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Congratulations on your new companion!

The Dog Owner's Handbook



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Congratulations!

Congratulations on your new addition to the family!

Canine companionship is one of life's greatest gifts. This dog ownership handbook contains important information that will help you provide the best health care for your pet so you can enjoy many years together.

Your veterinarian is your partner in ensuring your pet's health is optimum. Regular examinations and a focus on preventive care will help detect and manage various health concerns.

This handbook will serve as a useful guide for general pet health. Your veterinarian will provide advice specific to your pet's unique health needs.



Preparing for you new pet

Getting a new puppy is exciting. However, it also comes with some stress as it is your puppies first time away from their mother and littermates. Below are some things you can do to make the transition as smooth as possible.

CHECKLIST

- Nutritious food
- Fresh water bowl
- Chew toys – size appropriate, non-destructable, non-toxic material
 - Good options – Kongs, Nylabones, puzzle toys
 - Avoid antlers, hard bones, easily destroyed toys, or toys with small pieces that can be swallowed by accident
- Safe sleeping place (crate or other bedding)
- Leash and collar/harness

CRATE TRAINING

Crate training is a great way to give your puppy their own safe space in the home. Remember, it takes time and patience. With a consistent, positive approach your puppy will learn that their crate is a relaxing, comfortable area.

DO's of crate training

- DO choose an appropriate size crate (able to stand up and turn around) that is well ventilated.
- DO provide bedding that is appropriate for your dog – some dog will tear apart bedding, so don't be afraid to use a durable matt instead of soft bedding if needed
- DO use treat rewards when your dog enters the crate
- DO incorporate crate games – fetching a toy or finding a hidden treat inside the crate reinforces that the crate is a positive space
- DO provide gradual increases in crate time – start with just a couple minutes, and then gradually work up to longer periods.
- DO be patient – crate training can take a few months, but the reward for both you and your dog are well worth the effort

Remember, the crate is your dog's safe place. DO NOT use it as a place for punishment.

The Importance of Regular Check ups

1) Early disease detection

Regular check-ups provide an opportunity to detect disease/abnormalities early or prevent them. Unfortunately, pets often may appear healthy even though they have underlying illness. Heart murmurs, hernias, and dental disease are examples of ailments that are often undetected by owners, but identified during a doctor's exam.

2) Nutrition counseling

Obesity is one of the most common ailments affecting pets today. Overweight pets are predisposed to other illnesses such as diabetes and joint disease. During regular check ups your veterinarian will discuss diet and your pet's body condition to ensure your pet is receiving important nutrients and their weight is optimal. Sometimes a specific weight control diet as well as regular weight checks ups are recommended.

3) Behavioural counseling

Poor pet behaviour is one of the leading causes of pet surrender. During check ups your veterinarian will ask you about any behavioural concerns and provide useful resources to assist in tackling behavioural challenges.

What happens during a wellness exam?

At the beginning of the appointment your veterinarian will ask you some questions about your pet's health. This is important to help determine if there

are signs of disease present or if there are things that can be done to improve your pet's health.

The physical exam

- Your veterinarian will perform a complete nose to tail examination of your pet, including the following body systems
 - Heart and lungs
 - Skin, haircoat, and nails
 - Eyes and ears
 - Musculoskeletal (muscle, bones, joints)
 - Nervous system
 - Abdominal palpation
 - Lymph nodes
 - Oral health assessment
 - Perineal exam (anal, rectal assessment)



Preventive screening is an important part of assessing your pet's internal health. Because many diseases only show up clinically in the later stages, screening tests can help to identify these diseases earlier and allow for more effective management. Your veterinarian may recommend a blood, urine, and fecal sample for preventive screening.

Wellness Appointment Checklist

- Know your pet's diet (brand of food and amount fed per day)
- Bring a fresh fecal sample
- Write down your concerns or questions

How often should my pet be examined?

Dogs less than 7 years of age should be examined a minimum of once per year (annually)

Dogs 7 years and older should be examined every 6 months

Remember, a dog's life span is much shorter than a human and so a lot can change in 6 months time.

Vaccinations

Vaccinations help protect your pet against serious and potentially fatal diseases.

Your veterinarian will be able to advise you on the vaccinations that are appropriate for your pet's specific risk levels and lifestyle.

