

RAISE HAPPY DOG

The Complete Dog Care Guide

100 practical, evidence-informed practices for puppies, adult dogs and seniors - with safer reference tables for health, nutrition, exercise, training, grooming and emergencies.

100 care practices

12 quick-reference tables

International English edition

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PAW

Important: This guide is educational, not a diagnosis or a personalised care plan. Vaccines, parasite prevention, legal requirements, nutrition and emergency services differ by country and by dog. Use it to prepare better questions for your veterinarian.

A guide designed for real life - not perfect dog parenting

Good dog care is not a competition to buy the most expensive products or follow the longest routine. It is the steady work of noticing your dog, meeting essential needs, preventing avoidable harm and asking for help when something changes.

The original version of this resource contained useful ideas, but it also included fixed feeding amounts, universal temperature bands, a rigid vaccination schedule and popular internet rules that could mislead readers. This edition replaces those shortcuts with individual, region-aware guidance grounded in veterinary and animal-welfare sources.

Use the search and life-stage filters to find what matters today. Then return whenever your dog enters a new stage of life.

HEALTH

Veterinary & Preventive Care

Build a relationship with a veterinary team before an emergency happens.

PRACTICE 1

Choose a veterinary practice before you need one

Register with a clinic, learn its opening hours, and identify the nearest after-hours emergency service. Having a plan saves precious time when your dog suddenly becomes unwell.

PRACTICE 2

Use regular wellness visits, not only sick visits

Many dogs benefit from at least an annual preventive examination, while puppies, seniors and dogs with ongoing conditions may need more frequent care. Your veterinarian should set the interval for your dog.

PRACTICE 3

Treat puppy visits as a complete health programme

Early appointments are not only about vaccines. They are opportunities to discuss growth, nutrition, parasite control, behaviour, socialisation, dental development and safe handling.

PRACTICE 4

Increase monitoring as your dog ages

Ageing affects dogs differently. Ask when your dog should begin senior screening and whether more frequent examinations, blood tests, blood pressure checks or mobility assessments are appropriate.

PRACTICE 5

Learn your dog's normal

Notice normal appetite, thirst, energy, breathing, stools, urination, movement and behaviour. Small departures from an established baseline can be more useful than comparing your dog with someone else's.

PRACTICE 6

Keep vaccines individualised and local

Vaccines depend on age, previous history, lifestyle, travel, disease exposure and local law. Complete the puppy series and follow the schedule created by your veterinarian rather than a generic internet chart.

PRACTICE 7

Discuss both core and risk-based vaccines

Some vaccines are widely recommended, while others are important only for dogs with particular regional or lifestyle risks. Boarding, wildlife exposure, travel and local outbreaks can change the recommendation.

PRACTICE 8

Use a parasite plan suited to your region

Fleas, ticks, heartworm and intestinal parasites vary by climate and location. Ask your veterinarian which products, tests and year-round or seasonal schedules are appropriate where you live and travel.

PRACTICE 9

Report medication and supplement use

Tell your veterinary team about every prescription, over-the-counter product, herbal remedy and supplement. Interactions and duplicate ingredients can matter even when a product is marketed as natural.

PRACTICE 10

Discuss reproductive choices individually

The benefits and trade-offs of spaying or neutering vary with breed, sex, size, health, lifestyle and local regulations. Avoid relying on one universal age; decide with your veterinarian.

PRACTICE 11

Use both visible identification and a microchip

A collar tag can help someone contact you immediately, while a registered microchip provides permanent backup identification. Check that the registry details remain current after every move or phone-number change.

PRACTICE 12

Create a written emergency plan

Save your regular vet, emergency clinic and regional animal-poison service in every caregiver's phone. Include transport arrangements, your dog's medications and any handling needs.

PRACTICE 13

Maintain a concise health record

Keep vaccination certificates, laboratory results, medication lists, allergies, microchip details, insurance information and a timeline of important symptoms in one accessible place.

PRACTICE 14

Plan for veterinary costs

Insurance, a dedicated emergency fund or another realistic financial plan can reduce delays in care. Read exclusions, waiting periods and reimbursement rules before choosing a policy.

Evidence anchors: [1] [2] [3] [4]

NUTRITION

Nutrition & Healthy Weight

The best diet is complete, appropriate, safe and workable for the individual dog.

