



House Training Your Puppy

St. Michael Veterinary Clinic

Basic Training:

The best and most reliable way to house train your puppy is to provide frequent opportunity to eliminate in an appropriate place and to reward this behavior immediately as it occurs. To do this, walk your puppy on a leash at regular intervals and at least twice every day. The direct house-training method requires you to be nearby and to start good lifetime habits from the beginning. Other methods may seem easier and may appear to demand less initial investment of time. The direct training method, however, is sure to save you time and energy in the long run.

Puppies require more frequent walks until they can reliably control sphincters. This usually occurs by 6 months of age. The best method of house training is to take your puppy out within several minutes after each meal and each nap. These are predictable moments during the day when bowel and bladder are most full. A wave of rhythmic contractions along the length of the digestive tract (the gastro colic reflex) begins when food or water is swallowed. The contractions are particularly strong after eating, which explains why a bowel movement is so likely after a puppy eats. Feed your puppy at scheduled mealtimes and avoid snacks between feeding. The gastro colic reflex may be conditioned by feeding your puppy at regular intervals. Allowing your puppy continuous access to food makes house training more difficult. Prevent "accidents" between meals by taking your pup out before the accidents occur.

It is best to leash walk your puppy within 15 minutes or sooner after each meal. Continue to walk, incorporating play to make it fun, until the puppy has eliminated. If your puppy is too young to walk on a leash, carry it outside to an enclosed, safe area. Stay nearby and play with or pet him/her. If your pup is slow adjusting to leash walks, be patient. Avoid pulling the leash and allow your pup to take its time. When the pup prepares to eliminate, begin praising it in a happy and light tone of voice. Continue your praise until the task is completed. Immediate encouragement is necessary for your pup to learn to eliminate in an acceptable area. As your dog eliminates, pleasantly say something like "hurry" or "do it" and give abundant praise. This teaches the pup to void on command so that you won't freeze unnecessarily on a cold winter night while the pup leisurely looks for just the right spot. If your pup is initially afraid of the leash, leave the leash on indoors for brief leash walks indoors before graduating to walks outside. Daily leash walks throughout a dog's life help maintain good elimination habits.

Paper training is not the method of choice, contrary to popular opinion. Paper training encourages the pup to eliminate on newspapers spread over the floor in a designated area of the home. This can lead to several problems. The first is that you may confuse your pup by teaching it twice what it need to learn only once. When, and if, the pup has learned to void on the newspapers, it must then be retrained to eliminate outside. The second problem with paper training is that you may unintentionally teach your pup that it is acceptable to eliminate inside your home. Though some puppies stay on the paper, many more "miss" the boundaries set for them. You may think your pup clearly understands that it should void on paper. Instead, it may learn that it is acceptable to eliminate anywhere in that room and may begin soiling in a variety of unacceptable areas in your home. Some owners of small-breed dogs prefer to continue paper training throughout the pet's lifetime, but this should not replace daily walks.

A third problem stemming from this method of housetraining is the practice of punishing the pup for eliminating in the house and then taking it immediately outside. Some owners believe that pressing the pup's nose into its own waste discourages it. Others punish by using a stern voice or by hurriedly grabbing a pup while it is urinating or defecating. Punishment is often followed by whisking the puppy outside into a big and frightening world, where the irritated owner impatiently awaits appropriate behavior. While this may be intended to teach the puppy not to eliminate indoors, the

puppy may associate the punishment with going out and may learn to fear going outside. A confused and frightened pet is even more likely to spontaneously void when it is threatened! The dog might even learn to fear eliminating in your presence.

It is pointless to punish your dog at any age for "accidents" that occur in your home. This is particularly true when there is any delay between the act of soiling and your discovery of the mess. To be effective, punishment (and praise, for that matter) must closely follow your pet's action. Punishment is not helpful in-house training and is ineffective unless it is given immediately after the "crime". No matter how frustrated you may be, clean up the mess and concentrate on the steps to prevent another one.

Crate Training:

Crate training is based on the premise that puppies are unlikely to eliminate in or near an area used for rest. Crate training is popular among owners who cannot continually remain nearby to bring the puppy directly outside as described above. Some owners place the pup in a crate while they are away at work, or absent for short periods or even overnight. A puppy that naturally resists voiding inside the crate may eventually adjust to longer periods of crate confinement when you are absent. This method works well for some dogs, but not for all. Many young puppies are simply unable to control immature sphincters, especially when they are anxious or frightened. Some pups may soil themselves and even ingest their own waste. For these pups, the direct training method is preferable and crate training should be abandoned. Some pups do not tolerate this type of confinement, becoming very agitated and excessively vocal. If the pup initially objects to being closed in the crate, you will encourage undesirable attention-seeking behavior, such as whining or barking, by visiting or otherwise comforting the crated pup. Wait a few moments until it is quiet and calm before checking that all is well. This way, you will not encourage undesirable behavior nor will you defeat the potential usefulness of the crate. If your puppy's objections seem excessive or unacceptable to you, apply other housetraining techniques instead.

If you choose to try crate training, begin by selecting a crate that will accommodate your dog at its anticipated adult size. Your (adult) dog should be able to comfortably stand and turn to change positions in its crate. If you are purchasing a crate for a large-breed pup, you may decide to purchase just the one for its adult size; you may partition the unused space and enlarge the available space as the young dog grows. Consult a veterinarian about your dog's projected maximal growth, particularly if your pet is not purebred. To introduce your dog to the crate, associate the crate with positive things, such as food and safe shelter. Leave the door open until there is no sign of fear. Cover a section of the floor with comfortable and easily laundered bedding, such as a towel or blanket. Play with your pup, tossing favorite toys into the crate for it to retrieve. Place food and water in the crate to encourage your pet to consider it a safe place. This also decreases the likelihood that your dog will soil inside the cage. When the puppy enters the crate without hesitation at mealtime, gently close the door while it eats. Keep the door closed for gradually longer periods. Let the pup out when it is calm and quiet.

The crate is your dog's special place where it should never be disturbed or threatened. The crate must not be linked with punishment or your dog will avoid it. Encourage your dog to use the crate as a resting place. When the pup is ready to nap, place it in the crate with a favorite toy or treat. Never place your pup in the crate or try to remove it from its crate when you are angry. Do not reach in and pull your dog out of its crate. A dog that is threatened in its crate may aggressively resist leaving it. Teach your dog to willingly leave the crate on your command, using a simple "come" in a happy tone of voice.

The Umbilical Cord Method:

This method of house training is best used with the other techniques detailed above. Attach your pup to a long leash that is tied to your wrist or waist. This allows it a certain amount of freedom while ensuring your constant supervision over its activity. The pup cannot wander away to have an undetected accident and you can anticipate the pup's need to void, taking it directly outside. This method may be applied as an alternative to overnight crate confinement or isolation in another part of your home. The pup may be leashed to your bed or at least in your bedroom overnight. While some puppies may have "accidents" where they sleep, they may be less anxious when their owners are nearby, and this may positively affect their behavior.