



## Housetraining

Most adopters need to work with a new pet on housetraining to some degree. Patience, a strict schedule, good cleaning methods and supervision are all key to having a reliably housebroken dog.

### Housetraining and Adult Dogs

Many adult dogs adopted from animal shelters were housetrained in their previous homes. While at the shelter, however, they may not have had enough opportunities to eliminate outside, and consequently, they may have soiled their kennel areas. This tends to weaken their housetraining habits. Additionally, scents and odors from other pets in the new home may stimulate some initial urine marking. Remember that you and your new dog need some time to learn each other's signals and routines. Even if a pet was housetrained in a previous home, if you don't recognize their "bathroom" signal, you might miss their request to go out, causing them to eliminate indoors. Therefore, for the first few weeks after you bring them home, you should assume your new dog isn't housetrained, and start from scratch by following the steps outlined below for successful housetraining. If they were housetrained in a previous home, the re-training process should progress quickly. The process will be much smoother if you take steps to prevent accidents and remind them where they are supposed to eliminate.

- Take your dog out at the same times every day; for example, first thing in the morning when they wake up, when you arrive home from work and before you go to bed.
- Praise your dog lavishly every time they eliminate outdoors; you may even give them a treat.
  - You must praise them and give them the treat immediately after they have finished and not wait until after they come back inside the house. This step is vital, because rewarding your dog for eliminating outdoors is the only way they will know that's what you want them to do.
- Choose a location not too far from the door to be the bathroom spot. Always take your dog, on leash, directly to the bathroom spot. Take them for a walk or play with them only after they have eliminated. If you clean up an accident in the house, leave the soiled rags or paper towels in the outdoor bathroom spot. The smell will help your dog recognize the area as the place where they are supposed to eliminate.
- While your dog is eliminating, use a word or phrase like (for example) "go potty," that you can eventually use before they eliminate to remind them of what they are supposed to be doing.
- Feeding your dog on a set schedule, once or twice a day, will help make elimination more regular. Do not leave food out. If you don't control your pet's eating schedule, you won't know when they have to go out.

## Housetraining and Puppies

Housetraining a puppy requires time, vigilance, patience and commitment. Following the procedures outlined below, you can minimize house soiling incidents, but virtually every puppy will have an accident in the house, and more likely, several. Expect this – it's part of raising 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

- Puppies do best on a regular schedule. Take your puppy outside frequently, at least every two hours, and immediately after they wake up from a nap, after playing and after eating.
- Praise your dog lavishly every time they eliminate outdoors; you may even give them a treat.
  - You must praise them and give them the treat immediately after they have finished and not wait until after they come back inside the house. This step is vital, because rewarding your dog for eliminating outdoors is the only way they will know that's what you want them to do.
- Choose a location not too far from the door to be the bathroom spot. Always take your puppy, on a leash, directly to the bathroom spot. Take them for a walk or play with them only after they have eliminated. If you clean up an accident in the house, take the soiled rags or paper towels and leave them in the outdoor bathroom spot. The smell will help your puppy recognize the area as the place they are supposed to eliminate. While your puppy is eliminating, use a word or phrase, like "go potty," that you can eventually use before they eliminate to remind them of what they are supposed to be doing.
- If possible, put your puppy on a regular feeding 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 they will eliminate at consistent times as well. This makes housetraining easier for both of you.

### Paper Training

A puppy under six months of age cannot be expected to control his bladder for more than a few hours at a time. 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. If you're already committed to having a puppy and have to be away from home for long periods of time, you'll need to train your puppy to eliminate in a specific place indoors. Be aware, however, that doing so can prolong the process of teaching them to eliminate outdoors. Teaching your puppy to eliminate on newspaper may create a life-long surface preference, meaning that they may, even in adulthood, eliminate on any newspaper they find lying around the house.