PRACTICE 15

Choose food appropriate for the life stage

Look for a nutritional adequacy statement showing that the food is complete and balanced for your dog's life stage or intended use. AAFCO does not certify, approve or endorse individual foods.

PRACTICE 16

Consider the company behind the food

Useful questions include who formulates the diet, their qualifications, what quality-control testing is used, whether the company can provide complete nutrient information and how it handles recalls.

PRACTICE 17

Measure food using calories, not cups alone

Foods vary greatly in calorie density. Begin with the manufacturer's guide, then adjust with your veterinary team according to body condition, activity, age, neuter status and health.

PRACTICE 18

Assess body condition as well as body weight

A scale shows total weight; body-condition and muscle-condition scoring reveal fat and muscle distribution. Ask your veterinary team to show you what an ideal score feels like.

PRACTICE 19

Aim for a lean, well-muscled body

You should usually be able to feel the ribs with a light fat covering and see a waist from above. Sudden or unexplained weight change deserves veterinary attention.

PRACTICE 20

Keep extras within the nutrition plan

Treats, table food, chews and foods used for medication all add calories. For many healthy dogs, keeping extras to no more than about 10% of daily calories helps protect nutritional balance.

PRACTICE 21

Use puppy food designed for growth

Growing dogs require a diet formulated for growth. Large- and giant-breed puppies need careful mineral and calorie balance, so avoid adding calcium or other supplements unless prescribed.

PRACTICE 22

Do not switch to “senior food” by age alone

Senior dogs are diverse. Some need fewer calories, some need more protein or a therapeutic diet, and others remain well on their adult food. Base the choice on health and body condition.

PRACTICE 23

Provide fresh water at all times

Water needs change with diet, weather, exercise, pregnancy, nursing and illness. Measure intake when your veterinarian asks, but do not use a rigid universal amount as a substitute for clinical advice.

PRACTICE 24

Change diets gradually when possible

A gradual transition over several days often reduces digestive upset, but some medical situations require a different plan. Follow your veterinarian's directions for therapeutic or elimination diets.

PRACTICE 25

Understand the risks of raw animal products

Raw meat and raw treats can carry pathogens that affect dogs and people. Bones can also fracture teeth or obstruct and injure the digestive tract. Discuss any raw diet with a veterinary nutrition professional.

PRACTICE 26

Use expert formulation for homemade diets

Home-prepared diets can be nutritionally incomplete even when the ingredients look wholesome. Use a recipe formulated for your individual dog by a board-certified veterinary nutritionist and follow it precisely.

PRACTICE 27

Be cautious with supplements

More is not necessarily better. Supplements may add excessive nutrients, interact with medication or be unnecessary in a complete diet. Use them for a defined reason with veterinary guidance.

PRACTICE 28

Watch appetite, stools and thirst for meaningful change

A brief variation can occur, but persistent diarrhoea, repeated vomiting, refusal of food, marked thirst or weight loss warrants veterinary advice. Puppies and small dogs can deteriorate quickly.

Exercise, Mobility & Physical Health

Match movement to the dog in front of you, not to a universal number.

PRACTICE 29

Build an individual activity plan

Breed traits can offer clues, but age, fitness, health, temperament, weather and preference matter more than a single daily-minute target. Include both physical movement and time to sniff.

PRACTICE 31

Protect growing bodies from forced repetition

Limit repetitive jumping, hard-surface running and sustained forced exercise in puppies, especially large breeds. Let the puppy rest when tired and increase challenges gradually.

PRACTICE 33

Keep senior dogs moving within comfort

Regular gentle movement can support mobility and confidence. Shorter walks, non-slip surfaces, controlled strength work and veterinary pain management may be more appropriate than complete rest.

PRACTICE 35

Increase workload gradually

After illness, winter inactivity or a sedentary period, build distance, speed and intensity slowly. Weekend-only bursts of strenuous exercise are not a substitute for consistent conditioning.

PRACTICE 37

Check the walking surface

Asphalt, sand, metal and artificial turf may become much hotter than the air. Choose shade and natural ground, and stop if your dog lifts paws, slows down or seeks cooler surfaces.

PRACTICE 39

Stop when your dog shows distress

Excessive panting, noisy breathing, weakness, repeated lagging, limping, confusion or collapse are not training challenges. Stop activity, move to safety and seek veterinary advice as appropriate.

