

White Oak Veterinary Clinic

New Puppy Packet

What First Time Puppy Owners Should Know

The ideal age to bring a puppy home is between 8 and 10 weeks. This window is considered the prime time for bonding and learning, as puppies are especially receptive to new experiences during this stage. While adopting a puppy later than this doesn't mean they'll lack social skills, it may require a bit more intentional socialization.

Puppies go through a critical socialization period between 3 and 12 weeks of age. Around 7 to 8 weeks, they begin to engage more in social play, while also becoming more sensitive to unfamiliar sights, sounds, and experiences—especially between 6 and 8 weeks.

To help puppies grow into well-adjusted adult dogs, it's important to expose them to a variety of people, environments, and situations before they reach 14 weeks of age. This early exposure lays the foundation for confidence and adaptability throughout their lives.

Packet Highlights

HOUSETRAINING

SOCIAL SKILLS

WHAT YOU NEED ON DAY ONE

WHAT YOU WILL EVENTUALLY NEED

CONFINEMENT TRAINING

BITING AND MOUTHING

NUTRITION & EXERCISE

HELP US HELP YOU

TOXIC SUBSTANCES

WHAT TO BRING

Housetraining is one of the first and most important lessons your puppy will need to learn

Some breeders may begin this process before you bring your puppy home, but many do not. Keep in mind: puppies have very small bladders and it can take until 6 months old for them to recognize their body's "potty signals." To set them up for success, take your puppy outside to their "designated potty area":

- First thing in the morning
- After every nap
- After meals
- After indoor playtime
- Right before bedtime



The more consistently you take them out and praise them for going in the right spot, the quicker they'll learn. **Never punish a puppy for accidents indoors.** This only teaches them to hide their behavior, not correct it. Like human babies, housetraining takes time and patience—but with consistency, it will happen.

Beyond housetraining, puppies also need to learn your household rules. If you don't want your adult dog on the furniture, don't allow the puppy on the couch—not even once. If you want them to stay away from the front door when it opens, teach them to go to a specific spot instead. Reinforce the behaviors you want, redirect the ones you don't, and teach skills to set them up for lifelong success.

Consistency is key. Puppies don't understand "just this once." They learn through repetition and routine. Everyone in the household must follow the same rules, or your puppy will become confused and training will take longer.

Social Skills & Early Training

Puppy kindergarten is a great way to kickstart your pup's social development.

These classes help puppies learn how to interact with dogs outside their litter and build confidence in new environments. These programs should require all puppies to be up-to-date on core vaccines, including Bordetella, before attending.

Timid behavior is a red flag.

While some puppies are naturally more outgoing than others, fearfulness at 12 weeks old can lead to long-term anxiety and reactivity. Early intervention and support is key to helping shy puppies grow into confident adults.



Why Social Skills Matter

Basic social manners are essential—unless you're okay with a dog that:

- Jumps on your guests
- Steals food from your plate
- Swipes your dropped medication
- Claims the couch as their own
- Runs off with your wallet or barbecue tools

Untrained puppies often grow into unruly adults. In severe cases, they may become difficult to handle or even risk the safety of others. **Training classes and consistent practice at home are your best tools for raising a well-behaved dog.** Remember: training teaches you how to teach your dog.

Mouthiness & Play

Puppies explore the world with their mouths. Their tiny teeth may not do much damage, but they can still hurt during play. If not addressed early, mouthy behavior can become a bigger problem in adulthood.

Gentle play is crucial. While roughhousing may seem fun, it can teach puppies that biting and rough behavior are acceptable. Keep interactions calm and controlled to set the right expectations.

Socialization: Exposure Builds Confidence

Puppies need daily exposure to new sights, sounds, and people to grow into well-adjusted adults. Between 8–12 weeks, introduce your puppy to:

- People wearing hats, sunglasses, beards, or carrying bags
- Children of different ages and voices
- Dogs of various temperaments—including those who don't want to play
- Noisy shoes, different skin tones, and everyday household sounds
- Reminder to keep all interactions safe and controlled.

