



**ONTARIO  
VETERINARY  
MEDICAL  
ASSOCIATION**

**WELCOME TO  
THE FAMILY**

**A DOG  
OWNER'S  
HANDBOOK**





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# CONGRATULATIONS!

You have either added, or are considering adding, a new member to your family.

Following the proper care guidelines for your dog can ensure that you and your new companion enjoy many years of happiness together.

Your veterinarian is your partner in maintaining the good health of your dog. Regular examinations are an excellent way to prevent disease and obtain professional advice about the care of your pet.

Pet ownership is a huge responsibility. Dogs require a great deal of attention, guidance and care. In return, you will receive companionship and unconditional love from your new family member.

For more information on any of the topics covered in this handbook, talk to your veterinarian or visit our website at [ovma.org](http://ovma.org).

# GETTING READY FOR THE NEW FAMILY MEMBER

Your dog's first day in its new home is a critical event. A sudden separation from its mother and littermates can be upsetting for a puppy. How you prepare your puppy or dog for its first day in your home may determine the future behaviour of your pet.



## NEW DOG CHECKLIST

Before your new family member arrives, ensure you have the following:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| ✓ | A leash and collar   |
| ✓ | Food and water bowls   |
| ✓ | An appropriate-size crate (if crate training) or other bed/bedding |
| ✓ | Food and treats for training                                       |
| ✓ | Chew toys  |





# CRATE TRAINING

If you opt to crate train your dog, ensure that the crate is the proper size. The crate should be large enough for your dog to stand and turn around in once he is full-grown. Crates that come with an adjustable divider area are a great way to ensure the crate “grows” with your puppy. The crate should be well ventilated and contained on all sides, including the top. Newspapers or blankets can be used as bedding. This crate should be used for sleeping, and is also an ideal way to house your dog when travelling.

During the excitement of his first day in a new environment, your puppy may become tired. When this occurs, place him inside the crate for a nap. Feed him in the crate, but remove any uneaten food after he's finished eating. Your dog will become familiar with the crate and will be less likely to protest when left alone in the crate for the night. If your puppy cries during his first night at home, you can soothe him by putting the crate in your bedroom, or by placing a ticking clock near his bed. Don't remove the puppy from his crate. In time (usually a day or two), he will grow accustomed to sleeping in the crate.

A dog should not be confined to the crate all day and all night. Make sure he has ample opportunity each day to exercise, socialize and explore his surroundings.



# SOCIALIZATION AND BEHAVIOUR

Puppies don't instinctively know anything about the world in which they live—they learn about the world by experiencing it. Gradually exposing your puppy to the things he will meet during his life will help to ensure that your dog isn't afraid or anxious when confronted with people, cars or other animals.

Begin socializing your new puppy as soon as possible (ideally before four months of age). Start with one-person interactions, then gradually introduce your puppy to situations with more people. Make sure your puppy has plenty of opportunities to interact with children. Adding a treat or toy to new situations will help make it a positive experience. It's also important to teach your puppy to

be comfortable with people around their favourite toys, treats and food dish. As soon as your dog has received the appropriate vaccinations, introduce him to other dogs in the neighbourhood. Take him for short car rides to reduce the anxiety associated with travelling. Gradually introduce your dog to traffic, water and any other situations he is likely to encounter.

You can also take your puppy to training classes. These classes get puppies off to a great start in their training, and offer an excellent opportunity to socialize with other dogs and people. Ask your veterinarian about classes available in your area, and discuss any vaccinations your puppy may require prior to enrolling in these classes.





# TRAINING FOR GOOD BEHAVIOUR

Proper training can usually prevent behavioural problems like jumping, biting or excessive barking. Basic commands can be substituted in for these unwanted behaviours. Think of this as training your puppy to do what you want him to do instead of what not to do.

Training begins as soon as you get your new pet. At eight to 12 weeks, a puppy should learn to wear a collar, walk on a leash and come when called. In general, any behaviour that would not be acceptable when the dog is full grown should be discouraged when they are a puppy (e.g. jumping up).

A halter collar or gentle leader (a collar that goes over the dog's head and muzzle) may be of assistance when training your dog. These collars give you greater control and assist in the training of your puppy. Some dog owners choose to use a body harness instead of a collar. If you're thinking of using a head or body harness, ask your veterinarian for advice about what product style will best suit your pet.

Using force to train a dog can ruin your bond with your pet. Instead, train your puppy by using positive motivators like food, a favourite toy and attention.

## TRAINING TIP

Use hand signals in addition to commands. Dogs are more likely to respond to a double signal (verbal and visual) than just a verbal command.



## PUPPY TRAINING BASICS

Teach your puppy the basics as soon as possible:

|   |          |
|---|----------|
| ✓ | Come     |
| ✓ | Sit      |
| ✓ | Lay Down |
| ✓ | Stay     |

Reward your dog immediately after he performs the required task. Once the puppy begins to do as he is asked, praise him for every correct response and provide the reward on an intermittent basis.

