

A Puppy Primer of Everything You Need to Know — From A to Z

The wonderful world of puppies! From adapting to zoomies — and everything in between.

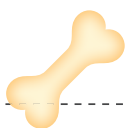
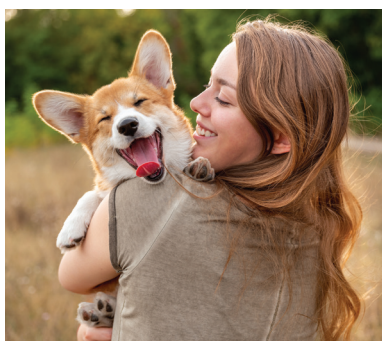
by ELIZABETH ANDERSON LOPEZ

Whether you're a first-time puppy owner

or a long-time canine companion, this A to Z guide will reinforce what to expect when getting one of these lovable bundles of energy — and you just may learn some new tricks, too!

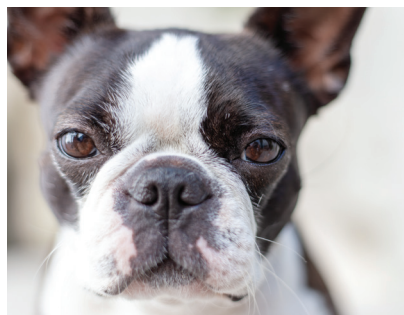
A *Adapting*

There are several things you can do to help your puppy adapt to her new home with you. The key is to be patient and help your puppy get started on a routine, which can provide comfort in structure. Depending on what situation your puppy came from, your house rules may be totally different. Create a safe space where your puppy feels like her personality can blossom in her new home.



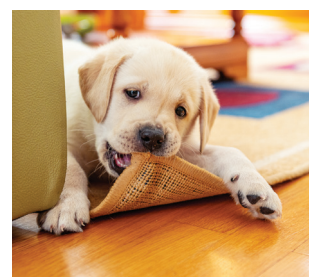
B *Brachycephalic breeds*

Do you love those squishy-faced dogs? The technical term is “brachycephalic.” The most popular breeds include Pugs, Frenchies and Bulldogs, but there are 21 others. Their squishy faces can look cute, but there is an actual health concern in breathing ability. Owners must take extra care not to let these dogs get overheated, as well as other precautions.



C *Chewing*

Whether it's her toys or your shoes, your puppy is going to chew — sometimes to relieve the discomfort from teething, others simply using her mouth to explore her world. It's definitely a key training issue: A little puppy chewing on your hand may be cute, but not when she grows to 50 pounds. Keep items off the floor, and try spraying bitter apple on furniture legs to make them less appetizing.



D *Digging*

Puppies are going to dig, from bedding to dirt. It's actually part of their genetic history to dig, but that doesn't mean there aren't some solutions. It may be a matter of getting extra toys to keep your dog occupied, since digging can happen when a dog is bored. If you have an outdoor space, consider a sandbox where your dog can dig to her heart's content. If she continues to dig her bedding, you may want to stick with old towels and blankets instead of something fancy. You dig?



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Eyes

Interestingly, there have been some actual scientific studies on “puppy dog eyes.” In 2022, researchers from the University of Portsmouth’s Dog Cognition Centre report dogs mostly use facial expressions in the presence of a human, while very rarely adopting them when on their own. They added that the dogs generally are not sad but are performing behavior to elicit a sympathy response from us.



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Feeding

Puppyhood is the time to focus strictly on quality nutrition and a balanced diet as opposed to the “fun” treats that may come later. Remember, this doesn’t make you a bad owner, it makes you one who is setting up your dog for a foundation of success via food. That said, it’s never a bad idea to get your veterinarian’s input on formula and how much food your particular dog needs based on age and breed.



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Grooming

Sure, grooming helps your dog look good, but it also helps you both feel good — it’s a bonding technique. Start by doing short sessions with a gentle brush to get your dog used to it. Also critical is getting your dog used to you handling her paws and teeth. Unless your puppy gets exceptionally dirty, she shouldn’t need much bathing at first. When you do bathe your pup, use only products made for dogs; puppies have delicate skin and sensitive noses.

