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## HOW TO TAKE CARE OF YOUR

Keeping your  
dog healthy  
and happy

# dog

[www.rspca.org.uk/dogs](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs)

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Owning and caring for a dog can be great fun and very rewarding, but it's a big responsibility and a long-term commitment in terms of care and cost – typically, dogs live for thirteen years, but many may live for much longer.

If you own or are responsible for a dog, even on a temporary basis, you are required by law to care for him/her properly.



There is no one 'perfect' way to care for all dogs because every dog and every situation is different! While many dogs are kept inside their owners' homes, some dogs are kept outside in kennels. It's up to you how you look after your dog, but you must take reasonable steps to ensure that you meet all of his/her needs.

**Under the Animal Welfare Act, pet owners are now legally obliged to care for their pets properly – as most owners already do – by providing the following five basic welfare needs.**

- 1** A suitable place to live.
- 2** A healthy diet, including fresh clean water.
- 3** The ability to behave normally.
- 4** Appropriate company, including any need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals.
- 5** Protection from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

**This booklet will help you to find out more about what your dog needs to stay healthy and happy.**

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# Environment

## MAKE SURE YOUR DOG HAS A SUITABLE PLACE TO LIVE

Dogs are intelligent so if they get bored, and don't have enough to do, they can suffer. You need to make sure your dog can exercise outdoors every day, play and interact with people or other dogs (if appropriate). Your dog also needs to be able to go to the toilet every few hours. He/she will be inquisitive and playful, so you'll have to make sure there are plenty of entertaining toys or activities.



### Home comforts

When they're not having fun playing or out on a walk, dogs and puppies need a comfortable, dry, draught-free, clean and quiet place to snooze in, as well as somewhere they can hide to avoid things that scare them. Always look out for a bed that is easy to clean and big enough to allow your dog to go through his/her natural routine of turning around before settling. Make sure that it's the right size and made of material that is safe for your dog.



Your dog will need lots of suitable objects to chew and play with. If you have more than one dog, you need to make sure there is always sufficient water for them all, as well as enough toys, beds, and hiding places to go round to reduce the chances of them becoming competitive and fighting.



## Dog crates

Dog crates are widely available and can provide an open 'den' area which some dogs like to use as a safe place where they feel secure. They can also be used as a training aid to help puppies to learn to be left alone or with toilet training – but crates should never be used as a punishment or to prevent unwanted behaviour. Sometimes a vet may advise the use of a crate to help recovery after surgery and they can also be used to keep dogs secure and comfortable while they are travelling.

»» Download our factsheet on *Dog crates* at: [www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/environment](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/environment).

