

Canine basic health check



Congratulations, you have a new puppy!

You've anticipated the new arrival by 'puppyproofing' your home and had lots of fun choosing the bed, blanket, toys and other supplies he or she will need. This frisky little creature is sure to bring you much joy. In return, you can make a major contribution to your pet's longevity, happiness and quality of life by providing him or her with good nutrition, loving attention in a safe, healthy environment, and regular checkups with your veterinarian.



Your puppy's basic health check

Your new puppy should visit a veterinarian as soon as possible. The first visit may include:

- Thorough physical examination to determine his or her state of health.
- Check for external parasites (fleas, ticks, lice, ear mites).
- Check for internal parasites (tapeworm, roundworm, etc.), if you can bring a stool sample for analysis.
- Initial vaccination and/or a discussion of the types of vaccines your puppy needs and when they should be scheduled.
- Discussion about whether your puppy should be desexed (spayed or castrated) and when.

This first health check will give your veterinarian the information they need to advise you on your puppy's immediate diet and care. Plus, it will give them a knowledge base from which, on subsequent checkups throughout your pup's life, they can better evaluate, monitor and manage your pet's health.

Desexing your puppy

Many veterinarians believe that desexing not only helps solve the serious problem of unwanted pet overpopulation, but also makes for friendlier, easier-to-live-with pets. Spayed female dogs are less likely to escape to find a mate, while castrated males are less likely to roam, urine-mark their territory, or fight with other males. Plus, desexing has health benefits – it helps to minimise the risk for cancers of the reproductive organs and mammary glands in females, and reduces the incidence of prostate problems and testicular cancer in males.

SPAYING involves removal of the reproductive organs of a female dog, usually around the age of six months. It is performed under general anaesthesia and occasionally involves an overnight stay at the veterinary clinic. Complications are rare and recovery is normally complete within two weeks.

CASTRATING, also carried out under general anaesthesia, involves removal of the testicles of a male dog through an incision at the base of the scrotum. This is performed when the puppy is about six months old, and full recovery takes about seven to ten days.

Make your puppy feel at home

Show your puppy the special places where he or she can eat, sleep, toilet and, since they're probably quite overwhelmed, give him or her some quiet time to themselves to let them adjust to the unfamiliar sights and sounds of their new home. Be sure, if there are also young children in the home, that they are taught that a puppy is not a toy, but a living creature who must be treated with gentleness and respect. As early as 8 weeks old, your puppy is capable of learning specific lessons – so start house-training and teaching simple obedience commands the day you bring him or her home. Your veterinarian can suggest the best training methods and recommend a good puppy training class. Your pup will find learning fun and easy and, with your positive reinforcement, they should remember their lessons well!



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Your senior dog

When is the best time to start caring for your ageing pet? When they're a puppy. Starting off your dog's life with good nutrition, regular exercise, scheduled veterinary appointments and a happy home life sets the blueprint for a high quality of life in their older years. However, as your dog ages, much like in humans, changes to the metabolism will occur. Paying attention to your dog's behaviour will make detecting problems easier.

What you can do at home

- Check your dog's mouth, eyes and ears regularly. Watch for loose teeth, redness, swelling or discharges.
- Keep your pet's sleeping area clean and warm.
- Groom your pet often. You'll detect any unusual sores or lumps and keep their coat healthy.
- Make fresh water available at all times.
- Maintain a routine of proper nutrition, exercise and loving attention.

Common problems

OBESITY is a big health risk. An older dog is a less active dog, so adjustments to your pet's diet to reduce caloric intake are imperative. This will relieve pressure on their joints as well as manage the risks of heart failure, kidney or liver disease, digestive problems and more.

ARTHRITIS severity can range from slight stiffness to debilitation. An exercise program, also to maintain muscle tone and mass, can be adjusted to their condition. Anti-inflammatory medication can help relieve the pain. Your veterinarian will prescribe any necessary medication.

INTOLERANCE TO HOT AND COLD TEMPERATURES occurs because your dog produces less of the hormones which regulate the body's normal temperature. Move their bed closer to a heater and bring them indoors on cold days.

TOOTH LOSS OR DECAY not only makes it harder to chew but also increases the likelihood of nasty infections. Brushing and cleaning the teeth, as well as regular dental check-ups and treatment by your veterinarian, will keep these to a minimum.

PROSTATE ENLARGEMENT OR MAMMARY GLAND TUMOURS are mostly diagnosed in uncastrated or unspayed dogs. Have the prostate or mammary glands examined at checkups.

SEPARATION ANXIETY presents itself when older dogs can't cope with stress. Aggressive behaviour, noise phobia, increased barking and whining or restless sleep are the signs. Medication combined with behaviour modification techniques are key.

SKIN OR COAT PROBLEMS Ageing means the skin loses elasticity, making your pet more susceptible to injury while the hair coat thins and dulls over time. Grooming more often and fatty acid supplements may be beneficial.

CANINE COGNITIVE DYSFUNCTION manifests itself in confusion, disorientation or decreased activity. Medication may help with some of these issues.

How old is your dog?

If your dog* is...	In human terms, that's
6 months	10 years
8 months	13 years
10 months	14 years
12 months	15 years
18 months	20 years
2 years	23 years
3 years	26 years
4 years	32 years
5 years	36 years
6 years	40 years
7 years	44 years
8 years	48 years
9 years	52 years
10 years	56 years
11 years	60 years
12 years	64 years
13 years	68 years
14 years	72 years
15 years	76 years
16 years	80 years

* Please note, these equivalencies refer to small breeds and are generalised estimates only, which are subject to individual variation.