PRACTICE 30

Avoid the unsupported “five minutes per month” rule

There is no reliable formula that determines safe puppy exercise from age alone. Favour self-paced play, short varied outings and veterinary guidance for developing joints.

PRACTICE 32

Combine different kinds of movement

Walks, sniffing, controlled play, balance work and breed-appropriate activities use the body differently. Variety can support fitness while reducing repetitive strain.

PRACTICE 34

Warm up and cool down

Begin energetic activity with several minutes of easy walking and end gradually. Sudden intense effort after inactivity can increase the risk of strain.

PRACTICE 36

Treat heat and humidity as a combined risk

There is no single safe temperature for every dog. Humidity, sun, exertion, body condition, airway shape and acclimatisation all matter. Reschedule or replace exercise when conditions are unsafe.

PRACTICE 38

Adapt for cold, wind and wet conditions

Small, short-coated, very young, older and medically vulnerable dogs may need shorter outings or protective clothing. Dry wet coats and paws, and watch for shivering or reluctance to continue.

Evidence anchors: [\[11\]](#) [\[12\]](#)

Mental Enrichment & Everyday Fulfilment

Enrichment adds choice, curiosity and healthy outlets; it does not replace rest or suitable exercise.

PRACTICE 40

Make sniffing part of daily life

Allowing a dog to investigate scents at a comfortable pace can be enriching. Not every walk needs to focus on distance, speed or perfect heel position.

PRACTICE 41

Use part of meals for enrichment

Food puzzles, scatter feeding and stuffed toys can encourage foraging and slow eating. Count the food within the daily calorie allowance and supervise new products.

PRACTICE 42

Rotate rather than constantly add toys

A small selection changed regularly can renew interest without clutter. Keep favourite comfort items available and remove damaged toys promptly.

PRACTICE 43

Choose chews with dental safety in mind

Chewing can be calming, but very hard items such as antlers, hooves and bones can fracture teeth. Select appropriately sized products that do not splinter and supervise use.

PRACTICE 44

Play search games

Hide a toy or a small portion of food in easy locations, then gradually increase difficulty. Search games can be adapted for small homes and dogs with limited mobility.

PRACTICE 45

Use training as a thinking activity

A few minutes of reward-based practice can teach useful skills and provide mental engagement. End while the dog is still comfortable and successful.

PRACTICE 46

Introduce novelty without overwhelming

New surfaces, objects, sounds and places can build confidence when exposure is gradual and voluntary. If your dog avoids, freezes or cannot take food, create more distance.

PRACTICE 47

Prepare indoor alternatives

Hot weather, storms, injury or poor air quality may restrict outdoor activity. Keep a menu of calm scent games, food toys, gentle training and safe chewing options.

PRACTICE 48

Support species- and breed-typical behaviours safely

Digging boxes, scent work, retrieving, tug, herding-style games and controlled shredding can provide appropriate outlets when matched to the dog and supervised.

PRACTICE 49

Balance activity with recovery

Continuous entertainment can create overtired or overstimulated dogs. Provide uninterrupted rest after walks, social events and demanding training.

PRACTICE 50

Treat behaviour changes as information

Pacing, destruction, barking, withdrawal or loss of interest may reflect unmet needs, stress, pain or illness. Avoid assuming every problem is simply boredom.

Evidence anchors: [13]

Training, Socialisation & Communication

Teach with safety, reinforcement and realistic expectations.

PRACTICE 51

Use reward-based training

Reward-based methods are recommended for teaching skills and addressing behaviour problems. Rewards may include food, play, access, praise or distance from something worrying.

PRACTICE 52

Avoid fear, pain and intimidation

Shock collars, prong collars, leash corrections, alpha rolls and physical punishment can create welfare risks and do not teach the dog what to do instead.

PRACTICE 53

Train in short, achievable steps

Break skills into small pieces, practise in low-distraction settings and increase difficulty gradually. Frequent successful repetitions are more useful than long frustrating sessions.

PRACTICE 54

Keep cues consistent but stay flexible

Household members should use the same cues and reward criteria. If progress stalls, change the environment or teaching plan rather than blaming the dog.

PRACTICE 55

Prioritise safety skills

A reliable response to name, recall, loose-lead walking, leave-it, drop, settling and comfortable handling can improve everyday safety and veterinary care.