Common Canine Vaccinations

- Distemper
- Hepatitis
- Parvovirus
- Rabies
- Bordetella
- Parainfluenza
- Lyme
- Leptospirosis

In Alberta, most veterinarians do not routinely vaccinate for lyme disease, leptospirosis, or canine influenza because the prevalence of these diseases is still relatively low. However, if your pet will be traveling outside of the province these vaccines may be recommended.

Canine Vaccination Schedule

Due to the potential for maternal antibody interference, puppies are vaccinated 3-4 weeks apart, starting around 8 weeks of age and finishing no earlier than 16 weeks of age.

Example vaccine protocol:

8 weeks – Distemper/parvovirus/hepatitis

12 weeks – Distemper/parvo/hep + Bordetella/Parainfluenza

16 weeks - Distemper/parvo/hep + Rabies

1 year – Distemper/parvo/hep + Bordetella/parainfluenza + Rabies

Dogs who complete their puppy series and 1 year boosters on schedule will generally be vaccinated for distemper/parvovirus/hepatitis every 3 years and Rabies every 3 years moving forward. The Bordetella/parainfluenza vaccine provides a shorter length of immunity and must be administered annually to provide protection against this disease.

Your veterinarian will discuss the specific vaccine protocol that is appropriate for your pet based on their history, lifestyle, and health needs.

Why must my dog be examined before vaccinations?

When we vaccinate, we rely on the animal to mount an immune response that provides sufficient antibody levels to protect against the disease we are vaccinating against.

If an animal is suffering from an illness or receiving certain medications, their immune system may not be able to mount an effective response and the vaccine will be ineffective. There is also increased risk that your pet could become ill from the vaccine if they are not healthy. For this reason, a medical history and physical examination is performed to ensure your pet is fit for vaccination.

How common are vaccine reactions?

Vaccine reactions are relatively uncommon and can range from mild to severe.

Mild signs may include:

- Discomfort at the injection site

- Lethargy
- Loss of appetite
- Mild facial swelling or hives

Severe signs may include:

- Severe swelling or hives (or the face or at the injection site)
- Extreme lethargy
- Fever
- Anaphylaxis
- Gastrointestinal signs

If your pet has reacted to a vaccine in the past, inform your veterinarian before another vaccine is administered.

Spaying and Neutering

Every year, thousands of unwanted pets are euthanized across Canada.

Spaying/neutering your pet not only prevents unwanted babies, it also reduces the risk of several other diseases such as mammary cancer and prostate disease.

What does the surgical procedure entail?

Spaying a female – ovariohysterectomy (spay) involves the complete removal of the ovaries and uterus. This procedure eliminates the chance of pregnancy, heat cycles and uterine/ovarian disease. Research has shown that spaying dogs before their first heat cycle dramatically reduces the risk of mammary (breast) cancer.

Neutering a male – castration (neuter) involves the removal of both testicles. This procedure reduces the risk of prostate disease, testicular cancer, and makes dogs less likely to roam in search of a female mate. Neutered males also have a reduced incidence of behavioural problems.

Your veterinarian will discuss with you the recommended age for spaying or neutering your pet.

Parasite prevention

Parasites may be internal (living inside your pet), or external (on the skin or hair).

Examples of internal parasites include:

- Roundworms
- Heartworm
- Hookworms
- Whipworms
- Tapeworms
- Coccidia
- Giardia

Heartworm is a serious blood parasite that is transmitted to dogs by mosquitos. The worms travel to the heart and surrounding vessels where they mature into adults and cause serious, potentially life-threatening disease. The prevalence of heartworm in Alberta is considered to be low. However, dogs who travel to other regions such as British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, and USA/Mexico are at risk of contracting this disease and should be routinely protected. Many routine internal parasite treatments will also prevent heartworm disease.

Because some internal parasite infections may not show obvious clinical signs, it is recommended that all puppies are screened for parasites (OPG fecal test). We recommend adult dogs are screening annually.

Common external parasites include:

- Fleas
- Lice
- Mites (body, ear)
- Ticks

These parasites can cause skin irritation/damage, anemia (ex: fleas, blood-sucking lice), and vector-borne illness such as heartworm, lyme disease and

tapeworm. Vector-borne illness is a disease that is transmitted to your pet from the bite of an arthropod insect, such as a mosquito, fly, or tick.