Twelve to 16 weeks of age is a good time to begin formal obedience training. Once again, your veterinarian will be able to advise you about classes available in your area.

# DEALING WITH BAD BEHAVIOUR

## EVERY PUPPY WILL MISBEHAVE FROM TIME TO TIME

Puppies, like children, go through a mouthing (teething) stage. During this stage, they may want to chew everything in sight. The best strategy for coping with this stage is to keep valuables out of reach and give your puppy a variety of chew toys. Some toys are potentially hazardous to your dog's health, so ask your veterinarian to recommend safe toys for your dog. Puppies need to learn proper bite inhibition as part of their socialization. This is learned through proper feedback from people and other dogs that biting too hard causes pain. Through this socialization process, the puppy learns to interact without hurting anyone. Another

important aspect of bite inhibition training is to get your puppy used to being touched and handled all over. Start as soon as you get your puppy—touch their feet, ears, tail etc., and pair this with praise and rewards. This will ensure that veterinary exams, trips to the groomer and being around small children (all situations that can involve touching in places that your puppy might not expect) go smoothly.

Never punish your puppy for misbehaving using pain or fear. Punishment during the early development stages can have a negative impact on your puppy's future relationships with people. Never strike your dog. Dogs continue to perform behaviours that are reinforced. Scolding a dog for bad behaviour can sometimes inadvertently reward it, as the puppy will see this as attention. Ignoring unwanted behaviour is the best way to get rid of it. If you need to discipline your puppy, a swift and brief "time-out" will make the puppy think twice about repeating the behaviour.

Dogs are loving, devoted companions, but any dog may bite if provoked. Parents should teach children about safe behaviour around dogs. Don't disturb a dog that's eating, sleeping or caring for puppies. Never tease, chase or yell at a dog. Don't grab a dog's ears or tail. Be aware that older or injured dogs may be easily irritated or frightened. Treat all animals with respect and you will greatly reduce the likelihood of a biting incident.

If your dog is a chronic biter, take him to your veterinarian for an examination. Your veterinarian can provide advice and, if necessary, refer you to a qualified behaviour specialist or dog trainer.





# HOUSE TRAINING

Following a regular routine can help prevent accidents. Take your puppy to the same spot outside first thing in the morning, immediately after eating and right before bedtime. When your puppy eliminates outside, praise him or give him a treat. Most dogs will be trained within seven to 10 days when these simple steps are followed. A puppy isn't considered housetrained until he has gone four to eight weeks without having an accident in the home.

"Paper training" your dog is not recommended unless you intend to have your dog go to the bathroom indoors throughout its life. Some dog owners who live in highrise buildings choose to paper train their dogs. If you're house training a puppy indoors, use newspapers or puppy training pads.

As a rule, puppies should never be crated longer than their age in months, plus one (i.e. a two-month-old puppy shouldn't be crated longer than three hours). If they are crated longer, they may begin to soil their crate. This may be detrimental to the success of their long-term house training.

If your puppy is home alone each day for long periods, confine him to a small room or exercise pen. Place newspaper in the area where he's likely to go to the bathroom. The puppy's crate may be placed in the confinement area during the day, with the door open, to

be used as a sleeping area. It's important to associate good things with the confinement area. Spend some time in the area playing with your puppy, and feed him in the confinement area.

If possible, try not to leave your puppy in the confinement area for more than four hours at a time. This will speed the house training process.

## HOUSE TRAINING DOS AND DON'TS

**DO** accompany your puppy outside.

**DO** lavish your puppy with praise and/or rewards when he "gets it right."

**DO** anticipate when your puppy will need to relieve himself and take him to an appropriate place.

**DO** show your puppy where he should have gone whenever you catch him having an accident.

**DO** clean all accidents thoroughly to remove stains and odours.

**DON'T** punish your puppy for accidents.

**DON'T** push your puppy's face into the soiled area.



# NUTRITION

Good nutrition is as important for pets as it is for people. With so many different options available, choosing the right food for your dog can be a challenge. Your veterinarian is your best source of information about pet nutrition.

## UNDERSTANDING INGREDIENTS

When buying food for your dog, know what to look for. The ingredients on the label are not nearly as important as the nutritional value of the food. For example, don't assume that a brand of dog food is better because meat appears as the first ingredient on the label. The quality of the protein is more important than the source. A high-quality plant protein can provide better nutrition than a low-quality meat source. As the trend toward less processed foods has become more popular in the human world, it's also reflected in the world of animal diets. However, these diets may be missing key nutritional ingredients that are important to your pet's health. For example, grain-free dog food is intended only for pets with a grain allergy or intolerance, which isn't a problem for most dogs. And since it's been linked to heart disease, a regular diet of grain-free food could do more harm than good. It's best to ask your veterinarian to recommend a food that meets the nutritional needs of your dog.