When your puppy must be left alone for long periods of time, confine them to an area with enough room for a sleeping space, a playing space and a separate place to eliminate. In the area designated as the elimination place, you can either use newspapers or a sod box. To make a sod box, place sod in a container, like 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, take the soiled rags or paper towels, and put them in the designated elimination place. The smell will help your puppy recognize the area as the place where they are supposed to eliminate.

### **Supervise, Supervise, Supervise**

Don't give your puppy an opportunity to soil in the house. They should be watched at all times when they are indoors. You can tether them to you with a six-foot leash or use baby gates to keep them in the room where you are. Watch for signs that they need to eliminate, like sniffing around or circling. When you see these signs, immediately take them outside on a leash to his bathroom spot. If they eliminate, praise them lavishly and reward them with a treat.

### **Confinement**

When you're unable to watch your puppy at all times, they should be confined to an area small enough that they won't want to eliminate there. It should be just big enough for them to comfortably stand, lie down and turn around in. This area could be a portion of a bathroom or laundry room blocked off with boxes or baby gates. You could also crate train your puppy and use the crate to confine them (see our handout: "Crate Training Your Dog"). If your puppy has spent several hours in confinement, when you let them out, take them directly to his bathroom spot and praise him when they eliminate.

***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, they will get confused about where they are supposed to eliminate, which will prolong the housetraining process.***

## **Other Types of House-Soiling Problems**

If you've consistently followed the housetraining procedures, and your dog continues to eliminate in the house, there may be another reason for his behavior.

- **Medical Problems.** House soiling can be caused by physical problems such as a urinary tract infection. Such an infection can occur for a number of reasons, but it is mentioned here with specific regard to shelter environments. Dogs at the shelter have no set schedule in terms of elimination. Some housebroken dogs who are used to being walked in order to urinate or defecate will frequently refuse to go in their kennel and instead wait for an opportunity to go outside. These dogs will "hold it" for quite some time. Because the urine is not being eliminated, bacteria can grow in the urinary tract. If your dog is difficult to housebreak (especially if the previous owners indicated that he had been housebroken) or if they eliminate frequently in odd places, especially after just being walked, you should take them to your veterinarian for a physical exam and a urinalysis.  
A parasite infection could also contribute to housebreaking difficulties, such as diarrhea. Check with your veterinarian to rule out any possibility of disease or illness.
- **Submissive/Excitement Urination.** Some dogs, especially young ones, temporarily lose control of their bladders when they become excited or feel threatened. This usually occurs during greetings, intense play or when they're about to be punished. Please see the next section for more details.
- **Medication.** Certain types of medication can make your dog have an increased desire to urinate.
- **Territorial Urine-Marking.** Dogs sometimes deposit urine or feces, usually in small amounts, to scent-mark their territory. Both male and female dogs do this, and it most often occurs when they believe their territory has been invaded.
- **Separation Anxiety.** Dogs that become anxious when they're left alone may house soil as a result. Usually, there are also other symptoms, such as destructive behavior or vocalization.

- **Fears or Phobias.** When animals become frightened, they may lose control of their bladder and/or bowels. If your dog is afraid of loud noises, such as thunderstorms or fireworks, they may house soil when they are exposed to these sounds.

## Submissive and/or Excitement Urination

**Submissive urination** occurs when a dog feels threatened. It may occur when they are being punished or verbally scolded, or when he's approached by someone they perceive to be threatening. It's important to remember that this response is based on the dog's perception of a threat, not the person's actual intention. Submissive urination may resolve as your dog gains confidence. You can help to build confidence by teaching your dog commands and rewarding them for obeying. You should also gradually expose them to new people and new situations and try to make sure all of his new experiences are positive and happy.

*Your dog may be submissively urinating if*

- Urination occurs when they are being scolded.
- Urination occurs when they are being greeted.
- Urination occurs when someone approaches them.
- They are a somewhat shy, anxious or timid dog.
- They have a history of rough treatment or punishment after the fact.
- The urination is accompanied by submissive postures, such as crouching or rolling over and exposing their belly.