When should I consider parasite prevention for my dog?

In the warmer months of the year (March – October), routine internal and external parasite prevention is recommended for most dogs. This is provided as either a monthly chewable tablet or topical medication applied to the skin.

It is very common for puppies to pick up internal parasites from their mother as well as the environment. It is recommended that puppies receive a dewormer every 2 weeks from 2 – 12 weeks of age, and then monthly depending on their lifestyle and risk level.

Your veterinarian will discuss a parasite prevention regimen that is specific to your pet's health needs and risk level.

Ticks and Lyme Disease

Ticks are small, spider-like animals that bite to fasten themselves to an animal's skin and feed on blood.

Ticks are most active in the Spring, Summer, and Fall when temperatures are above 0 degrees Celsius.

In addition to ticks that live in Alberta, migrating birds also bring ticks into the province from other regions.

In Canada, the Black-Legged and Western Black-legged ticks may carry bacteria known as *Borellia burgdorferi*. This bacteria is the cause of Lyme disease in humans and animals.

While most ticks in Alberta do not carry *Borrellia*, there is recent evidence suggesting the expansion of carrier ticks to this province. A Lyme disease surveillance program exists in Alberta to monitor this situation.



How can I protect my dog against ticks?

- Avoid tick infested areas (forests, heavy bush)
- Check your dog over after outdoor activities
- Talk to your veterinarian about tick prevention products

Safe removal of ticks

- Use fine-tipped tweezers or a tick removal tool to grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible
- Pull the tick straight out, gently but firmly, ensuring to remove the entire tick
- Place the tick in a secure container
- Clean the bite site with rubbing alcohol or soap and water
- Your veterinarian can assist with submitting the tick to the Alberta tick surveillance program for testing

Dental Care

It is estimated that 80% of dogs have dental disease by the time they are 3 years old.

Dental disease occurs when plaque (the bacterial film that forms on teeth within 12 hours) is not removed and goes on to form hard tartar (brown color that builds up near gumline). Over time, the bacteria in this tartar will damage the tooth and surrounding tissues leading to pain, infection, and in some cases other illness (ex: heart disease, kidney disease, liver disease).



It is important for all dogs to have some form of dental hygiene plan.

Home dental care

When your pet is 6 months old, start practicing tooth brushing with a soft-bristled brush. Pet toothpaste (non-fluoride) can be used to add moisture and flavoring for your pet. Human toothpaste should never be used as they are not meant to be swallowed.

It is important to start handling your dog's mouth early in their life to get them accustomed to oral assessments. Practice lifting their lips and gently opening their mouth to look at their gums and teeth, as well as using a soft toothbrush or your finger to massage their gums. It is very important to start a home dental care routine to minimize plaque and tartar build up.

Options for home dental care include:

- Brushing daily
- Dental wipes
- Water additives
- Dental diets
- Oral gels

In addition to home dental care, your veterinarian will perform an oral health assessment during your pet's wellness exam to determine if a professional cleaning or other treatments are needed.

Nutrition

Good nutrition is as important for pets as it is for people. With so many different options available, choosing the right food for your dog can be a challenge. Your veterinarian is your best source of information about pet nutrition.

Due to the stringent safety standards and strong scientific research, we recommend the following manufacturers:

- Royal Canin
- Hill's
- Purina veterinary and Proplan diets
- Science Diet

Understanding ingredients

When buying food for your dog, know what to look for. The ingredients on the label are not nearly as important as the nutritional value of the food. For example, don't assume that a brand of dog food is better because meat appears as the first ingredient on the label. The quality of the protein is more important than the source. A high quality plant protein can provide better nutrition than a low quality meat source. As more people choose to consume a grain-free and gluten-free diet, there's been an increase in the number of grain- and gluten-free diets available for pets. Most dogs don't require this type of diet, and there is now evidence to suggest that there may be a link between feeding grain-free and the development of heart disease.

In general, if your dog is eating a balanced diet there is no need to add vitamin/mineral supplements. Your veterinarian may recommend a food supplement if it is appropriate for your pet's specific health needs.

