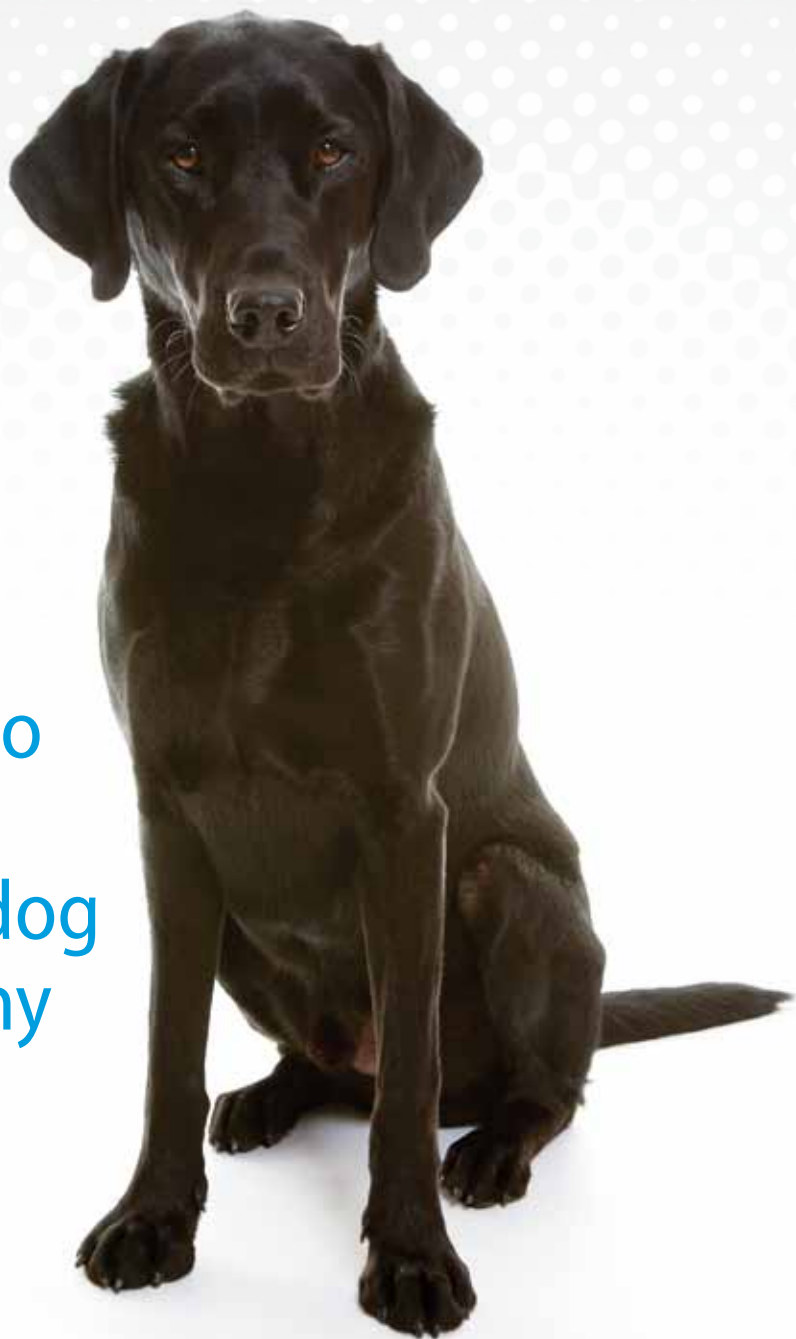


# How to keep your dog healthy



## Welcome

Getting a new addition to your family can be a rewarding and fun experience. However, taking the decision to own a dog should not be taken lightly as it does come with significant responsibilities that last the lifetime of the dog. This booklet is aimed to be a guide to areas of responsibility commonly associated with veterinary care. It is by no means exhaustive and if you are new to owning a dog, further reading around the subject is certainly advisable.

