



New Puppy – Wellness for life

Congratulations on your new puppy! Many of the decisions you make for your puppy now will affect the bond you share, as well as his or her future length and quality of life. We have created this handout to answer questions you may have and help your puppy become a healthy, happy dog. If you would like more information about any of these topics, please call or ask at your next visit.

Vaccinations

Your puppy needs vaccinations every 3-4 weeks until they are at least 16 weeks of age. Parvovirus is a disease causing vomiting, diarrhea, and severe dehydration that we see commonly in unvaccinated or incompletely vaccinated puppies. The virus is very contagious and very difficult to kill. You should limit your puppy's exposure to other dogs with unknown or incomplete vaccinations and public places where you can't control the cleanliness until your puppy receives their full vaccine series. Vaccinations will be less frequent when your puppy becomes an adult and their immune system is mature. Most adult dogs will receive only one vaccine yearly (for leptospirosis, a bacteria that can cause liver or kidney failure) and all others will be due once every 3 years. In the state of Michigan, rabies vaccines are required by law and you must show proof of rabies vaccination to get a dog license. Rabies vaccines are only legally valid if administered by a veterinarian. Some vaccinations are optional depending on risk factors of your pet's lifestyle such as lyme vaccine, kennel cough (bordetella), and vaccine to help prevent dental disease.

Intestinal parasites

Puppies are often born with intestinal parasites (worms). Some intestinal parasites are also transmissible to humans. There are not always symptoms that you can see at home, and stool checks can be negative even when they have worms. Therefore we recommend at least two stool sample checks before 6 months of age, and will usually give a couple doses of dewormer even if the sample is negative.

Heartworm disease

Heartworm is a different kind of parasite that is spread by mosquitoes and causes worms to grow in the heart. This eventually leads to heart failure. Heartworm disease is 100% preventable by having your pet on heartworm preventative medication. Heartworm is very uncommon in our local area and not all dogs need to be on heartworm prevention unless they are going to be traveling outside the Upper Peninsula. Discuss your dogs risk with your veterinarian. There is a test for heartworm disease which we recommend at least every other year on all dogs, and yearly if they travel to high risk areas.

Visits to the Veterinarian

Vet visits do not have to be stressful, fearful events. You can teach your puppy that the vet office is a happy place! First of all, always bring your dog (adults too!) to the office hungry. Do not feed on the morning of the visit, unless your puppy is less than three pounds or three months of age. In that case, feed a few hours before the visit. Bring treats

that are *really* good stuff, something they only get on vet visit days and make the pieces very small (cheerio sized – it doesn't take much). Give a treat in the parking lot, before entering the building, in the lobby, and again in the exam room. If they know the "sit" command, teach them to sit quietly on the scale for a treat. Also allow the doctor and staff to present some of the treats. The goal is for your pet to think of the vet's office as the place where they get fantastic treats. Another thing that will make your puppies' life (and ours!) easier is to practice gentle handling of the puppy with treat rewards from the time they come home. Don't just "pet" the puppy. Handle their feet, touch inside their ears, open their mouth and touch the teeth and gums, pet them firmly from nose to tail, put their limbs through a full range of motion, and teach them to be calm for gentle restraint. Make these sessions brief and rewarding with treats and they will be much less concerned about the veterinarian's physical exam.

Obedience training and socialization

Behavior problems are the number one cause of surrender of pets to shelters and are also a common cause of euthanasia. If you want your dog to be a joy to you and the other people in your life, you absolutely must socialize them and teach them how you want them to behave. Socialization means exposing them to new people/pets/situations early and often so they can move about their environment with confidence and without developing irrational fears or worse, fear aggression. The age of 9-16 weeks is a critical period in a puppy's social development. A lot of impressions, fears, and attitudes will become set in stone during this period. Make sure to follow guidelines to prevent infectious disease (see section on vaccines, above) while trying to socialize your puppy. Obedience training means deliberate training to respond to commands and should begin as soon as your puppy comes home. There are many resources such as books and internet web sites available with techniques help you. Puppy classes are an excellent way to accomplish both obedience and socialization. Just make sure that the techniques you decide to follow focus on positive reinforcement for good behaviors rather than punishment for bad ones.

