

Taking Care of Your Puppy's Health

Get tips on how best to take care of you puppy's health so he can be happy and healthy.

The problem with puppies, and with all dogs for that matter, is that they can't tell you what's wrong when they fall ill. Sure, they can show you something's up with great displays of whimpering and whining. They might scratch until the sun goes down, but you don't really know if the problem is caused by fleas or allergies. And unless you majored in animal husbandry, chances are you'll need to look for a veterinarian who knows her stuff to care for your four-footed friend—in good times and in bad. Furthermore, it's important to know what to expect when you visit her offices for checkups.

Finding a Veterinarian

Shopping for a health care provider for your pup is no different than searching for any other family doctor. You'll want to do plenty of research and consider the following: Does the veterinarian have a good reputation? Ask friends and family about their experiences. Also, call the local humane society to see who they recommend. After all, those who provide care to so many animals will have a sense of which professionals are most compassionate and have good track records. Do a background check on each professional's education and experience. Find out how long the provider has been practicing and whether or not she graduated from a prestigious veterinary program. Investigate whether or not the doctor has an area of specialty. Some might work only with dogs, for example, or have an in-depth knowledge of Golden Retrievers and the ailments common to that breed. Look into the clinic's location. After all, doggie ambulances are few and far between and a drive across town during a medical emergency could mean the difference between life and death. Once you find a provider you are comfortable with, visit her office for a one-on-one interview. You'll want to garner her philosophy on puppy rearing and discuss other matters unique to your circumstance.

The First Visit

We recommend taking your pet to the veterinarian within the first three days he's home to ensure he's fit. (The visit is akin to taking a used car to your own mechanic to make sure you didn't invest in a lemon.) The visit will likely include: An external check including the examination of the puppy's coat, muscles, bones, eyes, ears, mouth; A fecal exam to check for internal parasites; A question-and-answer period; The scheduling of immunizations.

The Decision to Spay/Neuter

Raising one puppy is delightful; realizing your pooch is "in the family way," however, can be downright daunting. Make sure there are no surprises by having your little one neutered or spayed as soon as possible, provided you don't want to become a breeder, that is. The surgeries can be done by the time puppies are six months old and include a fairly quick recovery time. Fido's mates pals at the park will be none the wiser. Benefits to such surgeries include: Decreased aggression in males; Decreased interest in roaming; Decreased urge to mark territory; Decreased chance of mammary tumors or uterine disease in females who are spayed before her first heat cycles; Less mess. (Dogs have 21-day-long cycles that occur every six months and start sometime after six months of age.)

Coping With Fleas

Unfortunately, puppies and fleas are like peanut butter and jelly—you can't have one without the other. These bothersome, nearly invisible parasites not only make your pup itchy, but they can transmit disease, pass on tapeworm or even cause anemia, especially in vulnerable youngsters. Furthermore, they can infiltrate your home and bite people. Though hard to spot with the naked eye, your pup will exhibit symptoms such as scratching, biting and gnawing the skin. By the time you actually see the fleas, you've got a full-blown infestation. If you suspect your puppy is harbouring unwanted guests, pop your pup in the bathtub and rub your hands up and down his coat to look for flea "dirt," dark dots that are actually flea excrement. Drop tap water on the dots and watch for the color red to develop. If so, you've got a problem.

Flea Control Myths

Some swear you can rid your puppy of fleas by feeding him onion or garlic. And though he might enjoy a taste of Italian cuisine, such a meal might actually produce a toxic reaction. Furthermore, feeding puppies brewer's yeast or applying it to the skin will have no effect on fleas.

Prescription Flea-prevention Products

Scientists have developed both topical and oral prescription medications that prevent fleas from biting and reproducing. They are administered once per month and, in our opinion, are well worth the cost. Here's the scoop: Oral treatments come in a pill but are not effective until after 60 days of initial treatments. At that point, chemicals present in the medication interrupt the flea's life cycle and they die. Topical products provide immediate relief and prevent future outbreaks.



As with humans, preventative care is the best way to ensure your puppy lives a healthy, happy life. And we're sure that means he'll be teaching you to speak Dog sometime soon.