## Vaccination

## Socialisation

## Training and behaviour

## Worming

## Flea and tick prevention

## Feeding

## Neutering

## Exercise

## Microchipping

## Holidays/foreign travel

## Insurance



## Vaccination

Dogs of all ages can and do become seriously ill or die from infectious diseases that could have been prevented through vaccination.

Vaccination offers the most effective way of protecting your dog against many of the most serious infectious diseases, including Canine Parvovirus, Canine Distemper, Infectious Canine Hepatitis, Canine Parainfluenza and Leptospirosis.

In the first few weeks of life, puppies are normally protected against disease by antibodies (immunity) from their mother's milk. This immunity decreases over time and has usually disappeared by approximately 12 weeks of age. Vaccination is then needed to protect your puppy against disease. Puppies generally receive a course of two vaccinations, with an interval of 3 to 5 weeks between injections. This primary course ensures that your puppy's immune system has the best chance of mounting a strong protective response.

The immunity generated by the puppy course of vaccinations does not last for life. Regular booster vaccinations are necessary to maintain the highest possible level of protection against serious infectious diseases. These regular annual visits also allow your vet to give your dog a full clinical examination and check up, and spot the early signs of any disease conditions which may be developing.

## Socialisation

The experiences of young puppies can affect their brain development and therefore influence their behaviour as they progress through adolescence and become adults. Socialisation is the process whereby a puppy learns to recognise and respond acceptably to different stimuli such as other animals, people and the environment and is critical in 'shaping' their behaviour as they mature.

Fear, anxiety and aggression are common issues related to poor socialisation. Socialisation and appropriate exposure to stimuli are essential for the proper behavioural development of a puppy. As early experiences affect how the brain develops, behavioural problems due to inappropriate socialisation can be difficult, if not impossible, to reverse.

To be effective, your puppy's socialisation must start during the 'sensitive period', which starts at about 3 weeks of age and ends around 12 weeks of age. Experiences, either good or bad, during this period can have a profound effect on the puppy's behaviour in the future. It is therefore vital for puppies to experience many different people, dogs and situations; both with their breeder and as soon as they are adopted by their new family.

## Training and behaviour

Puppy training not only helps to improve the bond between pet and owner, but it's also vital to teach your puppy appropriate commands at an early stage. Ensuring that your dog obeys basic commands such as 'sit' and 'stay', and comes back to you when called, will make life much easier when he gets older!

You can start training at an early stage, but keep training sessions short to avoid tiring your puppy out. For a 12-week-old puppy, 5 minutes is long enough. It may be beneficial to join a training group as this will allow your dog to interact with other puppies and make sessions more fun.

## A balancing act...

Some people don't adequately socialise their puppy because they are worried about them catching a disease. Before a puppy reaches 12 weeks of age you need to balance the risk of disease with the critical need for early socialisation. Socialisation under controlled conditions should start before the vaccination course is finished. So provide lots of different experiences for your puppy, but make sure these are away from where unvaccinated dogs may have been.

Useful experiences that are lower risk include:

- Carrying your puppy out and about.
- Visiting friends and family, especially if they have other vaccinated pets for your puppy to meet and interact with.
- Inviting visitors and their fully vaccinated and de-wormed dogs to your house.
- Car journeys.

Some activities, such as going to the park, or contact with unvaccinated or unknown dogs, should be delayed until the vaccination course is finished.

Don't forget...that your dog can forget these lessons too! So constant reinforcement is important to ensure that the behavioural development of your puppy continues into adulthood. This is especially important during the first two years as they reach social maturity.



## Worming

Dogs can be affected by about 12 different species of worm in the UK, with the most common types being roundworms, tapeworms and hookworms. Your dog could pick these up if they eat worm eggs passed by other infected pets or eat an infected flea during grooming. Although symptoms are not always easy to spot, they can cause serious damage to their health if left untreated.

