

Your new Greyhound

Thank you for choosing a Greyhound to be your new companion. You are taking home one of the most gentle, docile and sociable dogs. This is a brief guide to help you and your new dog live a happy life together.

The Greyhound is one of the oldest dog breeds. By sharing your home with a Greyhound you are carrying on a tradition which was popular with the pharaohs of ancient Egypt, medieval Kings and Queens and more and more of today's dog lovers. Unlike most breeds, Greyhounds have hardly changed over the centuries. This is because they have been bred solely for speed and to chase rather than for any cosmetic reasons. The word 'grey' does not refer to their colour but is an old Saxon word for a running dog.

Due to the Greyhound's breeding and history, there are some special rules that you must follow to help him become the perfect pet. However, these are not difficult to follow and you will be totally rewarded by the amount of love and joy your Greyhound will bring you.

Born to run

The common perception of Greyhounds is dogs charging round a racetrack at death-defying speeds. In fact Greyhounds are quite the opposite – they are extremely laid back, require little exercise and are particularly good with children and elderly people. They are fantastic company. They are also a much neglected breed and unfortunately many of those bred to race don't get the chance to enjoy life after racing in a home of their own. However, you must not forget that Greyhounds have been trained to chase and catch prey. This is not acceptable behaviour for a pet dog and it is now your responsibility to make sure this doesn't happen. All you need to do is follow the very simple instructions contained in this fact sheet (particularly the section on 'Exercise').

No matter how wonderful your Greyhound is, never take any unnecessary risks: you must have your dog under control at all times. Remember that your Greyhound is now an ambassador for the other Greyhounds still needing homes. Go out and show the world what they're missing!

Kennel life

If you are taking home an ex-racing Greyhound, he has probably only known the strict regime of kennel life. Look at the world through your Greyhound's eyes. Your home will be a weird and wonderful place to begin with but your Greyhound will soon see it as a palace when he realises it is his home. Your Greyhound will probably never have encountered stairs, washing machines, vacuum cleaners, televisions or ponds. If you have patio doors make sure that your Greyhound realises there is a barrier there and does not try to run through them at forty miles an hour – pull a curtain across if necessary.

Taking a Greyhound into your home is like having a puppy around. He may appear stressed to begin with (panting or salivating) but with patience and gentle encouragement will settle-in in no time. For example, your Greyhound will never have been around people when they are eating. When you sit down to a meal the dog will not believe that you are going to eat the food. He'll be convinced it must be for him but will learn very quickly with a few firm "no's". What's more, your dog will also assume that the food in the rubbish bin is also his dinner. For the first few days, while he realises that he doesn't have to eat everything he can get his paws on, you will need to keep your bin out of his reach. It is also advisable not to leave your Greyhound unattended in the garden initially as he is capable of jumping over high fences. However, most never show any inclination to escape.

Just like a puppy the best way to teach your Greyhound all he needs to know for his new life is through encouragement: rewarding good behaviour and ignoring bad behaviour. Greyhounds are very sensitive and do not respond well to being shouted at or disciplined. If they are afraid they will not learn anything. You will also need to teach your Greyhound how to play as most rescue Greyhounds have never seen a toy before.

Housetraining

Your Greyhound will probably be what is known as 'kennel clean'. This means that he tries not to mess in his bed area, which has been his 'home' so far. When he first comes into your house he will not understand that the whole house is now his 'bed area'. His first instinct will be to scent mark his new surroundings. To avoid this, as soon as you arrive home, without pausing, walk your Greyhound straight through the house and into the garden. As soon as he goes to the toilet give him lots of praise. Wait a while until you are sure he has finished. When you go indoors watch for any signs that the dog needs the toilet again (circling, sniffing and scratching, especially after sleeping and eating). As soon as you see any of these signs go outside with your dog and praise him as soon as he goes to the toilet.

For the first few days you will have to be extra vigilant and should go out for lots of short walks, always praising him for 'going' outside. If any accidents do occur indoors, clean the area with biological washing powder. Do not punish your Greyhound as it will only confuse him. After a few days he will learn that your home is now the equivalent of his kennel and he should avoid going to the toilet in the house as long as you are giving him sufficient opportunities to go outside. Greyhounds usually become clean indoors very quickly. It is advisable to only leave your Greyhound alone indoors for short periods of time at first and if possible restrict him to one room. The more he wanders around the more likely he will be to go to the toilet.