*What To Do If Your Dog Has a Submissive Urination Problem*

- Take your dog to the vet to rule out medical reasons for the behavior.
- Keep greetings calm and low-key.
- Encourage and reward confident postures from them.
- Give him an alternative to behaving submissively. For example, if they know a few commands, have them "Sit" or "Shake" as you approach, and reward them for obeying.
- Avoid approaching them with postures that could read as dominant, for example:
  - Avoid direct eye contact; look at their back or tail instead.
  - Get down on their level by bending at the knees rather than leaning over from the waist and ask others to approach them in the same way.
  - Pet them under the chin rather than on top of the head.
  - Approach them from the side rather than from the front and/or present the side of your body to them rather than your full front.
- Don't punish or scold them. This will only make the problem worse.

**Excitement urination** occurs most often during greetings and playtime and is not accompanied by submissive posturing. Excitement urination usually resolves on its own as a dog matures, if it's not made worse by punishment or inadvertent reinforcement.

*Your dog may have an excitement urination problem if*

- Urination occurs when your dog is excited; for example, during greetings or during playtime.
- Urination occurs when your dog is less than one year old.

*What To Do If Your Dog Has an Excitement Urination Problem*

- Keep greetings calm and low-key.
- Don't punish or scold them.
- To avoid accidents, play outdoors until the problem is resolved.
- Ignore your dog until they are calm.
- Take your dog to the veterinarian to rule out medical reasons for the behavior.

## Questions

***What do I do when my dog has an accident?***

Expect your dog to have an accident in the house; it is normal for both an unhousebroken puppy as well as an adult dog who is adjusting to a new schedule.

- When you catch them in the act of eliminating in the house, do something to interrupt them like make a startling noise (be careful not to scare them). Immediately take him to his bathroom spot, praise them and give them a treat if he finishes eliminating there.
- Don't punish your dog for eliminating in the house. If you find a soiled area, it's too late to administer a correction. Do nothing but clean it up. Rubbing your puppy's nose in it, taking them to the spot and scolding him, or any other punishment or discipline, will only make them afraid of you or afraid to eliminate in your presence. Animals don't understand punishment after the fact, even if it's only seconds later. Punishment will do more harm than good.
- Consider why the accident happened: Does the dog need more supervision? A smaller area in which to be confined? Different food? Less food? Usually by making changes to some of these areas, you can get your dog on the right track to being housebroken.

***It is true that small dogs can be difficult to housebreak?***

Yes. Toy breeds, such as Yorkshire Terriers, Chihuahuas, and Maltese, all have small bladders and generally cannot "hold it" for a long period of time. Housebreaking toy breed puppies can take months, and even then, you may not have a dog who can "hold it" for an eight-hour workday. Many small breed dogs are paper-trained, even through adulthood. A newer approach to the problem of housebreaking small dogs is to try litterbox training.

***When do male dogs who have recently been neutered stop marking?***

When some unneutered male dogs hit maturity, they begin to "mark" territory by urinating on it. This is not a housebreaking issue, and the problem is nearly always solved through having the dog neutered. It takes about 30 days for the hormones that encourage marking behavior to leave a dog's system. During that time, your recently neutered male dog may mark in your home once or twice. He will still most likely mark when taken for walks, or when taken to places other dogs have marked, such as the veterinarian's office.

***My dog seems embarrassed to “go” in front of me. What should I do?***

We have known some adopted dogs who seemed to have “modesty” problems. In researching these cases, they seem generally to have been dogs who had become used to going to the bathroom off-leash in their previous homes and are not used to having a person so close to them. If you don’t have the ability to let your dog off leash in a fenced area for regular housebreaking outings, try using a long, 10-foot leash (you can use inexpensive clothesline) and then ducking behind a tree on walks. This may give your pup a sense of privacy and encourage them to go. If this doesn’t work, call our behavior hotline for more ideas.