All dogs require regular treatment to help keep them healthy, but some pets may require more frequent worming. Dogs which are at higher risk include young puppies, dogs with tendencies to scavenge and farm dogs. Your vet can advise on the most appropriate treatment protocol for your dog. Regular treatment for fleas, which can carry tapeworm, will also help to reduce the risk.

Some types of dog worm (*Toxocara*) can also be transmitted to people with potentially serious results. Infection occurs when worm eggs are accidentally eaten and young children are particularly at risk. So if you have young children, it's even more important to ensure your dog is treated regularly.



## Flea and tick prevention

Dogs can be affected by external parasites from a very young age. Fleas, ticks and mites can cause more than just skin irritation and can transmit serious infectious diseases to your pet. Regular treatment is important and your vet can advise you on the most suitable products to use.

### FLEAS

If left untreated, heavy flea burdens can cause a loss of blood which can result in anaemia and be potentially life-threatening, particularly in puppies. Flea bites can also cause intense itching and scratching which can result in hairloss and discomfort. Flea saliva can also cause a very unpleasant skin allergy in sensitive dogs known as Flea Allergy Dermatitis (FAD). Tapeworm and some other infectious diseases can also be transmitted by fleas.

Once fleas are seen on your pet, the home environment is also invariably infested; adult fleas on pets generally only represent 5% of the actual flea burden, with the remaining 95% hidden in the home as eggs, larvae and pupae. Once established, a flea infestation can take several months to resolve, so prevention through regular treatment is essential to keep your dog and home flea-free.

### TICKS

In the UK an estimated 15% of dogs have ticks, and ticks are second only to mosquitos in transmitting infectious diseases to humans and animals.

Ticks hide themselves in long grass, parks and gardens, waiting to attach themselves to your pet. When they do, the ticks feed off your pet's blood and can transfer serious diseases such as Lyme disease.

To prevent tick infestations and minimise the risk of disease, you should regularly use a product that kills ticks within 48 hours of attaching. Most tick treatments need to be applied monthly.

Changes in the Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) mean that more exotic ticks may be brought into the UK, meaning tick control is even more important than before.

## Feeding

Dogs' nutritional requirements change over time and, just like humans, puppies, adults and senior dogs all have different needs. The best way to meet these requirements is to use a good quality complete diet from a reputable manufacturer. These diets are formulated to ensure that the nutritional requirements of your dog are met, not only whilst it is growing but also during adulthood. There is usually a choice between wet (tinned) food and dry biscuits. Dry food is more convenient to feed and is better for your dog's teeth.

Always make sure that there is a plentiful supply of fresh water for your dog, particularly if you are feeding a dry food diet.

Excessive weight gain and obesity is a significant problem in dogs, and overweight dogs are more prone to a wide variety of diseases, such as diabetes and arthritis. Feeding the correct quantities of food, avoiding treats and ensuring your dog gets an appropriate amount of exercise are all vital to keep your dog at a healthy bodyweight.

Get your dog weighed regularly at the vet – weight is used to dose many important medicines.



## Neutering

Unless you plan to breed from your dog, neutering is the responsible thing to do. The routine operations in the male (castration) and female (spaying or ovariectomy) are both performed under general anaesthetic. Your vet can advise you on the most appropriate age to have your dog neutered.

There are several advantages to having your dog neutered. In the male, castration can help to prevent unwanted behaviour, such as aggression and wandering to find a mate. Health benefits include prevention of testicular cancer and a reduced risk of prostate problems later in life. In the female dog, spaying prevents the problem of unwanted litters and also reduces the risk of mammary tumours and uterine infections.

## Exercise

Regular daily exercise is essential for your dog's physical and mental wellbeing. Exercise helps to improve and maintain muscle tone and cardiovascular fitness, and also prevents excessive weight gain and the associated health problems.

