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Puppy Health Care 101

Bringing up your puppy is very similar to bringing up a baby. Except, as my mom would say, a baby eventually grows up and learns to take care of itself as an adult.

I don't mean to scare you – just want to put things into perspective for you – **your puppy relies on you from the day you bring him home.** It needs you to feed it, to groom it, play with it, and love it. You are also responsible for your puppy's health care over its lifetime – you need to make sure he feels and looks good, and to make sure you know when things are not right.

Your puppy health care responsibilities involve things like taking him for his regular checkups at the vet. Or making sure he takes his worming tabs, flea pills. Taking him for his vaccinations on time. And making sure he's clean, fed, warm and safe.

I know – it is basic – but you'd be surprised what people miss when they are not informed about the things they should look out for. So, to avoid health complications and diseases later on, here are some of the best puppy health care practices to follow:

1. Food

Dogs are not picky eaters, but that does not mean that you're free to feed them anything you want. For one, they are not built the same way we are. If you feed them table scraps, your dog might develop intestinal parasites later on. Also, their body reacts differently from ours; for example, if you unknowingly feed chocolate to your puppy, **STOP IT!** It poses a lot of danger, because chocolate contains Theobromine, a chemical which can be toxic for dogs.

Another mistake that pet owners make is to overfeed their dog. Sure, chubby and plump dogs are adorable, but I sure hope you are not compromising their health because of pure aesthetic reasons. Overweight dogs are susceptible to a lot of illnesses and joint problems. Dogs cannot handle large amounts of food and they don't know when to stop eating; it's recommendable to feed your dog once or twice (at the most) a day in small portions – if you're unsure ask your vet or look on the packet of the particular dog food you buy – they usually have recommendations.

2. Vaccinations & Parasite Treatments

When you first take your puppy to the vet, be sure to give him the record we provided you with and the on-going Puppy Health Care schedule so that he will be able to make modifications and give you the choices you have for your puppy's vaccinations and parasite treatments. There are some vaccinations that are compulsory, but there are those that are entirely your choice – your vet will help you decide what suits you best.

VACCINATIONS

Here are some of the available vaccinations for more serious diseases, but make sure you ask your vet for more specific advice for basic vaccinations for your puppy's health care needs.

•**Distemper vaccination** – canine distemper is a very deadly viral dog disease. Some pet owners usually find out too late. Unfortunately, there's no cure for it so prevention is still your best weapon.

- Parvovirus vaccination** – young pups are usually afflicted by this disease. It's a highly communicable disease so in order to protect your dog, and other dogs in your neighborhood as well, have your dog vaccinated for parvovirus.
- Adenovirus vaccination** – Dogs contract hepatitis due to canine adenovirus. Your dog should get adenovirus shots to prevent him from getting this disease.

A word of warning: Be aware of what some of the signs are for an allergic reaction to vaccinations. If your dog becomes sluggish or develops hives, or has difficulty breathing, take him to the vet immediately! Now obviously your vet is highly trained, but things happen – and it's better that you're prepared on the odd chance that they do.

PARASITE TREATMENTS

While under our care your puppy will have received parasite treatments for the common parasites using pyrantel pamoate. Also we have implemented a precautionary strategy for coccidia.

3. Grooming

Coat, teeth, ears and nails – these comprise an important aspect of grooming and of your puppy's health care. Your puppy will not only look healthy, but it will FEEL healthy too.

- Coat** – Your lab puppy's coat will not need as much attention as a long haired puppy's but you will still want to brush it out a couple times a week.
- Ears** – Clean his ears with moist cotton balls twice a month at least. If you don't clean your dog's ears, it could lead to an ear infection – it's not pleasant for your pooch, and it will cost you to take him to the vet.
- Teeth** – Unlike humans, dogs don't need their teeth cleaned every day – thank goodness; about twice a week will do. But like humans, your dog can develop cavities if you don't brush his teeth regularly, so make it an appointment with you doggy friend.
- Nails** – Don't let your dog's nails grow too long to prevent him from accidentally scratching you or any family members.

4. Exercise/Play

Exercising your new dog is beneficial to his health, and yours! A daily walk is a good start. Swimming, playing Frisbee or fetch, hunting or running are also fun.

And to understand the necessity of providing moderate activity ... daily walks, occasional weekend excursions due to confinement during work hours . Puppies are easily injured if they are allowed to jump from high places (like trucks and couches) and they have very tender pads on their feet so you will need to walk them on pavement until they toughen up - they should not be taken on long runs but swimming is great exercise for growing joints.

Consider this: Dogs whose exercise opportunities are maximized (free to run and play all day and night in large paddocks) grow much more slowly because much of their food intake goes into play and running and rarely (almost never) suffer an injury. Whereas their litter mates in private homes, where exercise is confined to an hour or two of intense play or jogging when their owners return from work tend to grow very large, very fast and often suffer injury.

This is why we recommend moderate activity ... for the average home this works best.

5. Spaying and Neutering

If you do not plan to breed your own dogs, it's recommended you consider spaying or neutering your puppy but we do ask that you wait until your pup is at least 1 year old because the hormones in your puppy's body are necessary for them to develop strong bones and hips.

6. Status Quo

This simply means that you should get to know your puppy's usual disposition. This is very important because only if you know him, you'll be able to spot if something's wrong very early – and the earlier you tackle a health problem, the more chance you have of curing it and saving yourself and your loved pooch grief.

7. Safety

We all love to think nothing will ever go wrong – and I sure hope it never does with you and your pup. But reality sometimes hits us unexpectedly – so being prepared is so important.

Puppy proofing your home is essential for the health and life of your puppy. 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. Here are a few of the hazards you should be particularly aware of: Electrical cords, Swallow able objects, Garbage,

Medicines, Poisons and household chemicals, Poisonous plants.

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. For more detailed information read the article [Puppy Proofing Your Home](#) on the Resource page of the Desert Wind Labradors website.

Many new puppy owners choose to take up even the most basic of pet insurances for their dog. Make sure it covers the things you feel you won't be able to afford in an emergency, the rest you can pay for as and when you need to – this way insurance doesn't have to be expensive.

Remember, a healthy dog makes a happy dog. If you follow these dog care practices, your dog would enjoy a longer and more stress-free life.