight

*In the winter, rinse your dog's paws with warm water and towel-dry after outings to rinse off snow and melting chemicals that can irritate their pads and mouth

*Keep your dog inside and safe from extreme weather year round

How do I ensure that my puppy is well socialized?

The **socialization period** for dogs generally occurs between four and twelve 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, and so forth, 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. Puppy "kindergarten" and puppy training classes are ideal opportunities to socialize your pup.

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 4 weeks of age. They begin to fall out at about 3 ½ to 4 months of age and are replaced by the 42 adult (permanent) teeth by about 6–7 months of age. Therefore, chewing is a puppy characteristic that you can expect until at least 6–7 months of age, if not longer. 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. Avoid hard rubber or plastic toys as they can break teeth, and avoid bones since they can fragment and become obstructed in the intestinal tract.

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

Yes. Many puppies experience episodes of hiccuping that may last several minutes when they are young. This is normal and only lasts a few weeks or months. All puppies have a characteristic odor to their breath that is commonly called "puppy breath". Some of the distinctive odor is caused by teething. This odor is normal and will last only until the puppy matures in a few months.

How should I trim my puppy's toenails?

Puppies have very sharp toenails. When the puppy is young, you can use your fingernail or toenail clippers to trim off the sharp tips. As the puppy gets older, you will need to use nail trimmers made for dogs. 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. Some guidelines for nail trimming include:

- If your dog has clear or white nails, you can often see the pink of the quick through the nail. If you avoid the pink area, you should be safely away from 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 cut into the blood vessel. With black nails, it is likely that you will get too close on at least one nail. With some nails, you can have an assistant use a flashlight to illuminate the side of the nail to determine where the quick is, and use that as a guide.

- 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 (a clotting substance) available. This is sold in pet stores under several trade names, but it will be labeled for use in trimming nails.

Why should I have my male dog neutered?

Intact male dogs are attracted to a female dog in heat and will climb over or go through fences to find her. Intact male dogs tend to be more territorial towards other male dogs. Intact male dogs are prone to develop prostatic disease as they age and testicular cancer is relatively common in intact male dogs. **Neutering or castration is the surgical removal of the testicles**, and will prevent or decrease these problems, as well as being an effective method of controlling the problem of overpopulation. The surgery can be performed any time after the dog is six months old.

Why should I have my female dog spayed?

Spaying is the surgical removal of the uterus and the ovaries, and eliminates the dog's estrus cycles. In an intact dog, these heat periods (*estrus*) result in about 2–3 weeks of vaginal bleeding and discharge approximately every 6 months. During this time, male dogs are attracted from blocks away and, in fact, seem to appear out of thin air when a female is in heat! Male dogs will go over, around, and through doors or fences to reach a female in heat. Apart from the risk of unplanned pregnancies, it is well documented that intact female dogs have a significant risk of developing breast cancer and/or uterine infections. Spaying before the dog experiences her first estrus cycle has 3 benefits: it eliminates the risk of unplanned pregnancy and helps control the problem of dog overpopulation; it eliminates any possibility of uterine disease; and it virtually eliminates any chance of developing breast cancer. If you do not plan to breed your dog, we strongly recommend spaying before 6–7 months of age.

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, helping to minimize the problems to her and 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. For more information, see our series of fact sheets on Breeding of dogs.

Are there any emergency tips I should know?

There are several emergency situations that you may encounter. For details on First Aid and Emergencies in dogs, see our separate fact sheets "Canine Emergencies" and "Canine First Aid". In any emergency situation, keep your pet as quiet as possible and try to conserve body heat by covering it with bedding. Before attempting to move your dog or administer any form of first aid, MUZZLE the dog. No matter how friendly and non-aggressive your dog is under normal circumstances, it WILL BITE if in pain. In an emergency, a temporary muzzle can be made by looping a leash or piece of rope around the dog's muzzle.

With any emergency, contact our clinic immediately for specific emergency instructions, and bring the pup to Blue Cross Animal Hospital as soon as possible. If the emergency occurs after hours, call the Emergency Clinic of Kitchener–Waterloo at (519) 650–1617.

This client information sheet is based on material written by: Ernest Ward, DVM; Updated by Amy Panning, DVM

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