## Keeping dogs outside

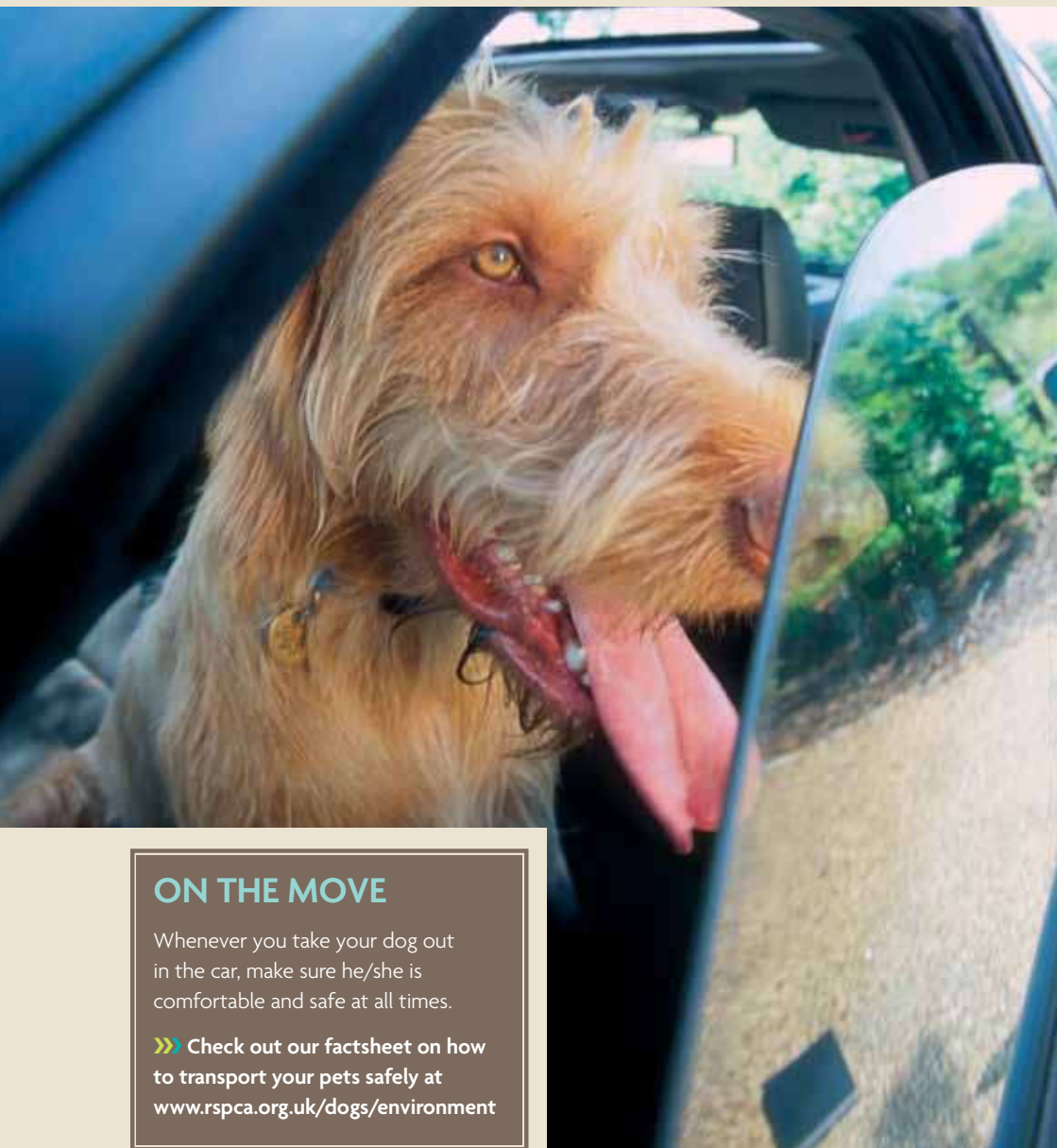
The RSPCA advises against keeping dogs outside because it can be very difficult to meet their needs. Living in a cold or wet place can cause a dog to suffer and may lead to illness.

You may be thinking of keeping your dog outside because of a behaviour problem – for example, toilet training or chewing – which is preventing you keeping him/her in the house. If this is the case, always talk to your vet first, to rule out any underlying health reasons. You may then be referred to a clinical animal behaviourist for further help.

»» For more information on clinical animal behaviourists see page 18.

»» If you still want to keep your dog outside, you can find out more about how to keep him/her healthy and happy at: [www.rspca.org.uk/dogs](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs).





## ON THE MOVE

Whenever you take your dog out in the car, make sure he/she is comfortable and safe at all times.

» Check out our factsheet on how to transport your pets safely at [www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/environment](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/environment)

## Don't leave your dog alone in a car.

If you want to take your dog with you on a car journey, make sure that your destination is dog-friendly – you won't be able to leave your dog in the car and you don't want your day out to be ruined! If you go on a long journey, make sure he/she gets regular stops to have a drink, exercise and go to the toilet.

It can get unbearably hot in a car on a sunny day, even when it's not that warm. In fact, when it's 22°C/72°F outside, the temperature inside a car can soar to 47°C/117°F within sixty minutes. You should never leave a dog alone in a car.