The amount of exercise your dog needs depends on its age, breed and size – your vet can advise you on an appropriate exercise regime.

Exercising your dog in public also comes with responsibility. Not only is clearing up after your dog has fouled a legal requirement, it also helps prevent transmission of diseases with potential human health implications, such as Toxocara worms. Similarly, keeping your dog under control and behaving appropriately in public is also important, helping to ensure the safety of your own pet as well as that of other pets and people.

## Microchipping

Microchipping is a permanent and inexpensive way of identification. If your dog ever gets lost, there is a better chance of them being returned to you if they can be identified by a microchip.

A microchip is a tiny electronic device, about the size of a grain of rice, which can be injected under the loose skin at the back of the neck. Each chip has its own unique number, which is recorded along with your details on a central database. If your pet is found, the chip can be detected and read by an electronic scanner, and the chip number can then be found on the database.

Having a tag on your dog's collar stating that he has been chipped will highlight the fact that he can be identified. If you move home, make sure you inform the central database so your records are up to date.

## Holidays and foreign travel

Preparing for a holiday needs to be done well in advance. If you are taking your pet with you, you need to ensure that your accommodation is 'dog friendly'. If your dog is staying at home, then he may need to be booked into kennels, in which case you need to check what the kennel's requirements are. Make sure you book the kennel well in advance, especially during the peak holiday season.

If you're going abroad, the Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) means that you can take your dog with you, provided certain requirements are met. Before travelling, your pet needs to be microchipped, vaccinated against rabies and issued with a Pet Passport. The Scheme only applies to countries within the EU and certain other listed countries, so it's vital to check the requirements for your destination country before travelling. For full details, speak to your vet or visit the DEFRA website for the latest information.

If you do take your dog abroad, remember that there may be other pests and diseases which are not found in the UK. Make sure you talk to your vet about the steps you can take to minimise the risks to your dog. Many of these diseases are transmitted by ticks, so the use of an effective tick treatment can help to reduce the chances of contracting a serious disease.

## Insurance

Dogs are inquisitive creatures and this can occasionally get them into trouble, ending up in an unexpected trip to the vets. Pet insurance has become increasingly popular and can give you peace of mind that should your cat be injured or fall ill, the costs of treatment will be covered. Pet insurance can also help to cover other costs related to pet ownership, such as the cost of cattery fees if you are hospitalised.

Pet insurance policies vary greatly, so make sure you shop around and get advice. Watch out for exclusions (conditions which aren't covered) and check whether the cover for chronic conditions, such as diabetes or arthritis, is lifelong or whether the policy will stop paying out after a year.

## Further reading

<b>Merial Animal Health Ltd:</b>	<a href="http://www.merial.co.uk">www.merial.co.uk</a>
<b>Pet Travel Scheme (DEFRA):</b>	<a href="http://www.defra.gov.uk">www.defra.gov.uk</a>
<b>The Dogs Trust:</b>	<a href="http://www.dogstrust.org.uk">www.dogstrust.org.uk</a>
<b>Battersea Dogs &amp; Cat Home:</b>	<a href="http://www.battersea.org.uk">www.battersea.org.uk</a>
<b>The Kennel Club:</b>	<a href="http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk">www.thekennelclub.org.uk</a>
<b>The Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors:</b>	<a href="http://www.apbc.org.uk">www.apbc.org.uk</a>
<b>The Association of Pet Dog Trainers:</b>	<a href="http://www.apdt.co.uk">www.apdt.co.uk</a>
<b>Petlog:</b>	<a href="http://www.petlog.org.uk">www.petlog.org.uk</a>
<b>NOAH Pet Health Information:</b>	<a href="http://www.pethealthinfo.org.uk">www.pethealthinfo.org.uk</a>
<b>Lost Dogs &amp; Cats Line</b>	0901 477 8477 (calls cost 60p per minute from a BT landline, other networks may vary) Opening hours 8am–8pm, Mon–Sun





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