PRACTICE 56

Manage the environment while teaching

Baby gates, leads, distance and secure storage prevent unwanted behaviour from being repeatedly practised. Management is responsible care, not a training failure.

PRACTICE 57

Socialise puppies safely and positively

The early socialisation period is important. Work with your veterinarian on safe exposure before the vaccine series is complete, using clean, controlled environments and healthy vaccinated dogs.

PRACTICE 58

Teach cooperative care

Pair gentle handling of paws, ears, mouth and body with rewards. Respect signs of discomfort and build toward grooming and veterinary procedures gradually.

PRACTICE 59

Choose qualified professional help

Look for transparent methods, recognised education, reward-based practice and collaboration with veterinarians. Serious fear, aggression or separation distress may require a veterinary behaviourist.

PRACTICE 60

Rule out pain when behaviour changes suddenly

New aggression, house soiling, restlessness, touch sensitivity or withdrawal can be caused by medical problems. Arrange a veterinary assessment before treating the issue as disobedience.

Dental Care, Grooming, Ears & Skin

Routine handling helps prevent discomfort and makes small changes easier to notice.

PRACTICE 61

Brush teeth daily when possible

Daily brushing with dog-safe toothpaste is the home-care gold standard. Build the habit gradually and never use human toothpaste, which may contain unsuitable ingredients.

PRACTICE 62

Introduce oral care gently

Begin with brief lip lifting and rewards, then touch the teeth and gums before adding a brush. Stop if the mouth is painful and arrange a dental examination.

PRACTICE 63

Use VOHC-accepted products as support

Dental chews, diets and other products carrying the Veterinary Oral Health Council seal have evidence for plaque or tartar control. They complement, rather than replace, brushing and veterinary care.

PRACTICE 64

Do not rely on anaesthesia-free cleaning

A complete veterinary dental procedure requires assessment and cleaning below the gumline, dental probing and radiographs when indicated. Surface scraping alone does not treat hidden disease.

PRACTICE 65

Avoid very hard chews

A practical safety check is whether the item is harder than the tooth can safely tolerate. Bones, antlers and hooves are common causes of fractures and can also cause digestive injury.

PRACTICE 66

Brush the coat according to its needs

Coat type, length, shedding and skin disease determine frequency. Brushing removes loose hair, prevents some mats and creates an opportunity to find lumps, parasites or sore areas.

PRACTICE 67

Treat severe matting as a welfare issue

Tight mats can pull skin, hide wounds and restrict movement. Do not cut close mats with household scissors; seek a trained groomer or veterinarian, especially if skin is painful.

PRACTICE 68

Trim nails according to length and gait

Nails that click, snag, alter stance or touch the ground at rest may need attention. Frequency varies greatly. Ask for a demonstration if the quick is difficult to see.

PRACTICE 69

Check ears but clean only when needed

Healthy ears may not need routine cleaning. Look for odour, redness, discharge, pain or repeated head shaking. Use a veterinarian-approved product and avoid cotton swabs inside the canal.

PRACTICE 70

Do not clean a painful ear before assessment

Deep cleaning may worsen pain, push debris inward or remove material needed for diagnostic testing. Contact your veterinarian before using drops or home remedies.

PRACTICE 71

Bathe for the individual coat and skin

There is no universal bathing interval. Use dog-appropriate products, rinse thoroughly and follow veterinary instructions for medicated shampoos or skin disease.

PRACTICE 72

Use grooming as a whole-body check

Inspect paws, between the toes, skin folds, armpits, groin, tail and mouth. Record new lumps, wounds, odour, hair loss, redness or changes in symmetry.

Safety, Toxins & Emergency Readiness

Prevention and a calm plan are safer than improvised home treatment.

PRACTICE 73

Dog-proof from floor level

Secure electrical cords, small swallowable objects, batteries, nicotine products, medications, cleaning agents, sharp tools and children's toys. Reassess as the dog grows or learns new behaviours.

PRACTICE 74

Use secure bins and food storage

Trash may contain bones, mouldy food, medication, wrappers and toxins. Use lidded containers and keep shopping bags and compost inaccessible.

PRACTICE 75

Know the major food hazards

Chocolate, xylitol, grapes and raisins, onions and related plants, alcohol, raw yeast dough, caffeine and macadamia nuts can be dangerous. Do not assume a small amount is safe.