## DOGS NEED DIFFERENT DIETS AT DIFFERENT AGES

Your dog's nutritional needs will change with age. Puppies should receive a good quality commercial "growth" food. Proper growth food will contain higher levels of protein, calories and minerals than adult diets. The age at which a dog should switch to an adult food varies from pet to pet. Consult your veterinarian about your dog's nutritional requirements. For the older pet, your veterinarian may recommend a senior diet. Other specialty diets include high-energy rations for very active dogs, low-calorie formulas for pets that are inactive or overweight, and a large selection of therapeutic diets for various

medical conditions. Because therapeutic diets are specific to the condition being addressed, they aren't appropriate for all dogs and therefore are only available through veterinary clinics under veterinary advice.

## VITAMIN AND MINERAL SUPPLEMENTS

Dogs that are fed a good quality commercial diet don't generally require any additional vitamins or minerals. In some cases, supplementation can even be harmful. For example, providing too much calcium to large-breed puppies can contribute to hip dysplasia and other orthopedic problems. Talk to your veterinarian if you think your pet may need extra vitamins and minerals.

## BOREDOM & VARIETY

There's no nutritional reason to change food if it's a balanced, high-quality diet. Although most dogs seem happy on a consistent diet, some may need variety to maintain a healthy appetite. If you change your dog's food, make sure the change is done gradually. Gradually mix the new food with the old food for five to seven days. For example, don't use more than 10 to 20 per cent of the new food on the first day. Abrupt changes in diet can cause indigestion, vomiting, diarrhea and gas.

## COST

Feeding your dog a healthy diet doesn't have to be expensive. To decide if a certain food fits your budget, consider the cost of feeding per day, not just the price of the bag or can. Higher quality foods provide more nutritional value per gram of weight, which means your dog needs less food per day. This means that a bag of an "expensive" diet can last much longer than the same-size bag of a lower quality, "cheaper" food.



## DRY VERSUS CANNED FOOD

Both dry and canned food can provide the same level of nutrition. Dry food generally costs less per serving and stays fresher when left in a bowl all day. Some people believe that feeding dry food helps to clean your dog's teeth, but this isn't true. For tips on keeping your dog's teeth clean, see the "Preventing Dental Disease" section of this handbook.

## PEOPLE FOOD

Feeding your dog the wrong kinds of people food can lead to obesity, vomiting, diarrhea, finicky eating habits, poor dental health, bone (orthopedic) problems and severe illnesses, such as pancreatitis and food poisoning. Ask your veterinarian which types of people food are OK for your dog.

## BONES

Feeding your dog bones carries the risk of broken teeth, mouth injuries, severe constipation, and potentially fatal intestinal perforations. Instead, give your dog rawhide chew strips or nylon bones.



## COMMON TOXIC FOODS FOR PETS

|   |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|
| ✗ | alcohol                       |
| ✗ | chocolate                     |
| ✗ | coffee                        |
| ✗ | caffeine                      |
| ✗ | avocado                       |
| ✗ | grapes and raisins            |
| ✗ | apple cores                   |
| ✗ | apricot pits                  |
| ✗ | cherries                      |
| ✗ | peaches                       |
| ✗ | plums                         |
| ✗ | rhubarb                       |
| ✗ | macadamia nuts                |
| ✗ | chives                        |
| ✗ | onions                        |
| ✗ | garlic                        |
| ✗ | raw/undercooked meat and eggs |
| ✗ | xylitol                       |
| ✗ | yeast dough                   |
| ✗ | salt and salty snacks         |

## HOMEMADE DIETS

Some dog owners choose to feed their dog homemade diets instead of commercial dog food. If you're considering using a homemade diet, there are important rules to follow when selecting ingredients and preparing the food for your dog. Consult your veterinarian to make sure that the diet meets your dog's nutritional needs.

## FOOD ALLERGIES

Like people, dogs can be allergic to many things, even food. True food allergies are uncommon in pets. When they do occur, the symptoms are usually severe itching,



hair loss and a rash. A rash may be accompanied by a skin infection caused by self-chewing, itching and scratching. Vomiting and diarrhea may also be present. If you suspect that your pet has a food allergy, talk to your veterinarian. If a food allergy exists, it's very important that your veterinarian helps you select an appropriate diet for your pet. There are many different foods out there now labelled as hypoallergenic but may not be.

#### **HOW MUCH SHOULD I FEED MY DOG?**

How much you feed your dog will depend on a variety of factors, including the nutritional value and energy content of the food, and your dog's breed, age and level of activity. The recommended daily amount listed on the food packaging is only a guideline. It's important to monitor your dog's body condition on a regular basis to know if you're feeding the right amount. To get a sense of your dog's optimal condition, run your hands along your

dog's side. The dog's ribs may not be visible, but they should be easily felt. If you can't feel the ribs, speak to your veterinarian about an appropriate volume and type of food.