Different diets for different life-stages

Your dog's nutritional needs will change with age. Puppies should receive a good quality commercial "growth" food. For the older pet, your veterinarian may recommend a senior diet. Veterinary prescriptions diets are also available any may be recommended depending on your pet's specific health needs.

Homemade diets

Some dog owners choose to feed their dog a homemade diet instead of commercial dog food. If you're considering using a homemade diet, there are important rules to follow when selecting ingredients and preparing the food for your dog. Consult your veterinarian to make sure that the diet meets your dog's nutritional needs.

Useful resources: hilarysblend.ca, balanceit.com

How often should I feed my dog?

Puppies should be meal fed three times a day until they are at least six months of age. This means that the recommended amount of food is placed in the bowl, and if the puppy doesn't eat it all within about 30 minutes, the food is removed and no more food is offered until the next meal. Adult dogs should be fed twice a day and should always have fresh water available.

Raw food diets – Myths and Facts

When considering this choice for your pet, it is important to understand the facts as well as the myths about raw food diets.

Myth: Raw food diets are natural, and therefore healthier for my dog

Fact: It is inherently incorrect to assume that something that is natural automatically is better for health. Many natural things (ex: snake venoms, toxic plants, bones) are well known to be detrimental to health. Conversely, some things such as vaccines and antibiotics, which are artificially created, have well-documented health benefits. It is important to remember that wild canids eat raw foods because that is what is available to them, not because it promotes a longer, healthier life. Wild canids experience shorter life spans in comparison to our domesticated dogs, in part due to the natural consequences of raw food such as parasitism, food-borne illness, dental disease and gastrointestinal disease.

Myth: Wolves eat raw food in the wild, so this is the best choice for my dog

Fact: Evidence-based research shows many genetic, anatomic, and physiological differences between our domesticated dogs and wild canids. These changes have also resulted in different dietary needs to promote optimum health.

Myth: Raw food diets are safer than commercially prepared foods

Fact: In comparison to commercial diets, raw food poses a significantly increased risk for food borne infections. This risk is greater for young, old, and immunocompromised animals and their human caregivers. While commercial diets are not immune to potential contaminations, the risk is much lower.

Myth: Raw foods are natural and therefore nutritionally balanced

Fact: It is common for home-prepared raw food diets to be unbalanced and nutritionally incomplete. While commercial raw foods that meet the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) standards are nutritionally balanced, the widespread use of bones in these diets poses a significant risk for gastrointestinal disease and dental fractures.

Grain Free Diets and Dilated Cardiomyopathy

Dilated Cardiomyopathy (DCM) is a life-threatening disease in which the heart muscle weakens and cannot pump blood efficiently. Dogs with DCM may cough, struggle to breathe, and have reduced stamina when exercising. Severe consequence of the disease include collapse and death. Historically, DCM was seen almost exclusively in dog breeds known to have a genetic predisposition, including Irish Wolfhounds, Dobermans, Boxers, and Great Danes.

In 2015, the FDA started receiving reports of DCM in dogs of other breeds. Rising numbers of these cases led the agency in 2018 to alert the public. A common theme in many of the cases was that affected animals ate grain-free foods.

In 2019 the FDA released a list of pet food brands most often named in reports of DCM in dogs. A larger veterinary research community have been working to determine whether diet is at the root of this problem, and if so, in what way. A common pattern that has emerged is that the vast majority of diets consumed

by these patients contain higher proportions of “pulse ingredients” (peas, lentils, chickpeas).

The role of “grain free” diets and the higher proportion of pulse ingredients in these diets and how they may related to the development of DCM is believed to be a complex, multi-factorial issue and is still under investigation.

Until we know more about whether these diets play a role in the development of DCM, we recommend dogs are not fed diets that are grain free or have pulse ingredients (peas, lentils) if possible. Dogs who are currently eating a grain free diet can be transitioned to an alternative food over 7-14 days to avoid stomach upset.

House Training

The best way to successfully house train your dog is to provide a consistent, positive approach.

Take your puppy outside to the same location at regular intervals throughout the day. Puppies need to go outside first thing in the morning, after meals, after play/sleep sessions, and before bedtime. Make sure to give lots of praise and a treat when your puppy eliminates outside.