PRACTICE 76

Identify plants by exact species

Common names can be misleading. Use an authoritative toxic-plant database and contact a veterinarian or poison service when exposure is suspected rather than relying on a generic plant list.

PRACTICE 77

Never induce vomiting without professional direction

Vomiting is unsafe for some substances and situations. Do not use salt, peroxide or other home methods unless a veterinarian or animal-poison specialist gives case-specific instructions.

PRACTICE 78

Save regional poison contacts now

Store your emergency veterinarian and the appropriate animal-poison service for your country. Fees may apply, and the service may ask for the product, amount, time, dog's weight and symptoms.

PRACTICE 79

Restrain dogs safely in vehicles

Use a crash-tested restraint or secured travel crate appropriate for the dog and vehicle. Never allow a dog to ride loose in an open truck bed or put their head far outside a window.

PRACTICE 80

Never leave a dog in a warm vehicle

Vehicles heat rapidly even with windows open. Plan errands so the dog can remain safely at home or with a responsible person in a temperature-controlled setting.

PRACTICE 81

Supervise water activities

Not all dogs are natural swimmers. Use a properly fitted canine life jacket when appropriate, provide an exit point, prevent access to unsafe water and rinse salt or pool chemicals from the coat.

PRACTICE 82

Prepare for travel and evacuation

Carry identification, medical records, medications, food, water, waste supplies, a secure restraint and destination-specific health documents. Check travel and border rules well in advance.

PRACTICE 83

Keep a pet first-aid kit

Include contact numbers, records, gauze, non-stick dressings, bandage material, saline, gloves, a thermometer and a muzzle only if your dog can breathe normally and use is safe.

PRACTICE 84

Recognise emergency warning signs

Trouble breathing, blue or grey gums, collapse, repeated seizures, severe bleeding, suspected poisoning, a swollen abdomen with unproductive retching or inability to urinate need immediate veterinary care.

Evidence anchors: [22] [23] [24] [25] [26]

Emotional Wellbeing & the Human-Dog Bond

Security grows from predictability, communication, choice and compassionate care.

PRACTICE 85

Create a predictable rhythm

Regular patterns for meals, toileting, exercise, rest and medication can reduce uncertainty. A routine should support the dog without becoming so rigid that ordinary change causes distress.

PRACTICE 86

Offer daily quality time

Shared walks, gentle play, training, grooming or quiet companionship all count. Follow the dog's preferences rather than forcing constant physical affection.

PRACTICE 87

Respect choice and consent

Allow the dog to move away from petting, choose a resting place and approach new situations gradually. Choice can build trust and reduce conflict.

PRACTICE 88

Learn early stress signals

Lip licking, yawning when not tired, turning away, whale eye, freezing, a tucked tail, panting when not hot and refusing food may indicate discomfort. Respond before behaviour escalates.

PRACTICE 89

Provide a protected retreat

Every dog needs a comfortable place where they can rest without being followed, hugged or disturbed. Teach children and visitors that the space is off limits.

PRACTICE 90

Build alone-time skills gradually

Practise brief, calm absences before long ones are necessary. Destruction, vocalising, drooling or panic when alone may indicate separation-related distress and deserves professional help.

PRACTICE 91

Protect uninterrupted sleep

Sleep needs vary with age, health and activity. Puppies and seniors often rest more. Avoid treating a tired or sleeping dog as entertainment, especially around children.

PRACTICE 92

Supervise every child-dog interaction

No dog is completely child-proof. Adults should actively watch, prevent climbing or hugging, protect the dog's food and rest, and teach children to recognise when the dog wants space.

PRACTICE 93

Notice emotional changes in ageing

Night waking, house soiling, confusion, anxiety or altered social behaviour may relate to pain, sensory loss or cognitive dysfunction. Early veterinary assessment can open more options.

Evidence anchors: [\[14\]](#) [\[27\]](#)

HOME

Home, Rest & Life-Stage Adaptation

A good care plan changes as the dog, household and environment change.

PRACTICE 94

Maintain a comfortable indoor environment

There is no universal ideal room temperature for every dog. Provide shade, ventilation, dry bedding and access to a cooler or warmer area, then watch the individual dog for discomfort.

PRACTICE 95

Make water easy to reach

Place clean bowls where the dog spends time and refresh them regularly. Multiple bowls can help large homes, multi-dog households and dogs with reduced mobility.