Obesity can cause a variety of health problems and can shorten your dog's life. Your veterinarian will weigh your pet on every visit. After weighing your dog, your veterinarian can tell you if an adjustment in diet is needed to maintain a healthy weight.

#### **HOW OFTEN SHOULD I FEED MY DOG?**

Puppies should be meal fed two to three times a day until they are at least six months of age. This means that the recommended amount of food is placed in the bowl, and if the puppy doesn't eat it all within about 30 minutes, the food is removed and no more food is offered until the next meal. Adult dogs should be fed once or twice a day, and should always have fresh water available.



# EXERCISE

Exercise is an essential part of keeping your pet healthy. The amount of exercise necessary varies from dog to dog, but walking is an excellent way to bond with your dog and meet his exercise needs. Other forms of exercise include running with your dog, racing, agility trials, obedience training, swimming and fly ball. While some dogs enjoy playing frisbee, it's not the sport for every dog because it can be hard on the joints. Catching a ball can be fun, but the ball shouldn't be fuzzy (like a tennis ball) as this can hurt the teeth. Small balls should also be avoided, as they are a choking

hazard. All of these activities require training and conditioning. Consult your veterinarian for help designing a fitness program for your dog.

Keeping your pet in top physical shape and optimum health is the goal of every responsible pet owner. Together with your veterinarian, you can ensure that your pet stays healthy for years to come. The routine physical examination that your veterinarian performs on your pet is crucial to maintaining your pet's good health.



# WHY ARE REGULAR CHECK- UPS IMPORTANT?

## EARLY DISEASE DETECTION

Checkups provide an opportunity to detect diseases early or prevent them altogether. Unfortunately, many pet owners underestimate the value of these visits because their pet appears to be healthy. However, many diseases and ailments, such as dental disease or a heart murmur, are often not evident in the early stages.

## OBESITY/NUTRITIONAL COUNSELLING

As noted earlier, feeding a proper diet rates as one of the most important considerations in health maintenance. Its importance lies not only in optimizing a pet's health, but also in the prevention and management of many diseases.

Nutritional counselling is an essential part of the veterinary checkup, and many pet owners use the annual examination as an opportunity to gain valuable advice on what to feed their pets. Your veterinarian also uses the annual examination to determine if your pet has an obesity problem.

Obesity affects almost one out of every three pets and is the most common nutritional disease among dogs and cats. A thorough physical examination allows your veterinarian to assess if your pet would benefit from a weight-reduction program.

## HELP WITH BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS

The checkup also provides you with the opportunity to ask questions about training and hygiene. Obedience training is important for your pet's health because behavioural problems account for more deaths in dogs than any known disease. In fact, a well-trained and obedient dog is more likely to live to a ripe old age than a poorly trained one. Other behavioural issues like fear of thunderstorms or separation anxiety can show up at any age. Your veterinarian can help with these problems, so it's important to mention any change in behaviour.

## WHAT HAPPENS DURING AN EXAMINATION?

Before the physical examination begins, your veterinarian will ask you questions concerning your pet's state of health. This is very important for determining if there are problem areas that need to be addressed. For example, a history of poor weight gain or weight loss can provide a clue to your veterinarian that a health problem may be starting. Puppies may be showing signs of parasites. Older dogs may be in the early stages of diabetes or kidney disease.

With laboratory testing of your dog's stool, blood and/or urine, your veterinarian can detect the presence of these ailments.

After obtaining a history, your veterinarian performs a physical examination of your pet. Your veterinarian will examine your dog's eyes, ears, face and mouth. Examining the teeth is especially important, since up to 80 per cent of all dogs and cats over three years of age have some degree of dental disease.





Your veterinarian will also examine your pet's coat, looking for signs of parasites (such as fleas), and to ensure that their coat isn't too dry or too oily. Your veterinarian will also check your pet's weight. If your pet is too heavy, a change in diet may be required to avoid health problems related to obesity. If your pet is losing weight over time, it could be a sign that your pet has a related medical problem that needs further examination.

During the physical examination, your veterinarian will listen to your pet's chest with a stethoscope to make sure there are no respiratory or heart problems. Some early warning signs of heart failure can be detected in this way. About 12 per cent of the dog population experience heart problems. Some of these heart problems can lead to heart failure, so early detection is crucial.

Your veterinarian will also feel your pet's abdomen, check his lymph nodes and examine the rest of his body for any lumps or bumps.

In addition to the physical examination, your veterinarian may also recommend further diagnostic testing, such as a blood test. These tests can often detect hidden disease. Early detection allows for more successful treatment of ailments than would be possible if the treatment did not begin until the dog appears sick.

### **HOW OFTEN SHOULD MY PET BE EXAMINED?**

When you don't feel well, you know it, and you seek medical help when appropriate. Unfortunately, since your pet can't talk, you don't always know when he's not feeling well.