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Hiccups

If you’ve ever seen a puppy hiccup in her sleep, you know it’s off-the-charts adorable. The AKC reports that puppies will sometimes get hiccups after eating or drinking too fast, when they are tired, when they are very excited or when they’re too cold. As long as the hiccup session doesn’t go on for more than a few hours, there’s likely nothing to worry about. If it does, let your vet know.

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Insurance

It’s smart to get pet insurance for your dog. It’s even smarter to get it for your puppy. That way the policy potentially covers more medical conditions. For example, if you have a 4-year-old German Shepherd already showing signs of hip dysplasia, that’s considered a pre-existing condition that will likely not be covered. If you had gotten a policy for that same dog at 4 months old, there would have been no pre-existing conditions.

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Jumping

This is a natural way your puppy shows excitement. It can be detrimental, though, when an exuberant puppy knocks down a toddler or elderly family member. While their enthusiasm for you is endearing, don’t reward this behavior. Instead, say no in a calm voice and gently push the puppy away. Be sure to give her lots of praise soon after when she is in a calm state.



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Kindergarten

Not to be confused with manners training, puppy kindergarten is where puppies learn to become well-adjusted dogs. The focus is on social skills, such as reading body language when another dog wants to play or not, and understanding when gentle nibbles on their friend’s ear is too rough. There’s no one perfect age to start, but many consider the earlier the better. Call around for recommendations and be aware that many kindergartens require proof of vaccination.

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Licking

This is similar to chewing — puppies explore the world with their mouths. But many dogs often lick for specific reasons. People still consider licking from their dog equivalent to getting a kiss. But when it comes to licking itself, that is where trouble can come in. Some dogs lick their paws out of boredom or anxiety. If it goes on too long, try redirecting her attention with a fun toy or treat. Excessive licking is one of the many areas where, when in doubt, have a vet check it out.

M

Meet and greets

When you have people over who have never met your puppy, it's natural to want to introduce her and show off her cuteness. She, however, may not be in the mood, especially when there are lots of new people, smells and maybe hats! Those can be scary! Instead of forcing Bella to be the belle of the ball, start the festivities with your pup in her crate and let her see people from afar before meeting everyone. If you wait until all your guests arrive, that also reduces the chance of her bolting out an ever-opening front door.



N **Neutering**

Having your pet spayed or neutered can have multiple benefits in your dog's demeanor and health, as well as reducing the number of unwanted pets. According to the ASPCA, the traditional age for neutering is 6 to 9 months, but healthy puppies as young as 8 weeks old can be neutered. Large breeds should be neutered between 9 and 15 months, after growth stops.

Fun fact: Neutering is not a gender-specific term, although it's often used for males. The term "castration" is specific for males and "spaying" is specific for females.

O **Overnight**

When you first get your puppy, the best sleeping option may be a crate next to your bed. This lets the puppy see and hear you. To create an even more den-like environment, cover the crate on three sides or more, depending on how much privacy your puppy seems to want. Expect your puppy to initially cry at night. Soothing items, like something with a familiar scent, can help. There are also products on the market that mimic a heartbeat, like the Snuggle Puppy, which can add an additional dose of comfort. It may take some time for your puppy to adjust to her new situation, so try to create a bedtime routine. That routine will also likely include a potty break during the night to teach your pup not to soil her crate. While your dog is building trust — and a bigger bladder — you may also opt to put a pee pad on one side of the crate.

P **Poop and pee**

And speaking of pee pads... While you can start training your puppy early on, be sure to manage expectations — there will be some accidents. A small piece of AstroTurf can also work, as you can easily hose it down. It is key to take your puppy out multiple times a day, make it clear that it is not playtime — it's "do your business" time. Now, let's talk poop. A healthy puppy will likely defecate several times a day, sometimes up to five. If you ever have questions about the color or consistency, do not hesitate to contact your vet. And potty training won't last forever; most puppies are able to hold their bladders for several hours at around 4 months old.