Whenever you are letting your Greyhound out into the garden it is worth making a noise to frighten off any squirrels or cats that might be outside. Most dogs will chase a squirrel or cat out of their garden but a Greyhound is more likely to catch them and could kill them.



Greyhounds and other animals

Racing Greyhounds lead an incredibly sheltered life. They never get to meet other types of dogs, just lots of other Greyhounds. Consequently they are usually very friendly towards their own breed but can be very unsure about other breeds to start with. Small fluffy dogs may initially be mistaken for prey. Larger dogs are likely to be quite threatening and may make your Greyhound uneasy. You should socialise your dog with lots of other breeds so that he builds up good associations with meeting different types of dog. Introductions should be calm and controlled in a neutral area and you should always have your Greyhound on a lead and muzzled.

A dog training class is an excellent environment to socialise your Greyhound with other dogs. He probably won't ever learn to 'sit' (this is actually very uncomfortable for him) but will benefit from just being there.

Cats

Believe it or not some Greyhounds can live quite happily with cats (some definitely cannot!) If you are taking home a Greyhound that can live with cats you will still have some work ahead of you to ensure long-term harmony in your home.

You must introduce your cat to the Greyhound right from day one. If you shut the cat away for a few days while the dog settles in, when they do meet your Greyhound will feel that the cat is intruding on his territory. Right from the start the Greyhound must understand that the cat was there first.

When you introduce the dog to the cat for the first time, keep the dog on a lead and muzzled and don't let the cat approach the dog. Allow the animals to spend time together in the same room (the cat's first instinct will be to leave!) but do not leave them unattended. You won't be able to leave them alone together until much later when you have total trust in your dog. You should look for one of two responses from your Greyhound when he meets the cat: he should either be indifferent to the cat and ignore her, or wary of her, looking away when the cat looks at him. If the Greyhound looks directly at the cat and wags his tail this is not a sign of friendship but means that the dog is excited by the cat – this is not a good response. When the Greyhound looks away from the cat or ignores her, praise him. If he stares at the cat, barks, wags his tail while looking at her or lunges towards her, tell him "No". Remember that a running cat is more exciting than a stationary one.

The cat and Greyhound should eventually become more comfortable in each other's company and you will be able to feed them together and even encourage them to sleep in the same room. Your hard work and patience will pay off and once they accept each other, the cat will be the boss for good. Remember: even if your Greyhound is good with cats inside, don't be complacent outdoors. A neighbour's cat in your garden can still trigger the Greyhound's chase instincts, as will cats encountered out on walks.

Bedtime

Greyhounds love to sleep. They can sleep for up to 20 hours a day in racing kennels as there is little else for them to do. If nothing exciting is happening your Greyhound will probably be asleep! This is part of their appeal and makes them very flexible, fitting in with your lifestyle.

Greyhounds sleep deeply and it is very important that they are not suddenly startled when they are asleep. This is probably the only time when a Greyhound may snap or growl until he wakes up and realises where he is. Therefore, make sure your dog sleeps in a safe place, away from everyone, and children are told to leave him alone when he's in his bed. The best way to wake your Greyhound is to call his name rather than touch him. Always give your Greyhound a soft bed to lie on – like a quilt folded in two – which can be washed easily. Moulded plastic beds are not suitable.

Exercise

The good news is that Greyhounds are very flexible when it comes to exercise. On a rainy day or a day when you are very busy, two 20-minute walks will be enough. However, if you want to go for a five-mile hike at the weekend your Greyhound will keep you company all the way. Greyhounds are almost always very good on the lead and love going for rides in cars. Avoid letting your Greyhound exert himself directly before or after a big meal as this can be dangerous for his digestive system and may cause a gastric torsion (twisting of the stomach).

When you take your Greyhound out of the house it is essential that you have the necessary equipment. Greyhounds are very good at slipping their collars. Use a wide collar designed for the breed and make sure that when you are outdoors it is tight enough: when the collar is up behind the ears of the Greyhound you should be able to slip two fingers underneath it, no more. Indoors you can loosen the collar or replace it with a softer one. If you do this it is essential to have ID tags on both collars as accidents can happen.