In fact, because predators in the wild tend to prey on the sick or the infirm, an animal's natural instinct is to try to hide health problems. You should therefore take your pet to your veterinarian at least once a year for a complete physical examination. The average life span of a dog is short relative to humans. Because dogs age so much faster than we do, a visit to the veterinarian every six months is like a person visiting their family doctor no more than every two years. Your pet's health can change a great deal over the course of even a few months. Consequently, many pet owners choose to have a physical examination done every six months. This is highly recommended after your pet has reached seven years of age.

Consult your veterinarian if you notice any significant changes in your pet's health. These changes can include a persistent cough, loss of appetite, vomiting, diarrhea, swelling, lumps or bumps on or under the skin, tender spots or a change in behaviour, weight, bladder or bowel habits.

To learn more about the benefits of the physical examination, talk to your veterinarian.

# VACCINATIONS

Vaccinations help protect your pet from potentially serious and fatal diseases. Vaccinations cost considerably less than the treatments available for the diseases pets are normally vaccinated against.

Speak with your veterinarian, who will be able to advise you on the choices of vaccinations and timeline, which may vary because of your pet's age and health status, exposure conditions and immune status.

Vaccines available for dogs include:

|   |                         |
|---|-------------------------|
| ✓ | Rabies                  |
| ✓ | Distemper               |
| ✓ | Adenovirus              |
| ✓ | Parainfluenza           |
| ✓ | Parvovirus              |
| ✓ | Leptospirosis           |
| ✓ | Lyme disease            |
| ✓ | Bordetella              |
| ✓ | Canine influenza (H3N2) |

## WHEN DOES MY PUPPY NEED HIS FIRST VACCINATIONS?

Puppies require a series of vaccinations during their first four months of life. Nursing pups receive antibodies from their mother's milk (maternal antibodies) that protect them from disease during the first months of life. These same antibodies can prevent a vaccine from being totally effective.

As maternal antibodies decrease, your veterinarian will give your pet a series of vaccines starting at six to eight weeks of age. These vaccines provide your pet with the best possible protection.

## WHY DOES MY DOG NEED REGULAR BOOSTER VACCINATIONS FOR THE SAME DISEASE?

The protection provided by a vaccine gradually declines over time. Your dog needs regular "booster" vaccinations to ensure ongoing immunity from disease. It's very important that you follow the vaccination schedule provided by your veterinarian. Missing a vaccine booster could put your pet at risk of contracting disease.

The necessity of annual vaccinations is a topic that is currently under investigation within veterinary medicine. Unfortunately, the duration of immunity for each vaccine is not currently known. Until more is known about the duration of immunity, the frequency and type of vaccines administered will vary. Talk to your veterinarian about the risk of viral and bacterial diseases in your area, and the recommended interval between vaccinations.

## WHY DOES MY VETERINARIAN HAVE TO DO A PHYSICAL EXAMINATION BEFORE VACCINATING MY DOG?

It is important to administer vaccines only to healthy animals. If the animal is already suffering from an illness, or is receiving certain drugs, its immune system may not be able to respond to the vaccine. For that reason, your veterinarian will ask you about your pet's medical history and perform a complete physical examination before vaccinating your pet.

## HOW COMMON ARE REACTIONS TO VACCINES?

Like a drug, a vaccine can cause an adverse reaction. These reactions range from mild (some discomfort at the injection site, lethargy or loss of appetite for a day or so) to more severe (allergic reaction, immunologic reactions). If your pet has reacted to a vaccine in the past, inform your veterinarian before another vaccine is administered.

# SPAYING & NEUTERING

Every year in animal shelters across Canada, thousands of unwanted pets are euthanized. Spaying or neutering your dog will help prevent the birth of unwanted puppies, while also benefitting your pet in a number of other ways.

## SPAYING OF THE FEMALE DOG

This surgical procedure, also known as an ovariectomy, involves the complete removal of the dog's ovaries and uterus. The surgery eliminates any chance of pregnancy, as well as all heat cycles, the accompanying unwanted bleeding and the desire to mate. Spaying your dog will protect it from uterine infections and other diseases. Studies have shown that dogs spayed before their first heat cycle are also much less likely to develop breast cancer.

## NEUTERING OF THE MALE DOG

Neutering is the removal of the dog's testicles. Neutering reduces the risk of developing prostate and testicular cancers and infections, as well as some behavioural problems.

## THE FOLLOWING ASSUMPTIONS ARE FALSE:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| ✘ | Dogs cannot be spayed until they have had their first "heat period" or a litter of puppies. |
| ✘ | My dog's personality will be affected by spaying.   |
| ✘ | Dogs that are spayed become fat and lazy.   |

Neutering will also make a male dog less likely to roam in search of mates.

Talk to your veterinarian for advice on when to spay or neuter your dog, and to learn more about what's involved in this procedure.



