

How to housebreak your new puppy

Follow these guidelines to make housebreaking as easy as possible for you and your pet.

Start at the ideal age. The best time to begin housebreaking a puppy is when it is 7 1/2 to 8 1/2 weeks old. At this age, you can teach the puppy where to eliminate before it has established its own preferences. But don't worry if your puppy is older when you start housebreaking; it will still learn, though it may take a little longer.

Six to eight times a day, take your puppy outdoors to eliminate. Choose an appropriate spot to take the puppy immediately after it wakes up, after play sessions, and 15 to 30 minutes after meals. If you take your puppy to the same spot every day, previous odors will stimulate it to urinate or defecate. Many puppies need 15 to 20 minutes of moving around and sniffing before they eliminate. Stay with the puppy the whole time. Housebreaking problems can result if you're unsure whether the puppy actually eliminated and you let it return to the house too soon. And remember the puppy needs to focus on the job at hand, so don't play with it until it has eliminated.

Use a key phrase while your puppy eliminates. If you repeat the same phrase (e.g. "go potty" or "take care of business") every time your puppy eliminates outdoors, it will learn that this phrase means that it's the right time and place to eliminate.

Once the puppy eliminates outdoors, immediately reward it. Reward the puppy by praising it, giving it a treat, or playing with it. But remember to reward it right away. The puppy will not learn to eliminate outdoors if the reward comes when it returns to the house. Instead, the puppy will think that it's being rewarded for coming inside.

Supervise the puppy indoors as well as outdoors. Find a room in your house that allows you to watch your puppy as much as possible. This will help you catch the puppy if it

starts to eliminate indoors. You can also leash the puppy or place a bell on its collar to help you keep track of it.

When you leave home, put the puppy in a crate. When you can't supervise your puppy, leave it in a small puppy-proof area such as a crate. If the crate is large enough to accommodate the puppy as an adult, partition it to avoid having the puppy soil one end and sleep in the other. And remember that young puppies' bladder and bowel capacities are limited, so let the puppy out at least every four hours.

Don't punish after the fact. If your puppy has an accident in the house, don't go get the puppy and rub its nose in it. This doesn't do any good because the misbehavior has already occurred. Instead, try to catch the puppy in the act. If you see the puppy getting ready to housesoil, don't swat it, but stomp your foot, shake a can filled with pennies, or startle the puppy by yelling "outside!" The puppy will likely stop what it's doing, and you can take it outdoors to eliminate.

Don't leave food out all day. Feed your puppy at set times every day, and remove the food bowl after 20 minutes. This will create regular intervals at which the puppy will need to eliminate.

Thoroughly clean areas where the puppy has eliminated in the house. Your veterinarian can recommend a safe, effective product that removes both odors and stains. It's important to clean a soiled area completely, otherwise your puppy may return to it and housesoil again.

Stick with the training program. Most puppies can be successfully housebroken by 14 to 20 weeks of age. But a pet may take longer to housebreak for several reasons. Consult your veterinarian if you're having difficulty.

Information provided by Debra F. Horwitz, DVM, Dipl. ACVB, Veterinary Behavior Consultations, 12462G Natural Bridge Road, Bridgeton, MO 63044.

