

Bringing a new dog or puppy home is an exciting event. Housetraining on the other hand is where the work begins. Housetraining requires patience and consistency, but the job usually goes smoother if some preparation is done ahead of time. An adult dog from a rescue or shelter will have the physical ability to be housetrained quickly. A puppy will need longer to physically develop in order to have bladder control. The following tips can help get the new dog on the road to being housetrained.

Housetraining an Adult Dog

An adult dog has the physical ability to be housetrained through the night and for a regular work-day but this doesn't always mean that the dog learned this skill. If the dog was raised in a shelter or lacked a consistent environment, bad habits may be started. It is also possible that the dog had training but doesn't know how to generalize the experience to a new home. Either way, getting off on the right foot can help. It is advisable to purchase a crate and schedule some time off if possible. If this is not possible, have a family member available or schedule a dog walker to come in during the day. **See our [handout on Crate Training](#).*

- 1. Pick a regular potty spot or area.** On day one, take the dog to this specific area every couple of hours or until the dog relieves itself in this spot. Praise the dog or give a treat when this happens. By going to the same spot, the dog will associate that spot with going potty. This can be done while acclimating the dog to the new crate. If the dog is being trained in the yard, go with the dog to make sure the dog relieves itself outdoors and is not running around playing. A leash may be necessary at first to keep the dog on task.
- 2. Create a schedule.** Once the dog begins to successfully go potty in the designated spot, start to extend the time between outings by adding 1 hour at a time. It is helpful to allow the dog a potty break about 15-30 minutes after a meal. Do not let the dog out of sight in between yet. It may be helpful to set up baby gates or close doors to prevent it from wandering off to have an accident. Interrupt any potential accidents by clapping your hands or saying "No" and taking the dog immediately to the potty spot. Again, praise for success at the designated area. Thoroughly clean any accident with an enzyme cleaner (sold at all pet supply stores).
- 3. Continue to supervise.** If the dog is now comfortable for short periods in the crate, it can be used to start extending the time between potty breaks. Put the dog in the crate with his favorite stuffed Kong or chew whenever it is left unattended. This can help when it's time to go back to work or for trips to the store or gym. If going back to work full time, have a dog walker or family member come in mid-day to let the dog out.
- 4. Watch for body language cues.** Accidents can still happen so it's important to watch for suggestive body language such as circling, restlessness, or pacing in front of the door. Take the dog out immediately and praise for success!
- 5. Avoid punishment.** Above all, never punish the dog for an accident. Remember to go back to the last stage of success and progress at a slower pace. Once trained, try to keep to a consistent schedule so the dog can feel comfortable. Continue to take the dog out first thing in the morning, about 15-30 minutes after a meal and last thing at night. Trained adult dogs need at least 4 potty breaks a day along with regular walks and exercise.

Housetraining a Puppy

Housetraining a puppy may take a little longer, especially very young puppies and small breed puppies. Physically the bladder is small, so the general rule of thumb is one hour for every month of age. For example, a puppy that is 2 months old needs to go out every 2 hours, a puppy that is 3 months old needs to go out every 3 hours and so on. If this is not possible, perhaps it is the wrong time to bring home a puppy. It's a good idea to have all resources lined up before proceeding. This may mean taking time off work, hiring a dog walker, or asking family or reliable friends for assistance. Go to the pet supply store and purchase a crate, preferably a wire crate with an adjustable divider that grows with the puppy, and a large bottle of enzyme cleaner. **See our handout on Crate Training.*

- 1. Establish a routine for the puppy.** Puppies, like children, do best when a consistent routine is followed. This includes feeding time, going out for potty breaks, play time and bed time. At first, take the puppy outside to a regular potty spot immediately after waking up (even from a nap), right after eating or drinking water and during or after playing. Regardless of the puppy's age, also start by taking it out every 2 hours. Even though accidents may happen, the goal is to get the puppy out before this happens.
- 2. Use lots of praise.** Praise or give the puppy a treat immediately after he has finished going potty. Always go outside with the puppy, even if he's being trained in a yard, to make sure he's relieving itself and to praise success. Avoid any punishment if a mistake occurs. Instead, interrupt the puppy with a hand-clap or by saying "No" and immediately get the puppy outside to the designated spot.
- 3. Supervise and use the crate.** Consider it human error if the puppy has an accident while unsupervised. Use baby gates or the crate to keep the puppy from wandering into other rooms to relieve itself or chew on household items. It may seem like too much time in the crate, but puppies sleep a lot. Make sure that frequent potty breaks, regular walks, exercise and playtime are consistently provided on schedule.
- 4. Bed time schedule.** Pick up the puppy's water bowl about 2 1/5 to 3 hours before bed time and don't feed after about 6:00 pm. Most puppies will need to go out to relieve themselves a couple times during the night at first but learn very quickly to hold it through the night. Small breed puppies may need a little longer. If the puppy wakes up and whines or is restless, take it out but keep it very low key; otherwise the puppy will think it's time to get up or play. Don't play with or talk to the puppy, go directly back to bed after going out.
- 5. Plan for time away.** Soon the puppy's schedule can be extended to longer durations between going out to relieve itself. By the time the puppy is 6 months, it is reasonable to say that a dog walker can come in once, mid-day to take the puppy out. On the way to that age, stick to the recommended schedule of one hour for every month of age.

Note: Unless it is a small breed puppy that is going to permanently use pee pads, avoid using them if possible, as it may prolong the process of housetraining. Instead, hire a dog walker or engage a family member or trusted friend if time away cannot be avoided.