PRACTICE 96

Choose supportive, washable bedding

The bed should allow the dog to lie fully, change position and rise without slipping. Older dogs may benefit from supportive foam and low-entry designs.

PRACTICE 97

Give puppies structured rest

Puppies need frequent sleep and quiet breaks. Overtired puppies may become mouthy or unable to settle. Provide a calm routine instead of trying to exhaust them continuously.

PRACTICE 98

Adapt the home for senior mobility

Use non-slip rugs, ramps where safe, raised or repositioned bowls when recommended, easy-access beds and night lighting. Ask your veterinarian about pain and mobility support.

PRACTICE 99

Separate resources in multi-dog homes

Provide enough beds, water stations, feeding areas and safe spaces to reduce competition. Supervise high-value chews and feed dogs separately when needed.

PRACTICE 100

Review the entire care plan regularly

At least every few months—and after illness, a move or major life change—review weight, food, exercise, behaviour, preventive care, identification and emergency details with the dog's current needs in mind.

Evidence anchors: [\[3\]](#) [\[11\]](#) [\[28\]](#)

Safer quick-reference tables

These tables are designed as decision aids, not universal prescriptions. They intentionally avoid false precision such as fixed cups of food, guaranteed safe temperatures or toxin doses.

Veterinary-care planning by life stage		
Life stage	What to discuss	Timing principle
Puppy	Growth, vaccine series, parasites, nutrition, behaviour, socialisation and reproductive planning	Several visits are commonly needed during the first months; follow the clinic's schedule
Healthy adult	Physical exam, weight, teeth, skin, heart/lungs, vaccines, parasite risks and lifestyle	Many dogs benefit from at least annual assessment
Senior dog	Mobility, pain, cognition, senses, weight/muscle, organ screening and medication review	Often more frequent than annual, depending on health and age
Chronic condition	Symptoms, treatment response, monitoring tests and quality of life	Set by the condition and treatment plan
There is no single global timetable. Local disease risks, laws and the individual dog determine the plan.		

Vaccination conversation checklist	
Question	Why it matters
Which vaccines are considered core for this dog?	Core recommendations can vary by region and individual risk.
Which lifestyle vaccines should be considered?	Boarding, travel, wildlife, ticks, water exposure and local outbreaks can change risk.
What does local law require?	Rabies and documentation rules differ among countries and jurisdictions.
When is the next dose or booster due?	Age, product, prior doses and health history influence timing.
What reactions should I monitor?	Your clinic can explain expected mild effects and warning signs.
Use your veterinarian's written schedule; do not copy a schedule from another dog or country.	

Choosing and feeding a complete diet

Check	Better question
Nutritional adequacy	Is it complete and balanced for my dog's life stage or intended use?
Formulation expertise	Who formulates it, and what are their nutrition qualifications?
Quality control	Does the manufacturer test ingredients and finished products?
Calories	How many kilocalories are in each gram, cup, can or pouch?
Portion	What starting amount fits this dog's body condition and activity?
Monitoring	Is weight, body condition and muscle condition being reassessed?
AAFCO publishes model standards but does not certify or approve individual pet foods.	

Simple body-condition guide

Observation	Possible meaning	Next step
Ribs, spine or hip bones very prominent	Under ideal; muscle loss may also be present	Arrange veterinary assessment, especially if change is recent
Ribs easy to feel with light covering; visible waist and abdominal tuck	Often consistent with ideal condition	Maintain and monitor
Ribs difficult to feel; waist reduced or absent	Over ideal	Review calories, treats, activity and health with the veterinary team
Weight stable but muscles becoming thinner	Possible muscle loss despite normal or high body weight	Ask for a muscle-condition assessment
Use the full WSAVA nine-point chart with your veterinary team for a proper score.		

Exercise decision guide

Before activity	Ask yourself
Dog	Is my dog well, hydrated, comfortable and willing?
Life stage	Is the activity appropriate for a growing puppy or ageing dog?
Conditioning	Has distance or intensity increased gradually?
Weather	Are heat, humidity, cold, wind or poor air quality creating extra risk?
Surface	Is the ground hot, icy, sharp or slippery?
During activity	Is breathing controlled, movement even and behaviour normal?
After activity	Does the dog recover normally without prolonged distress or pain?
Stop for noisy or laboured breathing, weakness, confusion, collapse, limping or persistent reluctance.	