Your dog should always be able to move into a cool, ventilated environment if he/she is feeling hot and have access to cool, fresh water to drink. Unlike humans, dogs pant to help keep themselves cool. In a hot stuffy car dogs can't cool down – leaving a window open or a sunshield on your windscreen won't keep your car cool enough. Dogs die in hot cars.

By law, if you put your animal at risk, you could face prosecution. You would also have to live with the fact that your actions resulted in terrible suffering for your pet.

»» If you see a dog left alone in a car on a warm day please call the police on 999.



## Top tips for summer

If you have to leave your dog outside, you must provide a cool shady spot where he/she can escape from the sun at all times of the day with a good supply of drinking water, in a weighted bowl that can't be knocked over.

Never leave your dog in a glass conservatory or a caravan and groom him/her regularly to get rid of excess hair. Your dog will still need to be exercised every day, so walk him/her early in the morning or later in the evening when it's cooler. Never allow your dog to exercise excessively in hot weather.

»» Find out more about heatstroke early warning signs and first aid advice at: [www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/healthandwelfare](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/healthandwelfare).



# Diet

## MAKE SURE YOUR DOG HAS A HEALTHY DIET

Your dog needs a well-balanced diet to stay fit and healthy as well as constant access to fresh, clean drinking water at all times. How much your dog needs to eat will depend on things such as age, how active he/she is and his/her general health. If your dog eats more food than necessary, he/she will become overweight and may suffer.

Always ask your vet for advice on what, and how much, to feed your dog. Dog food can be wet or dry and what is suitable will depend on your individual dog's needs. Meal times should always be supervised and always make sure plenty of clean, fresh drinking water is available, especially if you choose a dried food, as it can make your dog very thirsty.

Whatever prepared food you choose, always read the manufacturer's instructions. Once you've found a balanced diet which







suits your dog, then stick to it. Changing diets suddenly can lead to upset stomachs. Unless advised otherwise by your vet, feed your dog at least once a day.

Ask your vet for advice if you need to change your dog's diet for any reason (such as his/her age, activity levels or health problems). If your dog's eating or drinking habits change, talk to your vet as your dog could be ill.

Be aware that most human meals don't provide dogs with the nutrition they need and some foods, such as chocolate, onions, grapes and raisins can be poisonous to dogs (see page 17 for further details).



## Weight watch

There are a few simple regular checks you can make to help prevent your dog from becoming overweight.

- Make sure you can see and feel the outline of your dog's ribs without excess fat covering.
- You should be able to see and feel your dog's waist and it should be clearly visible when viewed from above.
- Your dog's belly should be tucked up when viewed from the side.

If your dog doesn't pass all three checks, or if you are in any doubt about his/her weight, always talk to your vet.

»» For further information about pet obesity visit the RSPCA website at: [www.rspca.org.uk/pets](http://www.rspca.org.uk/pets).



# Behaviour



MAKE SURE YOUR DOG IS  
ABLE TO BEHAVE NORMALLY

Dogs need regular exercise and plenty of opportunities to walk, run and play outdoors and to learn new skills through training. They are playful animals and enjoy having fun with toys, people and other dogs.



Choose a type and size of dog that is suited to you, everyone living in your house, your home and your lifestyle. Exercise your dog regularly to keep him/her fit, active and stimulated – he/she should be given a chance to run outdoors every day, unless your vet recommends otherwise.

The way a dog behaves depends on his/her age, breed (or type), personality and past experiences – frightening experiences and punishment can lead to behaviour problems and suffering. You should make sure your dog has constant access to a safe hiding place where he/she can escape if he/she feels afraid.

If your dog's behaviour changes, it could mean he/she is distressed, bored, ill or injured so always talk to your vet if you are concerned and he/she can refer you to a clinical animal behaviourist if necessary.

»» For further information on clinical animal behaviourists, see page 18.



## Keeping fit

How much exercise, and the type of exercise your dog needs will largely depend on the individual dog's habits, age and health. Some dogs will need loads of exercise throughout their lives compared to others which may be happy with the run of a garden and a daily walk.