Positive experiences build confidence. Your puppy doesn't need to interact directly—just being nearby and receiving treats as people pass by can help them feel safe and secure.



Balancing Vaccination & Socialization

This critical socialization period overlaps with your puppy's vaccination schedule, which typically lasts until 16 weeks. Vaccines are essential and should not be skipped or delayed.

To safely socialize your puppy during this time:

- Arrange playdates with vaccinated dogs
- Attend puppy classes that require proof of vaccination
- Avoid high-risk areas like dog parks until we give the green light



Enjoy the Puppy Phase

Puppies are full of energy, curiosity, and mischief. They're a lot of work—but also a lot of joy. There will be moments when you feel overwhelmed, but you've got this!

Before you know it, that round belly and sweet puppy breath will be gone, replaced by a lanky adolescent who sleeps less, plays harder, and needs even more exercise. Enjoy every moment—because they grow up fast, and you'll never hold that tiny paw again.



What You Need on Day One with Your New Puppy.

Bringing home a puppy is exciting—and a little chaotic! Luckily, if you've been in contact with a breeder or rescue, you've had time to prepare. Preparing ahead of time means you won't need to take your puppy (with their still-developing immune system) into a pet store full of other animals. So, what should be ready when your puppy walks through the door?

Cleaning Supplies

Accidents happen—even with housetrained pups. Puppies can get distracted, nervous, or just forget where to go. An enzymatic cleaner is your best friend here. It removes odors at the source, unlike vinegar or water, which may leave behind a scent that tells your puppy, "this spot is okay!"

Food & Bowls

Puppies need puppy-specific food, not adult formulas. Ask the breeder what they've been feeding and stick with it at first to avoid tummy troubles.

Use stainless steel or ceramic bowls—they're more hygienic than plastic and easier to clean. Later, you can add food puzzles and enrichment toys to keep mealtime fun!

Collar/Harness & Leash

A leash and something to attach it to is non-negotiable—it's a literal lifeline. Make sure it fits properly and is comfortable for your pup.

Safe Toys

Puppies explore the world with their mouths, so toys are essential—but choose wisely. Avoid toys that are too hard (which can break teeth) or too soft (which can be swallowed). And no, your old shoes are not toys! If you let your puppy chew on one, they'll think all shoes are fair game.

What You'll Need Eventually (But Not Necessarily on Day One)

Bringing home a puppy is a big step, and while some items are essential from the start, others can wait a little while. Here's what you'll want to add to your puppy toolkit soon:

ID Tag

Order one online or at a pet store and include your cell phone number. Attach it to your puppy's collar or harness for safety.

City License

Depending on local laws, your dog may need a license. You'll need proof of rabies vaccination, which typically happens during your puppy's vaccine series.

Medications

We will guide you on:

- Flea & tick prevention
- Heartworm prevention (especially in heartworm-prone areas)
- Dewormers or antibiotics if needed

Poop Bags

Yes, it's your job to clean up after your pup! You can use regular plastic bags or choose from a variety of pet-specific options—compostable, scented, perforated rolls, and more.



Our Veterinary Relationship

Your puppy must meet our vet in person to establish a Veterinary-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR). To keep it valid, they'll need an annual in-person exam.

Emergency Care Plan

Know where your nearest emergency vet hospital is and how to get there. Puppies have immature immune systems, so early care and prevention is key. If something seems off, call us—not Dr. Google.

Exercise & Leash Training

Tiny puppies need supervised playtime, not long walks. Use this time to teach them to follow you and start leash training gently.

Flat-faced breeds (like pugs, bulldogs, and Pekingese) are sensitive to heat—avoid outdoor play when it's hot and learn the signs of heat stroke.

