

HOUSETRAINING YOUR DOG

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Recently I was at a conference where 2 PhDs presented “data” from observations of their new puppy. They recorded each time their new pup eliminated. The numbers can seem startling. The pup averaged urinating 18 times and defecating 4 times a day. Such numbers might seem to make successful housetraining insurmountable, but in fact knowing these numbers may help you plan better for your puppy, or even your adult dog.

Housetraining for young pups or adult dogs is the same. Success depends almost entirely on the humans. Dogs quickly become accustomed to eliminating on specific surfaces (grass, gravel, dirt, carpet, tile, etc.). As the part of the family with an opposable thumb it is up to you to get your dog to a surface of your preference whenever he needs to go. If you are consistently successful at this, your dog will quickly become fully housetrained.

These guidelines will help you housetrain your dog and also improve your bond and understanding of each other. The more vigilant you are in the beginning of housetraining the quicker you will have a reliable dog. Every accident will set you back but each potty break in an approved area is a giant leap forward.

☞ **Start with a healthy dog.** All puppies should have an initial Veterinary visit as soon as they are brought home. Part of this visit should include a stool check for worms. If your older fully housetrained dog has suddenly begun to have accidents, talk to your Vet.

☞ **Crate train your dog.** Teaching your dog to like a crate will not only help with housetraining but can often be helpful later in life if the dog needs to be confined due to injury, illness or for traveling.

☞ **Know your dog’s schedule.** Puppies are especially predictable and need to be taken out every time after eating, waking, playing, drinking, times of excitement, during or after chewing, and just because it has been awhile. Even though some pups can make it through the night for up to 8 hours, they do not have the same ability during the day while they are awake. A reasonable rule of thumb is that a puppy can only hold his bladder for as many hours as he is months old. This means a confined 4-month-old pup can last about 4 hours.

☞ **Management and supervision.** Until you are sure there will be no accidents, do not let your dog wander the house unsupervised. This may mean that you find creative ways to watch your dog. You can tether him to you or near your activities. You can crate the dog or confine him to a small room with a baby gate when you cannot adequately supervise. This is not forever, just for housetraining. Do not overuse confinement in place of good supervision.

☞ **Know your dog’s signals.** Most dogs give some signs that they need to go—circling, sniffing the ground, a distressed look, panting, etc. When you see these signs take the dog out.

☞ **Potty breaks are only for taking care of business.** Take your dog out on a leash. Take him to the area you want him to go. You can give them a cue (Potty, Hurry up, etc.). Stand still and wait a few minutes. If the dog goes, praise lavishly when done. You can even offer a treat and have a little play session. Remember, a play session could lead to another potty break. If the dog does not go, head back inside and watch or confine the dog. Head back out in 10 minutes and try again.

☞ **Stay with your dog.** Do not turn dogs out in the yard alone. If you are not there, you cannot be sure that he has taken care of business. Many dogs will go out and become distracted and will actually forget that they need to go. This is why they will quickly eliminate once they are back inside. If the dog is not used to being on a leash, or going in the area or on the surface you have chosen, this may take awhile. But each successful trip will lead to shorter times in the future.

☞ **Feed healthy, high-quality food.** If you are feeding low quality food that is primarily fillers, your dog will have to go more often (and in huge amounts). Research various foods, and buy the highest quality you can afford. Your dog will be healthier and easier to live with.

☞ **Make sure successful potty sessions are not punishment.** Be careful not to get in the habit of a successful potty event outside ending a fun session. If your dog is playing and sniffing and eliminates and then you praise the dog and take them inside they will learn that the potty break ends the fun. This is why you want to keep potty sessions on focus and be conscious of when you end your dog's fun.

☞ **What about accidents?** Clean up the accident with non-ammonia cleaner that contains enzymes for eliminating pet odors. Make a note of accidents so that you can see a pattern if one develops. If you catch your dog as he is about to eliminate in the house, try to interrupt with a sharp, "Ah Ah!" and, if possible, quickly get your dog outside to finish. Accidents are not your dog's fault. Most likely, you were not being diligent and the dog was unsupervised. Do not punish or chastise the dog. This will not help with housetraining. If you did not see the beginning of your dog's signs that he was going to eliminate, go back to the beginning of this page and start again.