# TICKS & LYME DISEASE



## TICKS IN ONTARIO

Blacklegged ticks (also called deer ticks) live in woodlands, tall grasses and bushes. They are most commonly found in areas along the north shore of Lake Erie, Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River. Over the years, blacklegged ticks have spread to new areas of the province because of climate change and warmer temperatures. While the probability is low, it's possible to encounter a tick infested with Lyme disease almost anywhere in Ontario.

### How can I protect my dog against ticks?

- Avoid tick infested areas.
- Check your pet daily for ticks, especially after spending time outdoors.
- Talk to your veterinarian about tick preventive products and/or a Lyme disease vaccination for your dog.

### Tick removal

Follow these steps to remove ticks from humans and dogs:

- Use fine-tipped tweezers or a tick removal tool to grasp the tick as close to the skin as possible.
- Pull the tick straight out, gently but firmly, making sure to remove the entire tick (including the head).
- Place the tick in a secure container (e.g. medication bottle).
- Thoroughly clean the bite site with rubbing alcohol and/or soap and water.

Consult your veterinarian for more information about Lyme disease, including testing, vaccination and tick control products.

## COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT LYME DISEASE

### What is Lyme disease?

Lyme disease is an illness caused by the bacterium, *Borrelia burgdorferi*, which can be spread through the bite of certain types of ticks. In Ontario, Lyme disease is only spread by the blacklegged tick. Not all blacklegged ticks carry Lyme disease, and the tick must be infected by the bacteria causing Lyme disease to spread it to you and your pet. Lyme disease can have serious symptoms, but most cases can be effectively prevented and treated.

### Can dogs develop Lyme disease?

Yes. Lyme disease in dogs is characterized by a sudden onset of lameness, pain and sometimes swelling in one or more joints. Other signs may include fever, lack of appetite, dehydration, inactivity and swollen lymph nodes. In severe cases, the infection can cause kidney failure and death, although this isn't common.

Typically, clinical signs occur in about 10 per cent of infected dogs, and signs tend to show up two to five months after the tick has transmitted the bacterium.

### Is Lyme disease in dogs treatable?

Yes, Lyme disease can be treated with antibiotics. The clinical signs caused by *Borrelia burgdorferi* usually regress rapidly in response to appropriate antibiotic treatment. However, once infected the bacteria is never completely cleared and clinical signs can recur at any time. This is why it's important to know the Lyme status of your dog. If the disease remains untreated, dogs may suffer chronic recurrent arthritis and it can also lead to kidney damage.

# HEARTWORM, FLEAS & OTHER PARASITES



## HEARTWORM PREVENTION

Heartworm is a blood parasite that poses a serious health threat to dogs in Ontario. Heartworms are large worms that live in the heart and the blood vessels that supply the lungs. They can grow to a length of 15 to 30 centimetres, and in severe cases, a dog may be infested with hundreds of worms. They damage the heart, lungs and liver, and can result in death when internal organs are damaged.

Heartworms are spread from infected dogs to uninfected dogs by mosquitoes. The worms travel to the heart where they will mature into adults and begin reproducing until treatment is given.

Treatment for heartworm disease is available, but the methods are costly and complications could occur. Prevention is the key. After a negative heartworm (blood) test is obtained, a preventive program should be started. Preventive medication destroys the immature heartworms transmitted by the mosquitoes and stops the cycle of the disease.

**IF YOU HAVE ADOPTED A DOG FROM ANOTHER COUNTRY, BE SURE TO HAVE IT PROPERLY TESTED FOR POTENTIAL DISEASE OR PARASITES, INCLUDING HEARTWORM DISEASE. YOUR VETERINARIAN CAN ADVISE YOU ON THE APPROPRIATE TESTING REQUIRED TO ENSURE YOUR ADOPTED PET IS HEARTWORM FREE.**

## COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT HEARTWORM

**Do I need to worry about heartworm in my area?**

Surveys show that heartworm continues to be diagnosed in many areas of Ontario. Preventive heartworm medication is an essential part of proper health care for your dog.

**If my dog is always indoors and never gets bitten by a mosquito, does it need a heartworm prevention program?**

Mosquitoes are a fact of life during the summer months in Ontario. We have yet to see a foolproof method of avoiding contact with the insect, even indoors. Remember, it only takes one mosquito bite to infect a dog with heartworm. Consult with your veterinarian about diagnosis and prevention of canine heartworm disease.

## FLEAS & OTHER PARASITES

Parasites may be either internal or external. External parasites live on a dog's skin, while internal parasites live within your pet.



Fleas are the most common external parasites. They cause skin irritation and can transmit some types of tapeworms. Check under your dog's coat for small black specks on your dog's skin. These specks are the fecal droppings left by fleas. Other possible external parasites include lice, mites and ticks.

Consult your veterinarian if you suspect that your pet has fleas or any other external parasite. There are a variety of convenient, safe and effective methods to control these pests. Fleas can live for several months in your house and yard. You may have to treat these areas in addition to your dog and any other dogs and cats that live in the same household.