If your puppy has an accident inside, immediately take him/her to the designated outside area. Make sure you clean any soiled areas in the house well to avoid odors that may attract your pet back to that location. DO NOT scold your puppy or push his face into the soiled area. This form of negative reinforcement tends to cause confusion and anxiety. Remember, your puppy is learning a lot in these first few months. Positive reinforcement is the most powerful tool you can use to increase your puppy’s chance of quick success.

Socialization

It is important to start socializing your puppy as soon as possible.

Gradually expose your puppy to new people, including children. Practice teaching important skills such as allowing people around their toys and food bowls, and sitting to be petted.

Puppy classes are a great way to socialize your puppy with other dogs in a safe environment. You can also have single dog play dates in the home with a familiar dog who is fully vaccinated and safe with other dogs.

Do not take your puppy to dog parks or expose them to unknown dogs until they are fully up to date with all puppy vaccinations.



Practice gradually giving your puppy new experiences, such as short car rides, typical household noises (vacuum, dishwasher, microwave, etc). Using treats rewards in these new situations can help make it a positive experience.

Basic training

As part of raising a well-mannered dog, it is a good idea to teach a few basic skills to your dog.

Basic skills:

- Sit
- Stay
- Leave it (ex: leave a toy or food alone)
- Drop it

Pet Identification

Reliable identification for your pet is an important way to keep them safe in the event they are lost.

The most reliable and global pet identification system is the microchip. This is a very small, thin device that is inserted under your pet's skin. A microchip scanning device is then used to identify your pet's unique microchip number and connect this back to the pet owner's contact information. The



implanting procedure is very easy, fast, and can be performed without sedation. The most common time to perform a microchip implant is at the time of spay or neuter, however it can be done during any veterinary appointment.

Pet Insurance

While pets bring great joy and companionship, owning a pet is also a financial responsibility.

Pet insurance is a great, affordable way to ensure your pet gets access to the health care it needs, when it needs it.

Not only can pet insurance assist with routine health care costs, but it can also be an enormous advantage when your pet suffers from a serious illness or injury that requires medical or surgical intervention.

Pet insurance companies to explore:

- Trupanion
- Petsecure

- Pets + Us
- Petplan
- 24 Pet Watch

Useful resource: <https://www.petinsurancereview.com/canada/dog-insurance>

Common Environmental Hazards

The hazard lists below are only a few examples of some of the more common toxicities and hazards for pets. More complete lists can be found on the ASPCA Poison Control website.

Download the Animal Poison Control Centre (APCC) on your phone

Toxic foods

- Chocolate
- Grapes
- Raisins
- Avocado
- Coffee and caffeine
- Cherries
- Peach pits
- Plum pits
- Onions
- Garlic
- Xylitol (found in many "sugar-free" products)
- Macadamia nuts and walnuts

Toxic plants

- Azaleas
- Lilies
- Oleanders
- Aloe
- Rhubarb
- Marijuana

Household hazards

- Playdough
- Cleaning chemicals
- Human medications (ex: ibuprofen, acetaminophen)
- Snail bait
- Rodenticide (rat bait)
- Gorilla glue

Is my pet having an emergency?

When to call a vet!

If your pet has any of the following symptoms, call your veterinarian immediately:

- Difficult or labored breathing
- Unable to stand or walk (collapse)
- Painful or bloated abdomen
- Seizure or muscle tremors
- Known (or suspected) toxin ingestion
- Known (or suspected) foreign body ingestion (ex: clothing, toy, bone)
- Hyperthermia (over-heating)
- Vomiting/diarrhea
- Unproductive wretching (trying to vomit)
- Difficulty urinating
- Swelling of the face/neck
- Major trauma (hit by car, fall from a height, etc)
- Uncontrolled bleeding
- Weakness or lethargy

This is NOT a complete list of reasons to contact your veterinarian. If you are concerned about your pet for *any* reason, you should always contact your veterinary clinic to seek advice. If you are concerned about your pet after business hours, contact one of the local emergency clinics listed below.

Local emergency clinics:

VCA CARE Centre

7140 – 12 Street S.E. Calgary, AB
(403) 520-8387

VCA Western Veterinary Specialists and Emergency Centre

1802 10th Avenue S.W. Calgary, AB

(403) 770-1340

Fish Creek 24 Hour Pet Hospital

15311 Bannister Road S.E. Calgary, AB

(403) 873-1700