A Greyhound's best friend is his muzzle. This may sound strange to us as we are not used to seeing friendly dogs wearing muzzles. For the Greyhound a muzzle is every bit as exciting as his collar and lead – it means he going out for a walk. Your Greyhound's muzzle is also all that stands between him and centuries of breeding to chase and grab. For the sake of other people's pets, wildlife and ultimately your dog's future, you must use the muzzle even when he's on the lead.

For most Greyhounds, it will always be safest to keep them on the lead. No matter how much your Greyhound loves you, once he is in hot pursuit of a squirrel or rabbit you will cease to exist, as will other obstacles like cars and barbed-wire fences. After a long time and a good deal of training some Greyhounds will have some level of recall. However, never take your chances – find safely fenced areas for a quick off-lead sprint. Don't worry your Greyhound will be having a wonderful life compared to what he is used to, especially if he's an ex-racer. By taking simple precautions you will ensure that he has a long as well as a happy life.



Health and physical care

Generally speaking, Greyhounds are fit and healthy and are not prone to the genetic problems that affect many breeds.

Greyhounds have very little body fat and feel the cold – this is why so many people use dog coats on colder days. Your Greyhound may have bald patches on his thighs, which is quite common particularly for black or dark coloured dogs, and is usually nothing to worry about. If the skin becomes sore you should consult your vet. When you take your Greyhound to the vet for his annual vaccinations, you may find that his nails need clipping too.

One of the best things about Greyhounds is their lovely soft, short coat that makes them perfect companions for people who suffer from asthma. They are very clean dogs and require minimal grooming – you will find that by the time you get back from a walk the mud seems to have disappeared. However they really enjoy having their coat brushed.

Greyhounds are terrible cowards and if they are hurt they will let you know. Any little knock seems to result in a scream. Don't be overly alarmed – if they remember which leg it was five minutes later then start to take notice.

Feeding

Any dry complete food is fine for Greyhounds but avoid those with anything higher than 20% protein. You may find that you need to soak the food in warm water and add a little gravy or tinned meat to make the food more appetizing. However, if only fed very sloppy food they often develop bad teeth and smelly breath. Try to ensure that your dog eats chewy and crunchy things that will help remove and prevent build-up of tartar. It is also a good idea to brush your dog's teeth if possible.

It is very hard to overfeed a Greyhound, as they are naturally thin. Greyhounds usually maintain a good body weight. Your dog is the ideal weight if his pin bones are covered by muscle (these are the little bones on top of the hips). If these stick up above the muscle then the dog is underweight. You should be able to see the outline of the last two ribs, but the rest should be covered by muscle.

As long as your dog isn't terribly greedy it may be a good idea to leave some dry food down all the time. This reduces the chance of him trying to steal food from elsewhere (worktops, bins etc). Greyhounds benefit from having their food lifted up off the floor. You can buy feeding stands to hold the food and water bowls at the right height or use an upturned bucket. This will also help to prevent digestive problems such as a gastric torsion.

Dog training classes

It is recommended that anyone planning to attend a dog training class makes sure that the class has been approved by the Association of Pet Dog Trainers (APDT). Before registering with any training class make sure you watch a class in progress to ensure that you agree with their methods. A list of recommended dog training classes in your area can be obtained from the APDT by telephoning 01428 707234, or online at www.apdt.com.

Written by Becky Blackmore

References and recommended reading

Pet Owner's Guide to the Greyhound

by Anne Finch, Ringpress Books

For further advice, contact:

The Retired Greyhound Trust (RGT)

149a Central Road
Worcester Park
Surrey KT4 8DT
Tel: 020 8335 3016
www.retiredgreyhounds.co.uk

The website contains lots of useful advice on Greyhounds as well as all the latest Greyhound products available and can help research your Greyhound's racing tattoos.

Useful contacts

Battersea's Behaviour Advice Line

0905 020 0222 (calls cost 25p per minute)

Battersea Dogs & Cats Home

4 Battersea Park Road
London
SW8 4AA

Telephone 020 7622 3626

Fax 020 7622 6451

Old Windsor

Priest Hill
Old Windsor
Berkshire
SL4 2JN

Telephone 01784 432929

Fax 01784 471538

Brands Hatch

Crowhurst Lane
Ash
Kent
TN15 7HH

Telephone 01474 874994

Fax 01474 872855

www.dogshome.org