

House Training for Puppies and Dogs

Learning to eliminate in appropriate locations is a crucial skill for dogs. Dogs can easily be taught to eliminate outdoors, indoors on absorbent pads, or in any other specific area. House training involves conditioning: teaching dogs the habit of toileting in the right spots. All you need is consistency, supervision, and positive reinforcement.

When do I begin house training?

You should begin house training as soon as you bring your new puppy or dog home. Be consistent from the start. Select an appropriate toileting area outdoors and, when you bring your puppy to the elimination area, always lead your puppy through the same exit door. If you plan to provide an indoor latrine, such as a litter box or piddle pad, then bring your dog to that location when it is time for her to void.



Make sure you have a high quality enzymatic cleansing product on hand, such as Urine Away. Even if your training routine is excellent, accidents can happen. Good cleanup is crucial to discourage future toileting in the same spot – the odor of urine or feces is a cue to use the location again in the future.

How will I know that my puppy needs to eliminate?

It takes time for puppies to grow up enough to hold their eliminations, and it can take even longer for them to learn to communicate that they need to go. Puppies and dogs alike can become distracted while eliminating and fail to fully empty their bladder.

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Try to notice the behaviors that your dog exhibits just before eliminating. For example, many puppies will pause their current activity and quickly squat. Some dogs begin to sniff and/or circle just before they posture to eliminate. Puppies often become restless when they have a full bladder or bowels. If you see these signs, calmly but quickly lead your dog to the appropriate toileting area.

Patience is important! Puppies need many elimination breaks including:

- During the night (puppies may need overnight outings until they are 5 months of age).
- After a meal or a big drink of water.
- Immediately after waking up from a nap.
- Every half hour during high-energy times, such as running and playing.
- Every 1–2 hours when awake, **in addition to the times above.**
- **Every 4 hours, even if they have been resting.**

Your puppy (or new dog) will always need to be in one of three basic modes:

- Directly supervised by a responsible human so that someone is always ready to respond to signals that the puppy needs to "go" (e.g., tied to an observant person with a leash or within direct line of sight, less than 10 feet or 3 meters away).

- Safely confined to an area where a puppy could eliminate if necessary.

Puppies that are left alone for very short periods, no more than 3 hours, can usually be successfully confined in a crate. With a little training, most puppies learn to go to sleep when they are put into their crates. While sleeping, they are less likely to experience the urge to eliminate.

If your puppy is left alone for more than 3 hours, she will need a potty break. You may be able to find a friend or pet sitter to stop by. Alternatively, you could provide an area that includes both a resting space and an appropriate toileting substrate. A large crate can be divided so that there is a resting spot and a piddle pad. Another option is to use an exercise pen or gated enclosure with a resting spot (such as a crate) and an appropriate toileting substrate (such as a piddle pad or artificial turf).

Can you provide me with easy-to-follow instructions to help me house train my puppy?

- **Supervise your puppy.** Bring your puppy outside on his leash to his elimination area. Alternatively, you may set up a small, fenced enclosure, separate from the play area, and wait beside your puppy. Always go along. Do not send puppies outside alone to toilet. Until they are trained, most puppies that are left outside alone become distracted and do not eliminate until they are back indoors.
- **Be patient.** When you get to the elimination area, be patient for a few minutes. Your puppy might be excited to be outdoors. If your puppy does not eliminate after 5 minutes, take him back inside and supervise him closely. At the first sign of restlessness, immediately bring him back outside.
- **Reward.** After your puppy toilets, quietly praise them and offer a small treat. The reward should be given while you are still outside near the area of elimination rather than when you get back inside.
- **Postpone play time.** Play time and freedom to run off leash in a fenced yard should be postponed until your puppy has finished eliminating. This will teach your puppy to toilet quickly when brought to the elimination area.
- **Add a cue.** Once you are familiar with the signs that your puppy is about to eliminate, you may introduce a cue. Wait quietly until your puppy is in position and just about to eliminate, then calmly introduce a cue such as "go potty". Having a cue for elimination can be particularly convenient at times when you are on a tight schedule or when you and your dog travel away from home.

How can I teach my puppy to tell me that she needs to eliminate?

Once your puppy is physically mature enough to hold her bladder consistently, she can learn to "ask" to be taken outside. She may develop a signal on her own, such as coming to you and barking, or going to the door and scratching.

You can also teach your puppy to ring a bell attached to the door, which may save your door from being scratched. Be careful though – some dogs ring the bell just for a chance to play in the yard. For help with training a special cue like ringing a bell, speak with your veterinarian to get a list of recommended trainers in your neighborhood.



What should I do if my puppy makes a mistake and eliminates in the house?

If you notice your puppy begin to posture to eliminate in an undesirable spot, create a distraction that will interrupt him without scaring him. You may try to use your voice to make an odd noise, or lightly tap your hand on your leg or table. When your puppy looks up, guide him quickly to the right spot and then praise him.

"Punishing your puppy for a natural act can make them think they should never toilet near a person."

Perhaps you turned your back on your puppy for a few minutes and then found evidence of the elimination after the fact. **Do not punish your puppy.** The only fair thing to do is calmly and quietly clean the area and resolve to better supervise your puppy in the future. **Never rub a**

dog's nose in an elimination, and never strike your puppy. Punishing your puppy for a natural act can make them think they should never toilet near a person.

When can I start giving my puppy more freedom?

Once your puppy has gone 8–12 weeks without mistakes, they are probably ready for more freedom. This sounds like a long time, but puppies are babies, and they need constant supervision for success in house training, manners, safety from chewing or ingesting dangerous items, and so much more.

As you gradually allow your newly house-trained puppy or dog more freedom, consider allowing them to leave the room briefly without you. You may be able to set up a baby monitor so you can watch for any signals they are about to eliminate.

If your previously well-trained dog begins house soiling, always consult your veterinarian for guidance. There could be a medical condition or behavioral condition causing this change. Sometimes, dogs cannot control their eliminations. For example, some puppies urinate when they are excited or worried, such as when greeting people. This behavior is not due to a lapse in house training. A behavior professional can help your puppy succeed.