The Healthy Dog

AN INTRO TO

Keeping Your Dog Healthy

THE AMERICAN KENNEL CLUB
Your dog will rely on you to keep him in good health. A proper diet, regular exercise and grooming, and routine checkups at the veterinarian will help keep your dog in top form. It’s also important for you to get to know your dog’s habits—eating, drinking, sleeping, and so forth—since sometimes a variation in those habits can be an indication that he isn’t feeling well.

The information in this e-book should be used as a guide for keeping your dog healthy and identifying problems. Ask your veterinarian for advice on prevention and health care, and be sure to seek medical advice if you think your dog is ill or hurt. The [AKC Pet Healthcare Plan](#) can help with the cost of providing quality health care throughout your dog’s life.
Signs of Good Health
Skin—Healthy skin is flexible and smooth, without scabs, growths, white flakes, or red areas. It ranges in color from pale pink to brown or black, depending on the breed. Spotted skin is normal, whether the dog has a spotted or solid coat. Check your dog for fleas, ticks, lice, or other external parasites. To do this, blow gently on your dog’s stomach or brush hair backward in a few places to see if any small specks scurry away or if ticks are clinging to the skin. Black “dirt” on your dog’s skin or bedding may be a sign of flea droppings.

Coat—A healthy coat, whether short or long, is glossy and pliable, without dandruff, bald spots, or excessive oiliness.

Eyes—Healthy eyes are bright and shiny. Mucus and watery tears are normal but should be minimal and clear. The pink lining of the eyelids should not be inflamed, swollen, or have a yellow discharge. Sometimes you can see your dog’s third eyelid, a light membrane, at the inside corner of an eye. It may slowly come up to cover his eye as he goes to sleep. The whites of your dog’s eyes should not be yellowish. Eyelashes should not rub the eyeball.
Ears—The skin inside your dog’s ears should be light pink and clean. There should be some yellow or brownish wax, but a large amount of wax or crust is abnormal. There should be no redness or swelling inside the ear, and your dog shouldn’t scratch his ears or shake his head frequently. Dogs with long, hairy ears, such as Cocker Spaniels, need extra attention to keep the ears dry and clean inside and out.

Nose—A dog’s nose is usually cool and moist. It can be black, pink, or self-colored (the same color as the coat), depending on the breed. Nasal discharge should be clear, never yellowish, thick, bubbly, or foul smelling. A cool, wet nose does not necessarily mean the dog is healthy, and a dry, warm nose doesn’t necessarily mean he’s sick. Taking his temperature is a better indication of illness.
**Mouth, Teeth and Gums**—Healthy gums are firm and pink, black, or spotted, just like the dog’s skin. Young dogs have smooth white teeth that tend to darken with age. Puppies have 23 baby teeth and adults have around 42 permanent teeth, depending on the breed. As adult teeth come in, they push baby teeth out of the mouth.

To check your dog’s mouth, talk to him gently, then put your hand over the muzzle and lift up the sides of his mouth. Check that adult teeth are coming in as they should and not being crowded by baby teeth. Make sure the gums are healthy and the breath is not foul smelling. Look for soft white matter or hard white, yellow, or brown matter. This is plaque or tartar and should be brushed away.

Mouth infections can lead to serious problems in the gums and other parts of the body, including the heart, so it’s important to give your dog’s teeth and mouth special attention.
Elimination—Urine is a good indicator of a dog’s health, and should be clear yellow. Most adult dogs have one or two bowel movements a day. Stools should be brown and firm. Runny, watery, or bloody stools, straining, or too much or too little urination warrant a call to the veterinarian.

Weight—A healthy dog’s weight is the result of the balance between diet and exercise. If he is getting enough nutritious food and exercise but still seems over- or underweight, he may have a health problem. Don’t let your dog get fat by giving him too many between-meal snacks; obese dogs often develop serious health problems. The best way to tell if your dog is overweight is to feel his rib-cage area. You should be able to feel the ribs below the surface of the skin without much padding.
Vaccinations
Regular vaccinations from your veterinarian can keep your dog from getting serious and sometimes fatal illnesses such as distemper, parvovirus, hepatitis, leptospirosis, coronavirus, and rabies. A vaccination is also available for kennel cough, a respiratory problem that affects young dogs or dogs exposed to many other dogs.

A puppy’s first vaccines ideally should be given at 5 or 6 weeks of age and continue over a period of several weeks, up to 16 weeks. Afterward, yearly booster shots provide the protection your dog will need. To ensure immunity, be sure to stick to the schedule devised by your veterinarian.
Spaying or Neutering Your Dog
Unless you know you are going to show your dog, it is best to have your female spayed or your male neutered. Spaying or neutering is a fail-safe method of birth control.

A spay operation removes the female dog’s ovaries and uterus. A spayed female will not come into season two or three times a year, as unspayed females do. She will not attract male dogs from miles around, she will not discharge on rugs, sofas, or bedding, and she will not be prone to diseases such as pyometra (uterine infection) and mammary cancer.

A neutered male cannot breed successfully. His desire to roam in search of females will be reduced, and he may be less aggressive in defending his territory. Also, he will be less susceptible to prostate cancer.

Apart from these benefits, spaying or neutering will not change your dog’s personality.
When to Call the Vet?
You should alert your veterinarian if your dog exhibits any unusual behavior. Watch for the following symptoms:

- Vomiting, diarrhea, or excessive urination for more than 12 hours.
- Fainting.
- Loss of balance, staggering, falling.
- Constipation or straining to urinate.
- Runny eyes or nose.
- Persistent scratching at eyes or ears.
- Thick discharge from eyes, ears, nose, or sores.
- Coughing or sneezing.
- Difficult breathing, prolonged panting.
- Shivering.
- Whining for no apparent reason.
- Loss of appetite for 24 hours or more.
- Weight loss.
- Dramatic increase in appetite for 24 hours or more.
- Increased restlessness.
- Excessive sleeping or unusual lack of activity.
- Limping, holding, or protecting part of the body.
- Excessive drinking of water.
- White gums.
Thank you for reading! We hope this information was valuable to you in helping your pet live a long, healthy, happy life. Below, find additional products and services designed to strengthen the bond between you and your furry family member.

A specialty box of quality toys, treats, and fun meant to strengthen the bond between dogs and their owners. Look inside the box!

The AKC GoodDog! Helpline offers dog owners access to a telephone service that provides live training advice from knowledgeable American Kennel Club trainers.

The Guide to Dog Care and Training DVD presents basic care, nutrition, and training tips from AKC experts.

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