Other internal parasites include giardia, coccidia, hookworms, roundworms, tapeworms and whipworms. The microscopic analysis of your dog's stool will determine whether he has internal parasites. Consult your veterinarian about having your dog's stool analyzed to detect if any of these parasites are present.

To prevent against infection by internal parasites, remove and dispose of fecal material from your yard as soon as your pet passes stool. You should also discourage your dog from any stool-eating behaviour.

Some internal parasites may also be passed from pets to people. It's important to always "stoop and scoop" after your pet eliminates.

#### **DO PARASITES CAUSE "SCOOTING"?**

If you notice your dog "scooting" (pulling itself along with its rear end dragging on the floor), he is likely suffering from impacted material in the anal glands. This is a common condition in dogs and isn't usually caused by parasites. Tell your veterinarian, and he or she will remove the impacted material. Your veterinarian may recommend that a fecal sample be checked for worms.





# PREVENTING DENTAL DISEASE

Oral hygiene is one of the most important aspects of pet health care. It's estimated that 80 per cent of pets over the age of three have significant dental disease. Of that number, 50 per cent require immediate attention.

Periodontal disease causes pain and discomfort and puts your pet at risk for other problems, including lung, heart, kidney and joint infections. This occurs because bacteria can get into the bloodstream and become widely distributed throughout the body.

Just like humans, dogs will have two sets of teeth during their lives. A puppy's first set of teeth is replaced by the permanent teeth at about three months of age, which will continue to grow until the puppy is about six months old. The permanent teeth should remove the puppy teeth. Two teeth should never be in one spot. If you notice this occurring, you should consult your veterinarian and have the puppy tooth extracted immediately to prevent the adult tooth from settling in the wrong position.

Bones and cow hoofs can cause tooth fractures that require root canals or extractions, and should never be given to dogs. Nylon bones or other dental chews are preferable. They are available at many veterinary clinics and at most pet supply stores.

## HOME DENTAL CARE

When your dog is three to four months of age, start brushing his teeth daily using a toothbrush with soft bristles. It takes an average of two months for your pet to get used to having their teeth brushed, but the health rewards are well worth it.

There are a variety of toothpastes and liquid gum conditioners available for dogs. Consult your veterinarian for the one best suited to your pet. Human toothpastes, salt, and baking soda should not be used. The foaming action of human toothpaste is irritating, and the amount of fluoride may be toxic if swallowed.

## VETERINARY DENTAL TREATMENTS

If your pet has existing periodontal disease, the only way to clean the teeth is under general anesthesia. The teeth are examined, cleaned above and below the gum line, and polished. A medicated solution is then flushed below the gum line to remove debris and reduce bacteria. Fluoride may then be applied to the teeth.

A thorough oral hygiene treatment by your veterinarian will take anywhere from 35 minutes to an hour or more, depending on the severity of the dental disease.

There are foods, water additives and treats available that can help to reduce the amount of tarter and plaque on pets' teeth. Before giving one or more of these products to your dog, ask your veterinarian to suggest the most appropriate product for your dog. For more information on pet dentistry, talk to your veterinarian.

# PET IDENTIFICATION

Proper identification can mean the difference between life and death for your dog. Provincial law requires animal shelter operators to take reasonable steps to find and notify the owner of any found dog or cat that has a license tag, microchip or other means of identification. However, fewer than 40 per cent of dogs in shelters are ever recovered by their owners because they aren't identified.

If you have a municipal dog licence tag, attach the tag to your dog's collar immediately. Increasingly, pet owners are microchipping their pets.

A microchip is a tiny chip that's inserted beneath the animal's skin by your veterinarian. The microchip is permanent and can't be lost. If your dog is lost and recovered by an animal shelter, the shelter will scan him for the chip. When the chip is scanned, the shelter will be able to find out the name and address of the



dog's owner. In many municipalities, microchipping your pet also decreases the cost of a dog licence.

Ask your veterinarian for more information about microchipping.

## GROOMING

Grooming is important to your dog's health and happiness.

Your veterinarian can give you advice on how often to bathe your puppy and what type of shampoo to use.

Thorough brushing is the most important part of good grooming. Comb or brush your dog's coat on a regular basis to prevent matting and knots.

Some breeds will require daily brushing, and even regular clipping. Ask your veterinarian whether your dog has any special grooming needs.

Long toenails can cause problems for your dog. They may cause the dog's foot to become misaligned over time. Overgrown nails may also dig painfully into the fleshy part of the toe.

Special toenail clippers are required to clip the nails. Cutting the "quick" (nerve and vessel of the toenail) may result in considerable bleeding. If bleeding does occur, a styptic pencil or baking soda and a bandage will normally stop the bleeding. Your veterinarian can show you how to properly trim your dog's nails, or you can ask your veterinarian or a professional groomer to trim the nails for you.