Supervision & Safety

Puppies need:

- Affection, play, and gentle guidance
- Supervision to avoid chewing furniture, escaping the yard, or getting into dangerous items like ant bait
- Protection from rough handling by children or falling off furniture

If your puppy becomes destructive when left alone, use the crate until they learn the house rules.

The Long-Term Payoff

Everything you do now builds the foundation for a lifetime of love. Whether your dog lives 6–10 years (like a Mastiff) or 14–16 years (like a Chihuahua), your bond will grow deeper every day.

If you already feel like you'd do anything for your puppy after two days—imagine how strong that love will be in ten years.



Puppy Confinement Training Tips

The goal of confinement training is to help your puppy feel safe and relaxed in their crate, exercise pen, or gated area. This space should never feel like punishment—it's their cozy spot for naps, quiet time, or chewing on a favorite toy.

Crate & Exercise Pen

A crate helps with housetraining by tapping into your puppy's natural instinct not to soil their sleeping area. Even better? Set up an exercise pen with a crate, feeding station, and potty area.

Set Up for Success

Place the crate in a common area of your home where your puppy can still see and hear the family. Some pet parents find it helpful to have multiple crates—one in the living room, bedroom, or even the home office.

Avoid Common Mistakes

- Don't confine your puppy and immediately leave.
- Never let them "cry it out."
- Never kick or shake the crate to quiet them.

Instead, make the crate a positive experience from the start.



Step-by-Step Crate Introduction

- Start with the door open or tied back so it doesn't swing and scare your puppy.
- Toss treats into the back of the crate and let your puppy explore. Repeat this several times a day.
- Once they're comfortable, close the door gently for a few seconds while they're inside. Give a treat through the door, then open it again.
- Gradually increase the time the door stays closed, always rewarding calm behavior.



...Training Tips

Practice Calm Time

Keep the crate nearby while you:

- Watch TV
- Read a book
- Work at your computer

Give your puppy a safe chew or drop treats in the same spot to encourage relaxation. As they get more comfortable, try moving around—fold laundry, cook dinner—while they stay in the crate and watch you.

Try Short Absences

Once your puppy is calm with you nearby, try briefly leaving the room. Return before they get upset and reward them. If they start to cry, shorten the time and try again later. If they're still distressed, let them out—don't let them cry it out.

Timing Matters

Always take your puppy outside to potty before crate time. Puppies need frequent bathroom breaks and too much time in the crate can cause anxiety.

Keep It Positive

Confinement can be scary at first, so go slowly. Keep sessions short and upbeat. A bad experience early on can make crate training harder later.

If your puppy shows signs of separation anxiety, don't wait—reach out to a professional trainer or us for guidance.



Understanding & Managing Puppy Biting and Mouthing

Biting is normal for puppies, but if not addressed early, it can become a habit. Puppies learn quickly—if biting gets attention or helps avoid something, they may keep doing it.

Teaching bite manners now helps prevent problems later.

Why Do Puppies Bite or Mouth?

Puppies bite and mouth for many reasons, including:

- **Communication:** Puppies may bite to say “I’m scared,” “I don’t like that,” or “Let’s play!”
- **Play:** Rough play with littermates teaches bite inhibition. Without siblings, puppies may play too rough with humans.
- **Teething:** As adult teeth come in, puppies chew to relieve discomfort.
- **Exploration:** Puppies use their mouths to learn about their world—food, toys, textures, and more.
- **Instinct:** Some breeds, especially herding dogs, are naturally more mouthy.
- **Rarely,** fear or frustration can lead to biting, which should be addressed with professional help.



Tips to Manage Puppy Biting

- Avoid rough play like wrestling, which encourages mouthy behavior.
- Redirect biting to appropriate toys—chew toys, squeaky toys, or food puzzles.
- Use time-outs: Briefly remove attention when biting occurs. No eye contact, no talking. Resume play once your puppy calms down.
- Teach commands like “sit” to redirect focus. Reward only when biting stops.
- Use a high-pitched “ouch” to mimic a littermate’s yelp—but avoid startling or scaring your puppy.
- Try a firm “no bite” during biting, but only if it doesn’t increase excitement or fear.
- Provide outlets for energy and instincts—playtime, sniff walks, and puzzle toys help meet your puppy’s needs.
- Reward good behavior with treats, praise, and affection.

