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Factsheet

Housetraining your new dog



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Dogs are generally clean animals and will usually choose to move away from their sleeping area in order to urinate and defecate. However it is important that, when you bring a new dog into your home, one of the first training exercises you embark on is housetraining. Even if you have been informed that your new dog is fully housetrained it is worth providing your dog with a refresher course, especially if he has spent a period of time in kennels.



By using reward-based training, you and your dog can work towards a positive relationship that will serve as a good foundation for future training. However, it does require your time, patience and dedication.

The time it takes will depend on:

- How consistently you keep to the routine.
- How quickly your dog is able to learn.
- How old your dog is.
- The experience your dog has had in the past.

As well as not being housetrained, there are many other reasons why a dog will go to the toilet in the house, such as stress about being left alone and marking their territory. Under these circumstances it will be necessary to address the underlying problem as well as treating the symptom (i.e. the messing). The following programme is designed for situations where the most likely cause of your dog wetting and/or messing in the house is a simple lack of housetraining.

What to do

1. When you begin housetraining your dog it is important to take him out frequently (this may be as often as every hour). This will reduce the chances of him messing inside and also provides him with more opportunities to learn about where it is appropriate to go to the toilet.



2. It is important to learn to predict when your dog will need to go to the toilet. Dogs typically become fidgety, often sniffing around looking for a suitable location to go, begin to circle or squat, or appear distracted. Be particularly vigilant after naps, feeding, and periods when he has been left alone!

3. If you think your dog is looking as though he may need to go, encourage him outside. Always try to take him to the same place by the same route so that he learns to head in this direction. This exit should be one that is visible to you for a large proportion of the day, so when he heads for the exit, you will know that he wants to go to the toilet.



4. Once your dog is outside, wait with him, encouraging him all the time. You can give a simple command such as "be quick!" It is essential that you go outside with your dog, as this is your opportunity to tell him that this is the correct place to go.



5. Walk your dog around for a bit longer before going back inside. This will ensure that he does not learn that relieving himself ends his time outside and that he does not hold on to the last minute in order to extend his playtime.

6. If after a few minutes your dog is showing no signs of relieving himself, take him back inside. At this stage you know that he is very likely to go in the near future. Supervise him constantly so that he does not get the chance to make a mistake. Once your dog does ask to go outside, repeat step 4. If he goes to the toilet, wait until he has finished, and then offer plenty of praise or a food treat.



What should you do if you catch your dog about to go to the toilet?

If you catch your dog 'in the act' or he starts displaying some of the behaviours that indicate he is going to go to the toilet, it is important to try and interrupt the behaviour. This can be done by either calling out (a quick sharp "oi" to startle your dog will normally be enough to stop him) or clapping your hands.

We recommend a sharp "oi", rather than punishment, because it is likely that he has made mistakes in the past that you have not caught or been aware of and he has received no negative consequence for his behaviour. If on the occasions you do catch your dog and punish him, he will begin to notice a pattern. This means that he has not learnt the right or wrong place to go to the toilet, only that it is safe to go to the toilet when you are not around which could have detrimental effects on the success of your housetraining. In severe cases, he might stop going to the toilet on walks with you – waiting until he gets home so he can sneak off to a safe place.

Once you have interrupted the behaviour, take your dog back out into the garden. Although the dog initially made a mistake, praise him when he goes to the toilet outside to emphasise the fact that this is the correct place to go. Dogs only associate a consequence with the behaviour that immediately preceded it, so punishing him after he has been to the toilet in the correct place will send the wrong message.

What if you don't catch your dog in the act?

If you don't catch your dog in the act because you were out of the room or house at the time, there is nothing you can do. Punishing the dog after the act will have no effect. He will not associate this punishment with his earlier accident. As you wouldn't reward your dog for sitting two hours after the behaviour had occurred, you shouldn't punish him two hours after he's relieved himself.

"But he knows he's done wrong!"

Dogs have no moral concept of right and wrong. They learn by the consequences that follow actions. When an owner comes home to discover a mess on the floor, and the dog sitting still in the bed 'looking guilty', or approaching submissively, wagging his tail, lowering his head or rolling over on his back, the owner interprets this behaviour as guilt. Unfortunately this dog has learnt through experience that when you display certain body language the consequences for him aren't good! He doesn't understand why you act as you do but just makes an association between your arrival and its consequences, the behaviour he displays is his way of trying to calm you down.

Clearing up

When clearing up after your dog's accident it is important that the area is always cleaned properly. The best cleaning solution is biological washing powder, the same as you would use to wash your clothes. You will need to use one part powder to nine parts water. Wait for this to dry and then wipe over with surgical spirit (as surgical spirit may mark some surfaces it's best to try a test patch first).

Avoid any household detergents that contain ammonia. This is a natural chemical that occurs in your dog's urine and will encourage him to mark the area again. Odour neutralisers and air fresheners can also encourage him back to the same area again. It is also important not to clean the area in front of your dog, as this can result in him going to the toilet in the home to get your attention.

If you feel that you need further advice on housetraining your dog, please contact the Behaviour Advice Line on **0905 020 0222** (calls cost 25p per minute).