Your dog needs to be taught how to walk on a lead. In towns, a lead will protect him/her from traffic and keep him/her away from places where young children play. Dog faeces can be a health hazard so you must always pick up and dispose of your dog's poo! Even in the countryside, no matter how placid your dog is, use a lead when walking near livestock which can often be the target of attacks by dogs. But try to find a safe area where you can let your dog off the lead for a good run around.

## BACK TO BASICS

Train your dog from an early age using rewards. Never shout at or punish him/her as she/he is very unlikely to understand and may become nervous or scared of you. Always try to be calm and consistent in the way you, your family and friends react to your dog. Ask your vet for details of good, local training classes which use kind, reward-based methods of training so that you can learn how to teach your dog the skills he/she will need for every day life. If your dog often shows fear or signs of stress (such as excessive panting, licking lips, hiding, cowering, aggression) or exhibits any other behaviour problems, talk to your vet who can rule out any health problems and refer you to a clinical animal behaviourist if necessary.

## Barking

Dogs may bark for a variety of reasons such as during play, as a greeting or for attention. But prolonged periods of barking may be because your dog is unhappy, so it's vital to find out why this is happening. If your dog barks a lot when left alone, he/she may be having difficulty coping. It's important to talk to your vet who may suggest referral to a clinical animal behaviourist. They can diagnose the root cause of the behaviour problem and develop a treatment programme, based on kind, reward based methods, specifically for you and your dog.

»» Find out about behaviour problems at: [www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/behaviour](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/behaviour).



## AGGRESSION

Dogs are aggressive in response to unfolding events and it's invariably because they think that they are under some form of threat. For example, the threat could be to their personal safety, to take away something (or someone) they value highly, or they may feel their territory is threatened.

Dogs communicate mainly through body language. They have a wide range of non-aggressive signals and postures that they exhibit when they want us to stop doing whatever it is that they don't like. These signals include gestures that show they are uncomfortable, like yawning, lip licking, averting their gaze, turning their head away, dropping ears, crouching, low wagging or tucking their tail under and rolling over on their back. If these signals don't work the dog may then start to become more aggressive.



»» Take look at our factsheet on *Canine aggression* including information on where to go for help and advice at: [www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/behaviour](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/behaviour).



## If your dog shows signs of aggression

Firstly, stop whatever it is you are doing. Aggression is your dog's way of warning you to stop. Secondly, stand still. Movement towards an aggressive dog may be interpreted as a threat, and movement away may make him/her bold enough to bite. Stand still until the aggression stops or walk slowly away, backwards or sideways, looking down and sideways. Talk to your dog reassuringly. When the aggression stops, think about what caused it and avoid doing the same thing again. Dogs should never be punished for showing aggressive behaviour as this is likely to make them more fearful.

If your dog ever shows fearful or aggressive behaviour, you really should get some professional advice. Talk to your vet who will be able to refer you to a clinical animal behaviourist (see page 18).



# Company

## MAKE SURE YOUR DOG HAS APPROPRIATE COMPANY

Dogs are sociable animals so they need and enjoy company. If they are treated well as puppies, they learn to see people as friends and companions. Your dog will become lonely, bored and distressed if he/she is left without company and has nothing to do for long periods of time.

### Good company

If your dog has pleasant experiences playing with a wide variety of other dogs early in his/her life, it's more likely he/she will become more sociable as an adult.

Providing he/she is friendly towards other dogs, allow interaction with them on a regular basis. If your dog is fearful of, or aggressive towards, other dogs, avoid the situations that lead to this behaviour, and seek advice from a vet or clinical animal behaviourist (see page 18). Never leave your dog unsupervised with another animal

or person who may deliberately or accidentally harm or frighten him/her and when you are away, make sure your dog is properly cared for by a responsible person.

If you have more than one dog, if possible, house them together if they are friendly towards each other, but make sure they have enough space and can get away from one another if they want to, and there are plenty of toys, water bowls, and beds for each of them.



