TUFTS CUMMINGS SCHOOL OF VETERINARY MEDICINE

Your Dog

The Newsletter for Caring Dog Owners

GOOD MANNERS
HOUSE TRAINING

No matter your canine companion's age, breed or disposition, he needs to learn good household manners. The most important of these is housetraining. A dog who eliminates indiscriminately will cause headaches for his humans and himself. Luckily, a consistent behavioral program can give your dog perfect elimination etiquette.

- By C.C. Holland

ADVICE FOR EVERY STAGE OF YOUR DOG'S LIFE.

The Key: Watchfulness and Frequent Trips Outdoors

The best advice when housetraining a puppy: *"You can go with the flow of using the puppy's natural instinct to keep his den area or bedding clean,"* said Nicholas Dodman, BVMS, MRCVS, director of the Behavior Clinic at the Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University.

To begin, keep your puppy in a dry, secure area, such as an exercise pen or kitchen. Several times during the day, take him on-leash to a designated elimination area. Put the puppy down, keep him focused and let him move back and forth. When he eliminates, immediately offer a food treat and lavish praise. If he doesn't eliminate within 10 minutes, take him inside and keep an eye on him. Either confine him or attach his leash to your belt, wait 15 minutes and then, repeat the exercise. *"It may take two or three 15-minute blocks,"* Dr. Dodman said, *"but if at first you don't succeed, try, try again."*

Stay with the puppy outside to teach him the correct behavior. *"So many people just turn them out in the yard and wait for 30 minutes, let them in, and they urinate on the floor,"* said Dr. Dodman.

In general, puppies can hold their bladders for their age in months plus one; a 2-month-old puppy can go a maximum of three hours without a potty break. This means you'll need to make frequent trips outside during the day and usually at least once overnight. In addition, offer elimination opportunities 20 to 30 minutes after a meal and when the dog transitions from one activity to another, Dr. Dodman said.

WHEN ACCIDENTS OCCUR, DON'T MASK THE ODOR - REMOVE IT

Never punish your dog for an accident, Dr. Dodman said. He can't associate the punishment with the deed, or worse, he'll simply learn not to eliminate in front of you - and that means outdoors as well.

If your dog begins to squat or urinate in the house, make a sudden, loud noise to distract him and interrupt what he's doing, then calmly and happily attach a leash and take him outside, Dr. Dodman said. Encourage him to eliminate there, and if he does, praise him to the heavens and give him a treat.

If you've adopted an older dog, especially one who's been in a shelter, even if he's supposedly housetrained it's wise to act as if he isn't and begin at square one. Stress or changes in environment may cause some backsliding. Once he's reliable, a dog door can be a great aid to both owner and pet. "A dog door means the dog can now take charge of his or her own life, which is stress-relieving," Dr. Dodman said.

If a dog does have accidents in the house, you must clean up the mess and - most importantly - eliminate any associated scent. Once an area is soiled, it's marked as an elimination spot and a dog may tend to use it again. "Don't try to mask the odor with another scent," Dr. Dodman cautioned, "because your dog will still smell it. Use a solution that will destroy the compounds that cause those odors." He recommends Zero Odor (www.zeroodorpet.com), an oxidizing agent that removes both scent and stains.

HEALTH PROBLEMS AND MEDICINE CAN CAUSE HIS INCONTINENCE

Incontinence can plague older dogs, but it's usually associated with medical problems rather than age, Dr. Dodman said. While kidney function may decline as a dog gets on in years, that alone usually won't cause accidents. However, a variety of health challenges can cause incontinence or more frequent urination, including cystitis and various metabolic disorders.

Also, Dr. Dodman said, *"If you get a dog who is 10 or older and suddenly starts to have accidents, think about canine cognitive dysfunction."* House soiling is one of the hallmarks of the disorder, which can also cause disorientation and changes in sleep patterns and behavior. Excellent medications are available that can either eliminate or alleviate the symptoms in about two-thirds of treated dogs, Dr. Dodman said.

In addition, certain medications - such as cortisone and bromide - can cause the dog to drink more, which can also lead to accidents. *"Don't immediately blame the dog - think about the circumstances,"*

Dr. Dodman said. The bottom line: If your older dog begins to soil the house, have your vet check him out. If your dog has a medical condition that's incurable and causes incontinence, diapers designed for dogs can provide a good solution. For more on housetraining a senior dog, please see the following article.