



## Housetraining – Frequently Asked Questions

### Is my new dog already housetrained?

No shelter can possibly promise a housetrained dog, EVER. Even if the dog you are adopting was housetrained in the home where he lived before, he will still need to adjust to your household. Remember, your new dog will not know your routine and what you expect of him, much as you may not immediately recognize his signals that he needs to eliminate. Additionally, the length of time that the dog has spent in a shelter may have weakened his housebreaking skills or may have altered his surface preference (for example, he may now be more used to going to the bathroom on concrete than on a grass surface.)

Therefore, the first few weeks that you have your new pet at home, ASSUME THAT HE IS **NOT** HOUSETRAINED. If you start again at the beginning with that assumption, the re-training process should go quickly if the dog was indeed previously housetrained. If your new pet is a puppy, you should expect that there will be accidents, but the more consistent you are with the basics of housetraining, the faster your puppy will learn appropriate behavior.

### How can I get my new dog on a regular “potty” schedule?

All dogs, puppies and adults alike, do best on a regular schedule. Establish a routine by getting your dog out first thing in the morning; after eating, drinking, napping or playing; immediately upon your return from work or school; and the last thing before going to bed at night. Keeping a regular feeding schedule for your dog or puppy will also make it easier for you to predict when he will need to eliminate – after all, what goes in, must come out!

Take your dog to the same spot, at the same times each day. Walk back and forth with your dog on leash to encourage “movement,” and use the same phrase each time, just as he starts to relieve himself, to encourage him to go potty. Eventually you can use this phrase to hurry him along, once he has learned to relieve himself on cue. When he eliminates outdoors in the bathroom spot, praise him lavishly and reward him with a treat immediately after he finishes so that he will learn that going to the bathroom outside is a desirable behavior. Staying with your dog while he eliminates, even if you have the luxury of a fenced-in yard, not only gives you an opportunity to praise and reward him when he completes his task appropriately, but also gets your dog used to going to the bathroom in your presence. It is also the only way that you can be sure that he has gone!

If you are adopting a young puppy between eight and twelve weeks of age, you should consider carrying your puppy to your chosen bathroom spot outside. Limit trips outside for the first few weeks to potty trips only (no outside playtime) so that the puppy begins to associate the outdoors with elimination. For your adult dog, take him a walk as a reward for eliminating in the yard.

### How can I limit mistakes in the house?

There are several key aspects here. First of all, supervision is crucial. Don’t give your dog an opportunity to soil in the house: he must be watched at all times when he is indoors, especially for the first critical weeks until you are confident that he is housetrained. If that means you keep your dog on a six-foot leash, tethered loosely to you, at all times so that you can know where he is and what he is doing, then do so! Baby gates can also be used to confine the dog where you are or to other small areas so that you can limit mistakes. Watch closely for signs that he may need to go out, such as sniffing or circling, and immediately take your dog outside on a leash to his bathroom spot at those times. Praise him and feed a treat if he eliminates in the appropriate area.

When you are able to supervise, your dog should be confined to a dog-proof area that is small enough that he will not want to eliminate there. This area may be a dog crate (see handout on crate training) or a blocked-off area of a kitchen or laundry room. Set up a pattern of taking your dog outside immediately to eliminate upon his release from confinement.

A houstraining “mistake” can be a learning opportunity for your pup – but ONLY IF YOU CATCH HIM IN THE ACT! If you discover the mistake hours or even minutes later, it is too late – the learning moment has been lost. Simply clean up the mess, using an enzymatic cleanser like Stain Stealer or Nature’s Miracle, that will get rid of every last trace of urine or feces. If not cleaned properly, your dog may return to the same spot over and over. Any form of punishment administered to your dog (such as rubbing his nose in it, scolding, or striking him with a newspaper), will have no effect except to make your puppy or dog afraid of you or afraid to eliminate in your presence. Dogs that have been physically punished by their owners for accidents will often slip away from their owners when they can to eliminate in hidden locations outside their owner’s presence!

If you do catch your dog in the act of eliminating in the house, do something to interrupt him, such as clapping your hands. The idea is to interrupt the unwanted behavior and to redirect it to the appropriate area. After interrupting, immediately take the dog outside, and praise and reward him when he finishes outside.

### **How often do I need to take my dog out? How long can I expect him to “hold it?”**

This depends on the age (and to some degree in adult dogs, size) of the dog in question. Young puppies under six months of age cannot be expected to control their bladders for more than a few hours at a time. A good rule of thumb is to count your puppy’s age by months, then add one. This is the maximum length of time that he will be able to “hold it.” For example, if your puppy is twelve weeks old (three months of age), the longest he will be able to hold it will be four hours. Even this may be optimistic for some puppies, and you will want to be sure that they are getting out often enough so that they do not have to eliminate indoors or in their crate. If the puppy is allowed to (or forced to) eliminate in the house or crate, the houstraining process will become more difficult and it will take longer for your puppy to learn appropriate elimination habits. You can generally expect to see better bowel and bladder control around four months of age.

An adult dog with no other contributing problems such as medical conditions or separation issues should be able to “hold it” for a normal work day. Anything longer than eight or nine hours is too long for any dog, and if your schedule requires that you be away from home for longer periods, you may want to re-think your pet choice or consider a pet sitter or dog walker to provide a mid-day break for your canine companion. Smaller dogs often need more frequent potty breaks than large ones, and for that reason many people consider litter or paper training for these pets.

### **What if I think I am doing everything right but my dog still has accidents?**

1. Make sure you really are doing everything right! Most accidents happen when the owner is physically present but mentally absent. In other words, the owner was not paying enough attention to the dog’s whereabouts or signals, or was distracted by other activities, and thus not truly supervising. If you cannot supervise your dog, confine him to a crate or puppy-proofed room so that you are, at the very least, limiting the chance of mistakes. Every time your dog has an accident in an inappropriate area, you’ve increased the likelihood that another accident will happen.
2. Rule out medical problems by consulting with your veterinarian. A urinary tract infection or intestinal parasites could be causing house-soiling problems.
3. Look for patterns to determine other possible reasons for the behavior, such as:

#### *Submissive or Excitement Urination*

Some dogs, particularly young ones, temporarily lose control of their bladders when excited or frightened. This often occurs during greetings, intense play, or when the dog believes it is going to be punished.

#### *Territorial Urine Marking*

Although most people think of this problem as a typically male behavior, scent marking of territory, done by depositing small amounts of urine or feces, can be done by both male and female dogs. A dog may do this

because they believe their territory has been invaded, and they thus feel the need to clearly identify, or “mark” it, as their own.

### Separation Anxiety

Some dogs that suffer from anxiety when left alone may also have accidents in the house when the owner is absent. Many times there are other indications of this anxiety, such as destructive behavior or vocalization. Treatment for this condition may require medication and a desensitization training program.

### Fears or Phobias

If your dog becomes particularly frightened by such things as thunder, fireworks or loud noises, he may lose control of his bladder and/or bowels when those sounds occur.