Q **Quarantine**

After two-plus years of COVID, it's easy to understand why "quarantine" is not a favorite word. However, when it comes to a puppy, or any new pet, it's a good idea to keep them isolated from other animals and people until they get all their vaccines. Set up a separate room in the house or a separate area of the yard, blocked off by a fence or baby gate. Duration varies, but most often it is a number of weeks.

R **Rescue**

If you are looking for a young dog, don't forget rescue organizations and shelters. You would be surprised at how often youngsters are available and waiting for their forever homes. Consider the fact, too, that many dogs are still considered puppies until they hit 1 to 2 years old. This is a win-win in that you miss out on the teething phase, while still being able to train a young dog lots of new tricks.





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S **Socialization**

One of the main factors that goes into turning a puppy into a well-adjusted dog is socialization. A dog that gets along with other dogs and animals, as well as different people, is less likely to be afraid of the world. When you start this at a young age — think double-digit weeks, not months (as soon as your puppy has gotten all her shots) — your puppy gets comfortable seeing new things and new people all the time. Start by meeting other dogs in a public place to avoid turf anxiety, and instruct new people to let your puppy come to them instead of swooping in and picking up your puppy right away. This exposes puppies to not only other dogs, but many new people and objects.

T **Teeth/teething**

A puppy's baby teeth start coming in around age 2 to 4 weeks. When adult teeth start coming in, this process can be painful, and your puppy will benefit from sturdy chew toys.

Put some chew toys in the freezer for the extra comfort of coolness when chewed. By the time your puppy is about 6 months old or so, all her puppy teeth should have fallen out, and her adult teeth should have grown in.



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U **Upset stomach**

Most of the time when a puppy has an upset stomach it is because of something she ate. If your puppy is vomiting or has diarrhea, she still needs nutrients. Some safe, plain foods to help provide nutrition during this time include plain rice, eggs and plain chicken; low-sodium broth can also help with both calories and hydration. Canned pumpkin is another food that is famously used for dogs with digestive issues, but be sure to get plain pumpkin not pumpkin pie mix. Vomiting and diarrhea can also be a symptom of parvovirus. Keep a watchful eye and alert your veterinarian sooner rather than later as it's important not to let your puppy become dehydrated.

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V **Vets and vaccinations**

Your veterinarian is your puppy's other best friend. No matter how you got your puppy — a breeder, a shelter or a rescue group — plan on the first vet visit within a few days. Your veterinarian will perform a general exam, which assesses your pup's current condition and establishes a baseline for future visits. An early visit will also include vaccinations. Expect the first vaccinations to be distemper and parvovirus at 6 to 8 weeks old, followed by several more during a puppy's first year. The core vaccines are DHLPP — distemper, hepatitis, leptospirosis, parvovirus and parainfluenza. Depending on geography, vaccinations for leptospirosis and Lyme disease may move from optional to strongly recommended. And don't ignore those booster shots; they are critical for full immunity.

W **Whining**

Experts say whining is simply the first vocal form of communication puppies are familiar with. Sometimes whining means a puppy is anxious or even excited. Use her visual cues to help determine the cause. A common time and place is in her crate at night. If possible, keep one crate in the bedroom and one in the family area during the daytime so your dog gets access to a safe space anywhere in the house.

X **X-ray**

You could swear you left a pair of earrings on your bed. But now the only thing you see is your puppy. Did she eat the earrings? Whether it's from consuming a foreign object or a suspected broken bone, the only way to tell is with an X-ray, or radiograph. If the puppy is small enough and not too squirmy, an anesthetic will likely not be needed.

Y **Yeast infections**

A surprisingly common issue in dogs of all ages is yeast infections. They often show up on the skin or in the ears. Signs that this may be the case include a lot of scratching, head shaking and a yeast-like odor. Certain breeds are particularly susceptible, and while some foods can help, ultimately a trip to the vet may be in order.

Z **Zoomies**

Have you ever seen your puppy run around out of nowhere, with a sudden burst of energy that you marvel at? Those are technically called "frenetic random activity periods," more commonly known as "zoomies." This is perfectly natural and perhaps one of the cutest things a puppy does. Dogs of all ages do this, but it seems to be especially common in youngsters. Oh, to have that kind of energy! 🐾

