



# Housetraining Puppies and Retraining Adult

One of the reasons that we can keep dogs and cats as house pets is because their elimination behavior patterns allow them to be trained to go to the bathroom in locations that are acceptable to us. However, puppies cannot be expected to control their bladder and bowels for long time periods until five to six months of age. Some puppies are not fully housetrained until they are eight or nine months or even a year old. Because dogs are denning animals, like wolves, they tend not to soil the area they consider to be their den. You cannot assume that your new adult dog or puppy will realize at first that your entire house is now his den. You must teach him that.

## Housetraining Puppies

### 1. Establish a routine.

Housetraining a puppy requires time and commitment from you. The more consistent you are, the quicker your puppy will learn acceptable behavior. Like babies, puppies do best on a regular schedule. If possible, put your puppy on a regular feeding schedule. Check with your veterinarian, but depending on its age, puppies usually need to be fed three or four times a day. Feeding your puppy at consistent times each day will make it more likely that it will need to go to the bathroom at consistent time periods, as well. This will make housetraining much easier.

### 2. Reward good behavior.

Take your puppy outside frequently, at least every two hours. Your puppy should also be taken outside when it wakes up from a nap, after playing and after eating. Establish two command phrases - one asking, "Do you need to go outside?" and another saying, "Go do your business!" once outside. Use whatever words you choose, but be consistent - always use the exact same phrases. Go outside with your puppy. Repeat your command phrase and when it urinates or defecates, praise your puppy quietly, but enthusiastically. You can also give your pup a tidbit as a reward for eliminating outside. Most pet owners forget to reward puppies for doing the right thing. The importance of rewarding good behavior (rather than punishing unacceptable behavior) cannot be overemphasized.

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### **3. Supervise your puppy.**

A new puppy must be supervised constantly. Puppies that are allowed to wander off into rooms by themselves or who are left alone, free in the house, will most likely get into trouble. Always be sure you know where your puppy is. Encourage it to stay in the same room with you or another family member. You can "tether" the puppy to you on a six-foot leash or use baby gates to keep it in the room where you are. Closing doors to unoccupied rooms is also a good idea. When a puppy must be left alone for relatively long periods, it should be confined in a small area or a crate. This area or crate must be large enough to provide a sleeping and playing area, as well as an area where the puppy can eliminate. Papers can be placed in that part of the confinement area designated as OK for the puppy to eliminate in. Because young puppies cannot always control their bladder and bowels for long time periods, it is not fair to confine a puppy for an entire workday with no place to relieve itself. A puppy can be crated at night (preferably in the same room with a family member) if you are willing to get up and go outside with him/her when necessary.

### **4. Never punish after the fact.**

Virtually every puppy will have an accident in the house. Expect this; it is part of owning a puppy. If - AND ONLY IF - you catch your puppy in the act of soiling, do something that startles it, that it perceives as coming from the environment, not from you. Make a loud noise (a whistle, slapping your palm against the wall, dropping something) or toss a pillow toward your puppy. DO NOT RUB YOUR PUPPY'S NOSE IN THE MESS OR HIT IT. This will teach your puppy to be afraid of you and afraid to eliminate in your presence - and you do want the puppy to go to the bathroom in the yard when you are there. If you find a soiled area, but do not catch your puppy soiling, do nothing but clean it up. Animals do not understand punishment after the fact - even if it is only seconds. Punishment after the fact without a doubt will do more harm than good. Punishment should punish the behavior, not the animal. This cannot happen unless the puppy is caught in the act.

### **5. Use enzymatic cleaners.**

The best cleaning agents to use for soiled areas are enzymatic-type cleaners available at many pet stores. The enzymes break up the organic material that produces the odor. Do not clean with ammonia, as this smells similar to urine. Vinegar diluted with water can also help neutralize odor. If your puppy has picked a favorite spot to soil, not only should it be thoroughly cleaned, but it can be made less appealing by changing the texture. You can do this by covering it with plastic or tape that is sticky on both sides. However, you must also make sure that you are following all the rest of the basic housetraining procedures, especially rewarding your puppy for going outside.

### **6. Provide more freedom gradually.**

As your puppy matures and begins to show you that it understands going outside to eliminate is what you expect, you can gradually increase its freedom. If you wish, you can leave the puppy free in the house for short time-periods - while you run to the store. Don't expect the puppy to make the transition from being confined to being left completely free in the house in a single step.

## **Retraining Adult Dogs**

Many adult dogs adopted were housetrained in their previous home. However, this does not guarantee that this will be the case in their new homes. Although dogs housed at the

kennels are taken for walks and exercised, they can't always be taken outside when they need to eliminate. This, dogs usually soil their kennel areas. This tends to weaken their housetrained behavior. When first in a new environment, a dog may not yet realize that this is now its den. Scents and odors from other pets may also stimulate urine marking, even in spayed and neutered animals.

For the first few days and weeks, you should assume that your new dog is not housetrained. Treat it just as you would a puppy - establish a regular schedule, take it outside frequently, reward it for eliminating outside, and supervise its activity while inside. Progress should be much faster than with a puppy because you are refreshing and reinforcing already established habits, rather than teaching totally new behaviors.

## Housetraining Problems

If you have consistently followed basic housetraining procedures and your dog continues to eliminate in the house, then the cause of the behavior must be determined before it can be changed. There are reasons why dogs house soil other than a lack of housetraining. Some examples are:

**Medical Problems:** House soiling can often be caused by physical problems such as a urinary tract infections or an irritated bowel. Check with your veterinarian to rule out any possibility of disease or illness.

**Territorial Urine-Marking:** Dogs will deposit urine, usually in small amounts, to scent-mark territory. Both male and female dogs may do this. This most often occurs when the dog believes its territory has been invaded.

**Separation Anxiety:** It is not uncommon for dogs to become anxious when left alone and house soil as a result. If the soiling is occurring only and consistently when you dog is left alone, separation anxiety may be the cause.

**Fears or Phobias:** When animals become frightened, they often lose control of their bladders and/or bowels. If your dog is afraid of loud noises, thunderstorms or other things, it may house soil when exposed to these environmental events.

**Submissive/Excitement Urination:** Some dogs, especially young ones, temporarily lose control of their bladder when they become excited or threatened. This usually occurs during greetings, intense play or when they are about to be punished (another good reason for not punishing after the fact or using physical types of punishment).



San Bernardino County  
Animal Care & Control Program  
**(800) 472-5609**