Heat-risk check - no universal temperature

Risk factor	Why it raises concern
High humidity	Panting becomes less effective for evaporative cooling.
Direct sun and hot ground	The dog absorbs radiant heat and paws may be injured.
Running, fetch or cycling	Exercise generates substantial internal heat.
Flat face or airway disease	Cooling and breathing may be less efficient.
Older age, obesity or illness	Physiological reserve may be reduced.
Not acclimatised	A sudden hot spell can be riskier than similar weather later in the season.
When in doubt, choose brief toilet breaks and indoor enrichment, then walk during safer conditions.	

Dental and grooming cues

Area	Routine cue	Contact a professional when
Teeth	Brush daily when possible with dog toothpaste	Bad breath, red gums, pain, loose teeth or difficulty eating
Nails	Trim when they touch the ground, click, snag or alter gait	The quick is difficult to see, nails are overgrown or handling is unsafe
Ears	Check regularly; clean only when needed with an approved product	Odour, redness, discharge, head shaking or pain is present
Coat	Brush according to coat type and matting risk	Mats are tight, skin is painful or the dog cannot be handled safely
Skin and paws	Inspect during grooming and after outdoor activity	There is swelling, bleeding, discharge, persistent licking or a new lump

Frequency varies by individual dog; a calendar alone cannot replace observation.

Common foods and substances to keep away

Hazard	Examples	What to do
Sweeteners	Xylitol in gum, sweets, baked goods, toothpaste or medication	Contact a veterinarian or animal-poison service immediately
Chocolate and stimulants	Chocolate, cocoa, coffee, tea, energy products and caffeine tablets	Do not wait for symptoms
Grapes and related dried fruit	Grapes, raisins, sultanas and currants	Treat any exposure as potentially significant
Allium plants	Onion, garlic, leek, chives and concentrated powders	Save packaging and seek advice
Alcohol and fermenting dough	Alcoholic drinks, spills, raw yeast dough	Prevent access and seek urgent advice
Medications and nicotine	Human painkillers, prescriptions, vitamins, vape liquids and nicotine pouches	Never give home antidotes or induce vomiting without instruction

Toxicity depends on the exact product, concentration, amount, dog and time since exposure. No table can define a universally safe dose.

Emergency warning signs

Sign	Action
Trouble breathing, blue/grey gums or collapse	Go to an emergency veterinary service immediately
Repeated seizures or one prolonged seizure	Emergency care immediately
Swollen abdomen with repeated unproductive retching	Possible gastric dilatation-volvulus; emergency care immediately
Severe bleeding or major trauma	Apply safe pressure if possible and transport urgently
Suspected poisoning	Call a veterinarian or animal-poison service; do not induce vomiting unless directed
Inability to urinate, severe pain or sudden paralysis	Urgent or emergency veterinary assessment
Call ahead when possible so the clinic can prepare and advise on safe transport.	

Stress-signal ladder

What you may see	Possible message	Helpful response
Turning away, sniffing ground, lip licking or yawning	Mild discomfort or an attempt to de-escalate	Pause, create space and reduce pressure
Tucked tail, pinned ears, whale eye or refusing food	Significant worry	Increase distance and stop the interaction
Freezing, hard stare, growling or showing teeth	The dog feels threatened and may escalate	Do not punish; calmly create safety and seek qualified help
Panting, pacing, drooling or destruction when alone	Possible separation-related distress	Record behaviour and consult a veterinarian/qualified professional
Body language must be interpreted in context. Sudden changes can also reflect pain or illness.		

Animal-poison contacts for key English-speaking markets

Region	Resource	Number
United States	ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center	+1 888 426 4435
United States / Canada	Pet Poison Helpline	+1 855 764 7661
United Kingdom	Animal PoisonLine	01202 509 000
Australia	Animal Poisons Helpline	1300 869 738
New Zealand	Animal Poisons Helpline	0800 869 738
Other locations	Your veterinarian or nearest emergency clinic	Save the local number before an emergency
Services and fees can change. Verify the number for your location and save it with your emergency clinic.		