## Friends for life

We all enjoy spending lots of time playing with and petting our dogs, but problems can arise if dogs become too dependent on human attention and get it 'on tap' when they are with us. If your dog is worried about something and you always respond by giving attention, he/she may become anxious when left alone.

To avoid this, you can spend as much time as you like interacting with your dog but

if you want a well behaved and calm pet you should follow some simple rules which are based on you deciding when to start and finish talking, petting or playing with him/her. Unless you want a dog that constantly runs off with the remote control, jumps up at you or nudges your elbow, you should ignore these behaviours. Instead teach your dog that sitting quietly is the best way to get your attention!

»» For more detailed advice take a look at: [www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/company](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/company)





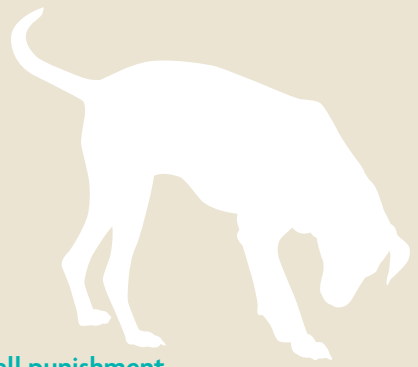
## Learning to be left alone

One of the most effective ways of preventing your dog from becoming anxious when he/she is left alone is to teach him/her right from the start that being alone is enjoyable! To do this you need to very gradually increase the time that you leave your dog alone so that it is never frightening and always associated with something pleasant.

Try to always feed and exercise your dog before leaving him/her. Take your dog for a walk, returning home half an hour before you are due to leave and give him/her something to entertain him/her while you are away – for example a 'special' toy or treat that he/she really loves such as a 'Kong' stuffed with food.

The speed that you progress will depend on your dog's reaction. Never leave your dog so long that he/she starts to become distressed. If you do have to go out and leave your dog for long periods of time as soon as you bring him/her home, arrange for friends or family to help out for a while.

»» Find out more about how to build up each stage in the process at:  
[www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/company](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs/company)



## Avoid all punishment

If your dog misbehaves while you are out, it is vital that you don't react badly when you come home. Your dog will link any punishment with your return rather than the destruction, barking or toileting carried out some time previously. He/she will then become anxious about what you will do when you return the next time he/she is left alone and, as a result, will be more likely to chew or lose toilet control, making the problem even worse!

Many dogs who have been punished in the past when their owners return will show submission in an attempt to appease their owners. They make themselves as small as possible, putting their ears back and their tail between their legs. Unfortunately owners often think that the dogs look guilty and punish them because they "know they have done wrong". Even if you take your dog to the scene of the crime, he/she will not be able to associate your anger with his/her behaviour hours earlier – your dog will simply become more anxious the next time you go out.

Although it's not easy, if you do find a mess when you come home, please don't physically punish or shout at your dog. Try to even avoid letting your dog see that you are annoyed – let him/her outside before cleaning up.



# Health & welfare

MAKE SURE YOUR DOG IS PROTECTED FROM PAIN,  
SUFFERING, INJURY AND DISEASE

Dogs can suffer from a range of infectious diseases and other illnesses but individual dogs show pain and suffering in different ways.

A change in the way a dog behaves can be an early sign that he/she is ill or in pain. Dogs who are insecure or stressed can also become unwell as a result. Never let the thought of having to pay for veterinary treatment stop you from making sure your dog has the best of care.

Before deciding to buy/acquire a dog, make sure you find out what health and

behaviour problems he/she has, or may be prone to, for instance as a result of his/her breed, how he/she has been bred, and how he/she has been socialised and cared for. Always check with a vet if you are unsure.

»» For useful advice on how to avoid buying puppies from irresponsible breeders, check out:  
<http://puppycontract.rspca.org.uk>.





Think about taking out pet insurance and having your dog microchipped. For just a few pounds a month you'll be covered for unexpected vets' bills in the future and safeguard your pet's health. A one-off payment for microchipping your dog means you are more likely to be quickly reunited if he/she goes missing and he/she will receive prompt veterinary care if injured.