Avoid Punishment

Never punish your puppy for biting. Harsh corrections can damage your bond, increase fear or anxiety, and may even lead to aggression. Instead, stay consistent, patient, and positive.

Nutrition & Exercise: What Every Puppy Parent Should Know

Whether you're welcoming your first puppy or it's been years since your last, it's important to know that our recommendations evolve—especially when it comes to nutrition and exercise. With so many pet food options and conflicting advice online, it can be hard to tell what's marketing hype and what's truly best for your puppy's long-term health.

Nutrition Basics: FAQs

Do puppies really need “puppy food?” Yes! Puppies have unique nutritional needs—especially for calcium, phosphorus, amino acids, and calories to support healthy bone growth and development. Look for foods labeled as “formulated for growth” or “all life stages” with a Nutritional Adequacy Statement from AAFCO.

What's the difference between regular and large-breed puppy food? Large-breed puppy diets are specially formulated with lower calories, calcium, and phosphorus to support slower, controlled growth and reduce the risk of orthopedic issues. These diets are essential for breeds expected to weigh over 70 lbs as adults.

When should I switch to adult food? Puppies should stay on a growth diet until they reach about 80% of their adult size:

- Small/medium breeds: ~12 months
- Large/giant breeds: 18–24 months

Switching too early can lead to nutritional imbalances and bone development issues, especially in large breeds.

Can I limit calories by switching to adult food early? No—this outdated advice can be harmful. Instead, adjust the amount of puppy food to maintain a lean body condition. Learn to assess your puppy's Body Condition Score (BCS) and feed accordingly.

What if my puppy already has orthopedic issues? Talk to us right away. We may recommend a diet change or refer you to a board-certified veterinary nutritionist or orthopedist for expert guidance.

Exercise Guidelines

Puppies need exercise—but not too much!

- Short, supervised play sessions are best for young puppies.
- Avoid high-impact activities like jumping or running on hard surfaces, especially for large breeds.
- Flat-faced breeds (like pugs and bulldogs) are sensitive to heat—keep them cool and avoid outdoor play in hot weather.



Managing Weight, Diet, and Exercise for Large-Breed Puppies



What If My Puppy Is Overweight or Obese?

If your puppy is carrying extra weight, the best approach is to:

- Slightly reduce their food intake
- Increase low-impact activities like leash walks or swimming

Continue feeding a large-breed puppy diet to ensure proper nutrient balance while managing calories. Weight-loss diets are typically designed for adult dogs and may not meet the needs of growing puppies. If significant calorie restriction is needed, consult us or a board-certified veterinary nutritionist. Prevention is always easier than treatment—so keep your puppy lean from the start!

Can I Feed My Puppy a Homemade Diet? Not without professional guidance.

Generic recipes from books or websites often lack essential nutrients—especially calcium and phosphorus—which are critical for bone development. Feeding an unbalanced homemade diet during growth can lead to serious orthopedic issues and permanent damage.

Homemade diets also require:

- Time and effort to prepare
- Space to store ingredients
- A higher financial investment

If you're committed to feeding a homemade diet, work with a board-certified veterinary nutritionist to create a custom recipe tailored to your puppy's needs. Avoid generic recipes—they're a recipe for disaster!

Can My Puppy Go Jogging or Running With Me? Not yet. While young dogs may have the energy to keep up, they don't know when to stop—and their growing bones and joints aren't ready for high-impact, repetitive exercise. Forced exercise (anything beyond natural play) can cause long-term damage, especially in breeds prone to orthopedic issues like hip dysplasia. Wait until your puppy's growth plates close, usually around 12–15 months, before starting vigorous activities like running or jumping. **Think of it this way:** A 6-month-old puppy is like an 8–12-year-old child. You wouldn't expect a child to run 5 miles at an adult pace—and the same goes for your pup.

