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## ***Tips on Puppy-Proofing Your Home***

**Before you bring that adorable new puppy into your life**, it's important to make sure that your home will be a safe place for him or her to live and grow.

Like young children, puppies are very curious about the world around them. If allowed to, they're likely to get into whatever mischief they can -- just for the sheer fun of discovering something new. **Your puppy probably can't wait to investigate everything within his reach.**

**Most puppy owners can share amusing stories of their puppies' exploits.** "On the morning after we brought Lacy home, I realized that I hadn't been watching her for a while, and things were awfully quiet," says Donna Beck, owner of a 12-week-old Sheltie. "I looked everywhere for her. Then I stepped into the bedroom, and it was a wonderland of white -- she had found the tissue roll in the bathroom, and dragged the entire roll's worth all out into the bedroom, trampling and winding it all around. There she was, her tongue hanging out, happily in the middle of the pile. All I could do was laugh!"

**But sometimes puppies get into mischief that's more risky than amusing**, and this adventuresome spirit can spell danger. That's why AKC Family Dog magazine, published by the American Kennel Club ([www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org)), recommends that you "puppy-proof" your home and yard -- ideally before your new bundle of joy moves in -- by making sure that all potential poisons and dangers are out of reach.

**One way to do this is by walking through your house and thinking about everything from the puppy's point of view.** (It helps if you actually get down on your hands and knees to check things out!) Look for things on the floor, on low tables, or otherwise within reach. Inspect cabinets and closets that the puppy can get into. Try to prevent as many emergencies as possible.

Keep in mind that whereas a human child uses hands and fingers to investigate, **a puppy's natural instinct is to use its mouth and teeth to explore new things.** He'll be tempted to bite and chew on any object he can get into his mouth, and maybe even swallow it. Your puppy doesn't know any better, so he's not being naughty -- he's just doing what comes naturally.

**Here are a few of the hazards you should be particularly aware of, according to the AKC:**

**Electrical cords.** Tuck all cords where your puppy can't get to them. Perhaps you can use duct tape to secure them out of harm's way. A shock can be fatal, so keep a watchful eye lest your pup should have the urge to chew.

**Swallow able objects.** Pick up and put away any objects your puppy can reach that are small enough for him to swallow. It obviously could be bad for your puppy to get a hold of and swallow any object with sharp parts, such as a pin or razor blade. Such things could cause serious injury to his digestive tract. But even an object that is smooth, soft or made of non-toxic material -- such as a ping-pong ball -- can be harmful if swallowed, because it can get stuck in the intestines and cause blockage.

**Garbage.** Household garbage is one of the most common sources of things that can make a puppy sick. Spoiled food, sharp lids and discarded toxic materials are just a few of the risks that can lurk inside. And with its tempting smell of food scraps, the kitchen waste can be sure to be of interest. Use one with a lid that closes securely, or put the can in an inaccessible place when you're not home and "on guard." Remember that your puppy will be eager to investigate wastebaskets in other rooms of the house as well.

**Medicines.** Make sure that all medicines are stored high above your puppy's reach, and never leave individual pills or containers on low, accessible surfaces, even for a moment. They can be swallowed in an instant. Even gobbling down too many vitamins can make a puppy sick.

**Poisons and household chemicals.** See that no containers of cleansers, polishes, poisons or other dangerous chemicals have been left in puppy-level, easy-to-open cabinets. (Child-safety latches can help.) Some to look for are oven cleaners, floor products and waxes, bathroom cleansers, makeup items, paint removers, plant fertilizers or sprays, laundry products, insect traps or sprays and rodent poisons. Cigarettes and felt-tip pens can be toxic, too.

**Poisonous plants.** Not all plants are pet-friendly. Many can be harmful to your dog. Toxic indoor plants include cactus, dumbcane, mistletoe, philodendron and poinsettia. Outdoors, keep your pup away from plants such as azalea, boxwood, cherry seeds, daffodil blooms, honeysuckle, horse chestnut, holly, lily of the valley, morning glory, rhododendron, rhubarb, skunk cabbage, tulip bulbs and wild mushroom.

**Once you've thoroughly puppy-proofed your home, the final key to ensuring that your puppy stays safe and sound is to have a watchful eye over him.** Just as you wouldn't let a toddler wander through the house unsupervised, keep tabs on your young puppy. Consider setting up a "safe room" for him where he can't get into trouble during those times while you're not watching him, rather than leaving him to roam the entire house.

**By preparing your home ahead of time for that inquisitive, adventurous new family member, and keeping careful watch over him once he arrives, you'll help ensure that he'll grow up to be your happy, healthy companion for years to come.**

For more tips on raising your puppy, visit the American Kennel Club's Web site, [www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org).