Nutrition

Deciding what to feed our pet can be extremely overwhelming. There are hundreds of pet foods available, so how do you choose? And once you decide *what* you are going to feed, how do you know *how much* to feed? Veterinary nutrition experts do not always agree on the answers to these questions, but we can give you some general guidelines that help you decide. Above all, **feed to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight**. Obesity in pets is becoming increasingly common, has devastating consequences for your pet's health, and is 100% preventable. We recommend feeding at specific times each day right from the start rather than having food available all the time. For puppies this will help with training as bowel movements will be more predictable. Adults only need to be fed twice daily while young puppies need to eat 3-4 times daily. Use a measuring cup so you know how much your pet is getting each time, don't just fill up the bowl. The food you are feeding will have guidelines on the bag or can for how much to feed based on your pet's body weight. These tend to be an overestimation, but it is a place to start if you are not sure how much to feed. Also, after your pet is spayed or neutered, metabolic needs

change dramatically. You should decrease the amount you are feeding by 1/3 (yes, that means 33% less food) from the first day they come home from surgery!

When deciding what to feed; learn what to look for on the pet food label. Choose a food that is complete and balanced for your dog's life stage. There will be a statement to this effect on the label. Do not choose a food that says it is complete and balanced for **all** life stages. Next, look at the ingredients. A high quality meat product should be the first ingredient. Avoid foods that have grains such as wheat, corn, or soy in the first ingredient. Also avoid foods with pretty bright colors as it takes a lot of artificial things to make the food look so "natural". Do not change your pet's food frequently. Dogs do not need variety in their diet like people do and it can cause digestive problems if their body has to keep adjusting to new foods. Finally, when it comes to people food and table scraps, just say no. Stick to dog food and dog treats unless you want to create a begging monster. Also, many human foods are toxic to dogs (such as chocolate and grapes), and many dogs will have digestive problems if they consume human food. If you wish your dog to have human-grade food, we can help you find recipes for home cooked diets that will meet your dog's nutritional needs.

Microchips

Microchips are very small pill-shaped devices that can be implanted under the skin using a needle and contains a number unique to your pet. Shelters and veterinarians have scanners that can read this number if you pet ever becomes lost or stolen. If you are interested in having your pet microchipped, we recommend having it done at the time of spay or neuter, but it can be done at any time. Our clinic uses Home Again brand microchips.

Dental care

Pets need dental care too! Periodontal disease, which is inflammation of gum tissue and the deeper tissues around tooth roots, is the most commonly diagnosed disease in cats and dogs. More than 80% of pets older than 5 years have some form of dental disease. Periodontal disease causes tooth loss, pain and bleeding in the mouth, and allows bacteria to access the bloodstream. The best news is that **it is preventable** and there are several prevention strategies available. At home, tooth brushing is your best daily defense. Go slowly at first, use pet toothpaste or none at all, and perform once daily for best effect. Dental chews, rawhides, and dental toys a few times a week allow your pet to help with his or her own oral care. There is also a vaccine available for dogs at risk which offers protection against the bacteria that cause the most damage leading to tooth loss. Finally, scaling and polishing of the teeth under general anesthesia will usually be recommended once yearly after about 3-5 years of age.

Spay/neuter

If you do not intend to use your pet for breeding, it should be spayed or neutered, or breeding will often take place whether you intend it to or not. We generally recommend spay/neuter be performed around 6 months of age except in some small breeds due to problems with adult tooth eruption and in Labrador Retriever or Labrador mixed pets due to concerns for urinary incontinence later in life. Ask your veterinarian if there are different recommendations for your pet. In females, spaying significantly reduces the risk of mammary (breast) cancer and eliminates the risk of pyometra (life-threatening infection of the uterus). In males, neutering reduces the risk of non-cancerous prostate

problems and eliminates the risk of testicular cancer. It also reduces the risk of being hit by a car or other trauma while roaming to find females in heat.

If you are considering breeding there are several things to be aware of in order to breed responsibly. Females should not be bred until 2 years of age for optimal physical and emotional maturity, which means they will have several heat cycles that you need to keep them away from males. They should not be bred every heat cycle to give their bodies a chance to recover. You should have them screened and certified free of breed related diseases prior to breeding. Puppies should stay with their mother until 8 weeks of age for optimal social development and have first vaccines and deworming prior to going to a new home. Finally, if your dog is a mixed breed or you are considering breeding your dog to a different breed, consider that there are already many mixed breeds in shelters looking for homes.

Illness

How do you know if your puppy is sick? Call us any time you have concerns and we will help you decide if your puppy needs to be examined by a veterinarian. If your puppy has vomiting and diarrhea, especially with blood in it, parvovirus is a concern and they should be seen that same day.