By law, a dog in a public place must wear a collar with his/her owner's name and address either on the collar or on an attached tag.

## POISONING

It's every responsible owner's nightmare if his/her pet is poisoned. Make sure you're prepared for such an emergency. Preventing your dog from coming into contact with poisonous substances and treating any accidental poisonings quickly and appropriately is an important part of responsible pet ownership.

Never 'watch and wait' in any case of suspected poisoning. If you suspect your pet has been poisoned, act fast and contact your nearest vet for advice immediately.

Signs of poisoning include vomiting, diarrhoea, dehydration, hyperactivity, high temperature and blood pressure, abnormal heart rhythm and tremors.

» Read our advice on what to do if you think your dog has been poisoned and how to prevent poisonings at: [www.rspca.org.uk/poisoning](http://www.rspca.org.uk/poisoning)

You can also check out our information on some of the most common poisons that dog owners should be aware of. These include chocolate, anti-inflammatory drugs such as Ibuprofen, grapes/ raisins/ sultanas/currants, slug/snail baits and rodent poisons.



## Health checklist

- **Check your dog for signs of injury or illness every day, and make sure someone else does this if you are away.** If you suspect that your dog is in pain, ill or injured, go and see your vet immediately.
- **Take your dog for a routine health check with your vet at least once a year.** It's a good chance to ask for advice about things you can do to protect your dog's health, including essential vaccinations and treatments to control parasites (e.g. fleas and worms).  
  
Dogs should be routinely vaccinated against canine parvovirus, canine distemper virus, leptospirosis and infectious canine hepatitis.
- **Think about getting your dog neutered.** Neutering can help reduce the huge number of unwanted pets, prevent illnesses and some unwanted behaviours.  
  
If you do decide to breed, talk to your vet to make sure the dogs' health and personalities are suitable for breeding and make sure you are able to look after both the mother and puppies (including finding them good homes).
- **Only use medicines that have been prescribed for your individual dog.**
- **Make sure your dog's coat is kept in good condition by grooming him/her regularly.** If you're not sure how to groom your dog's coat properly, talk to a pet care specialist.

»» For detailed information go to:  
[www.rspca.org.uk/pets](http://www.rspca.org.uk/pets)

## How to find a behaviour expert

Dogs can develop a range of behaviour problems, such as aggression, destructiveness, inappropriate toileting, nervousness and phobias. If your dog develops a behaviour problem, it's important to get him/her checked by your vet first, in order to rule out any illness or injury that could be causing the problem. Your vet can then refer you to a clinical animal behaviourist.

Behaviour experts will work to identify the cause of the behaviour problem and then develop structured treatment plans that are suitable for you, your dog and your circumstances.

»» Find out more at: [www.rspca.org.uk/findabehaviourist](http://www.rspca.org.uk/findabehaviourist)



# FIND OUT MORE...

Dogs are amazing animals with complex needs that must be met if they are to be kept healthy and happy.

There's loads more to learn about dogs on the RSPCA website – from our top ten dog facts to detailed advice sheets on various aspects of dog care.

So make sure you visit:

[www.rspca.org.uk/dogs](http://www.rspca.org.uk/dogs)

Keeping your  
dogs healthy  
and happy



If you are thinking of taking on a dog or puppy, you've researched his/her welfare needs and you're committed to taking care of him/her for life, please think about giving a home to some of the many rescue dogs available for adoption at RSPCA animal centres across England and Wales.

Some rescue dogs prefer to live without other pets, while others are great with children or other pets so our staff take great care to make sure each dog goes to the right home. Every dog we rehome is neutered to prevent unwanted pregnancies, and microchipped to give them the best chance of being identified if they get lost or stolen.

[www.rspca.org.uk/rehoming](http://www.rspca.org.uk/rehoming)

**This booklet  
will help you  
find out what  
dogs need to  
stay healthy  
and happy.**



**The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals**

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