What Kind of Exercise Is Safe?

- Free play with other puppies or gentle adult dogs
- Supervised swimming (great for joints!)
- Mental enrichment like sniff walks, puzzle toys, and training sessions

Avoid:

- Running with adults or older dogs
- Excessive stick chasing or frisbee catching
- Long hikes or forced runs

Mental stimulation is just as important as physical activity—and often just as tiring!

Our clinic can be overwhelming for puppies—new smells, unfamiliar animals, strange handling, and unexpected pokes like vaccines or stepping on a scale. But with a little preparation at home, you can help your puppy feel confident and calm.

Practice Gentle Handling

Help your puppy get used to being touched by practicing the following techniques at home. This builds trust and prepares them for our exams, grooming, and nail trims.

- Gently handle their paws, ears, mouth, and tail
- Use high-value treats to reward calm behavior
- Always give your puppy the choice to walk away—never force interactions

Teach Problem-Solving & Independence

You can't expose your puppy to everything they'll encounter in life—but you can teach them how to handle new situations.

Use puzzle toys and food-dispensing games to:

- Build confidence
- Encourage independence
- Reduce boredom and destructive behavior

Training with positive reinforcement also helps your puppy learn cooperative behaviors like:

- Touch
- Chin rest
- "Go to mat"
- Stationing on platforms

These skills make visits to see us smoother and less stressful.

Make Car Rides Fun

Many puppies get carsick or anxious. Help them adjust by:

- Taking short, frequent rides
- Giving treats at drive-thrus
- Ending rides at fun places (like a walk or playdate)

If your puppy struggles with motion sickness, talk to us about anti-nausea options.





Toxic Substances



Dogs are not little humans—they're a completely different species, and some things that are harmless to us can be dangerous or even deadly to them.

While a couple of M&Ms might not harm a 120-lb dog, a 20-lb pup eating half a chocolate cake is a serious concern. If you know your dog has ingested something questionable, call us immediately or contact the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center at (888) 426-4435 (note: a consultation fee may apply).

Common Household & Environmental Toxins to Avoid:

- Alcohol
- Antifreeze
- Caffeine
- Chocolate
- Cigarettes, nicotine, and e-liquids
- Compost
- Dishwashing liquids & detergent pods
- Fabric softener sheets
- Grapes & raisins
- Ibuprofen & naproxen (Advil, Aleve)
- Cannabis (including edibles)
- Minoxidil (Rogaine)
- Mosquito repellents with DEET
- Nasal decongestants
- Macadamia nuts
- Onions, garlic, chives
- Pesticides & rodenticides
- Topical medications (human or pet)
- Wild mushrooms
- Xylitol (found in sugar-free gum, candy, and some peanut butters). Also called "birch sugar."
- Unbaked yeast dough



Safety Tip:

Puppies explore the world with their mouths. Keep harmful items out of reach, and supervise your pup closely—especially in kitchens, bathrooms, garages, and yards.

Putting It All Together: Your First Visit to White Oak Vet

With preparation, your puppy's experience doesn't have to be scary.

Puppies who are well-socialized, comfortable in the car, and familiar with gentle handling are more likely to stay calm in the waiting room and exam area.

Bring familiar items like:

- A snuffle mat or licking mat
- A frozen treat toy
- Their favorite blanket or toy

These tools can help your puppy relax, step on the scale willingly, and stay distracted during exams or vaccinations.



Your Puppy's Comfort Matters To Us!

By investing time in socialization, training, and gentle handling now, you're setting your puppy up for a lifetime of low-stress visits and cooperative care. If your puppy shows signs of anxiety or fear, don't hesitate to reach out to us or a certified trainer for support.

***We're honored to care for your newest family member.
Welcome to White Oak Vet!***