Practical first-aid and evacuation kit

Category	Useful contents
Information	Vet and emergency numbers, poison service, medication list, microchip details and records
Basic supplies	Gauze, non-stick dressings, bandage roll, tape, blunt scissors, saline, gloves and clean towels
Transport	Secure lead/harness, carrier or crate, muzzle only when breathing is normal and use is safe
Daily needs	Water, bowls, several days of food and medication, waste bags and comfort item
Travel/evacuation	Identification photos, destination documents, charger, torch and weather-appropriate supplies

Ask your veterinarian whether your dog's medical condition requires additional items.

Do not wait during an emergency

Seek immediate veterinary help for trouble breathing, blue or grey gums, collapse, repeated seizures, severe bleeding, suspected poisoning, a swollen abdomen with repeated unsuccessful retching, sudden paralysis or inability to urinate. Do not induce vomiting unless a veterinarian or animal-poison specialist instructs you.

Continue with focused Raise Happy Dog guides

[How Hot Is Too Hot to Walk a Dog?](#) · [Why Is My Dog Licking Their Paws?](#) · [Dog Ear Infection Symptoms](#) · [Free Care Reminder](#) · [AI Training Advisor](#)

Frequently asked questions

How often should a dog see a veterinarian?

Many healthy adult dogs benefit from at least an annual preventive examination, but puppies, seniors and dogs with medical conditions may need more frequent visits. Your veterinarian should set the schedule.

What is the best food for a dog?

There is no single best brand for every dog. Choose a complete and balanced diet appropriate for the life stage, made with appropriate expertise and quality control, then monitor body condition and health.

How much exercise does a dog need?

Exercise needs depend on age, health, fitness, body shape, temperament, weather and activity type. Use the dog's response and veterinary advice rather than one universal time target.

How often should I clean my dog's ears?

Healthy ears may not need routine cleaning. Check them regularly and use a veterinarian-approved cleaner only when needed or when your veterinarian has prescribed a maintenance schedule.

Which foods are most dangerous to dogs?

Important hazards include xylitol, chocolate and caffeine, grapes and raisins, onions and related plants, alcohol, raw yeast dough and some nuts. Contact a veterinarian or animal-poison service after a suspected exposure.

When is a dog's condition an emergency?

Trouble breathing, blue or grey gums, collapse, repeated seizures, severe bleeding, a swollen abdomen with unsuccessful retching, suspected poisoning or inability to urinate require immediate veterinary help.

References and trusted organisations

These sources support the major principles used in this guide. Links open the original organisation or document.

1. [AVMA - Preventive pet healthcare](#)
2. [AVMA - Importance of wellness exams](#)
3. [WSAVA - Global Principles of Wellness](#)
4. [AAHA - Canine vaccination guidelines](#)
5. [WSAVA - Global Nutrition Guidelines](#)
6. [AAFCO - Understanding pet food](#)
7. [AAFCO - Frequently asked questions](#)
8. [WSAVA - Guidelines for selecting pet foods](#)
9. [FDA - Risks of raw pet-food diets](#)
10. [WSAVA - Feeding treats to your dog](#)
11. [RVC - Heatstroke in dogs and cats](#)
12. [WSAVA - Body condition score for dogs](#)
13. [AAHA - Enrichment and emotional wellbeing at home](#)
14. [AVSAB - Humane dog training position statement](#)
15. [AVSAB - Puppy socialisation position statement](#)
16. [AVSAB - How to choose a trainer](#)
17. [Veterinary Oral Health Council](#)
18. [AAHA - Dental care for pets](#)
19. [Cornell - How to clean your dog's ears](#)
20. [ASPCA - Dog grooming tips](#)
21. [WSAVA - Frequently asked nutrition questions and myths](#)
22. [ASPCA - People foods to avoid feeding pets](#)
23. [ASPCA - Animal Poison Control Center](#)
24. [AVMA - First-aid tips for pet owners](#)
25. [AVMA - Pets and disasters](#)
26. [AVMA - Microchipping FAQ](#)
27. [RSPCA - Understanding dog behaviour](#)
28. [AVMA - Responsible pet ownership](#)
29. [Pet Poison Helpline](#)
30. [UK Animal PoisonLine](#)
31. [Animal Poisons Centre Australia/New Zealand](#)

Editorial transparency: Prepared by the Raise Happy Dog Editorial Team using veterinary and animal-welfare references. This edition has not been individually reviewed by a veterinarian. Medical and legal recommendations should be confirmed with a qualified professional in the reader's country.

Raise Happy Dog

A calm, practical companion for dog parents everywhere.

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