# BEWARE OF THESE HEALTH HAZARDS

## HEATSTROKE

Never leave your pet inside a parked car on a warm day. Within minutes, the temperature inside the car can reach a scorching 50°C or more. Extreme temperatures can cause heatstroke, which may kill or seriously injure your dog. Signs of heatstroke include hard panting, difficulty breathing, vomiting and rapid heart rate. If you suspect that your pet has heatstroke, try to cool your pet down and see your veterinarian immediately.

## PLANTS

Be aware of the plants you have in your home and yard. Just to name a few, azaleas, oleanders, mistletoe, sago palms, lilies, poinsettas and yews can be toxic or fatal to your dog.

## HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS

Never allow your pets to have access to the areas in which cleaning agents are being used or stored. Cleaning agents have a variety of properties; some may only cause mild stomach upset, but others can cause severe burns of the tongue, mouth and stomach.

Many other common household items can be lethal to animals. Mothballs, potpourri oils, coffee grounds, homemade play dough, fabric softener sheets, dishwashing and laundry detergent pods, batteries, cigarettes, alcoholic drinks, and hand and foot warmers are all highly toxic, even in small quantities. Antifreeze and rat bait are particularly appealing to dogs and should be kept out of your dog's reach. Human medications can also be extremely dangerous if ingested by pets. Keep all over-the-counter and prescription medications out of their reach, and always ask your veterinarian before giving your pet any human medications.

Make sure your pets don't go on lawns or in gardens treated with fertilizers, herbicides or insecticides until they have dried completely. It's preferable to keep pets off treated areas for several days. Always store such products in areas that are inaccessible to your companion animals.





# RABIES

## WHAT IS RABIES?

Rabies is a viral disease transmitted through the saliva or tissues in the nervous system from one infected mammal to another. Rabies can be transmitted from a wild animal (e.g. bat or raccoon) to a dog, cat or human, and from pets to humans via a bite or scratch. The virus attacks the central nervous system, causing severe neurological symptoms and then death. Rabies is one of the deadliest diseases on Earth, with a 99.9 per cent fatality rate.

## DOES RABIES EXIST IN ONTARIO?

Yes, rabies poses a significant threat to wildlife, pets and humans in Ontario. Over the last several years, there's been a spike of cases in wildlife, primarily in bats, skunks, foxes and racoons. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency tracks the number of reported rabies cases in each province by year. To view a list of reported cases by area, visit [inspection.gc.ca](http://inspection.gc.ca) and type in the search "rabies in Canada".

## HOW CAN I PROTECT MY DOG AGAINST RABIES?

The best way to protect against rabies is by vaccinating your pet. By law, all dogs three months of age and over must have either a current Certificate of Vaccination or a current Statement of Exemption issued by a veterinarian for that animal. Unvaccinated animals are a risk to human health, and owners of unvaccinated animals can be subject to fines.

## HOW LONG DOES THE RABIES VACCINE LAST?

Rabies vaccinations protect your pet for one to three years, depending on the vaccine used. Talk to your veterinarian about the vaccine that's best for your pet.

## MY DOG CAME INTO CONTACT WITH A WILD ANIMAL THAT I'M CONCERNED MIGHT BE RABID. WHAT DO I DO?

If you suspect your pet may have been exposed to a rabid animal, contact your veterinarian immediately.



# OVMA

# PET HEALTH INSURANCE

Pet insurance is one of the best ways to plan for unexpected illnesses or injuries. It's estimated that half of all pets will have a major illness in their lifetime. Veterinarians can now offer advanced treatments to help your pet recover from illness or injury, but these treatments can be costly, and veterinary bills can climb to several thousand dollars or more. Pet insurance can help protect you from unexpected costs while providing the best veterinary care for your pet.

OVMA Pet Health Insurance is the first pet health insurance designed and backed by Ontario's veterinarians. Features include:

- Transparent coverage, with the program covering 80 per cent of the cost of treatment, including the examination and taxes.
- A unique, independent review process for any claims disputes.

- Reimbursements can be sent directly to the veterinary practice, so pet owners don't have to pay the entire bill upfront.
- Quick (often same-day) claims processing.
- A portion of the proceeds from each policy goes to support the Farley Foundation, which helps low-income pet owners pay for the cost of veterinary care.

For more information about OVMA Pet Health Insurance, visit [ovmapetinsurance.com](http://ovmapetinsurance.com) or speak to your veterinarian.



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Established by the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association in 2002, the Farley Foundation is a registered charity that assists people and pets in need by subsidizing the cost of veterinary care for the pets that mean the world to them.

To learn more, visit:  
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# **ONTARIO VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION**

**ONTARIO VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION**

205-420 Bronte St S

Milton, ON L9T 0H9

[ovma.org](http://ovma.org)

[info@ovma.org](mailto:info@ovma.org)

1.800.670.1702

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