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**PREVENTING DISEASE ON THE TRIP HOME**

**& DURING THE FIRST FEW WEEKS**

Your pup has received his first set of vaccines, but they will not have immunity to important diseases (such as Parvo – a devastating and often fatal intestinal virus) until after their 2nd booster. Here are some tips to prevent your pup from picking up a nasty bug on the way home:

1. DO NOT let your puppy out at gas stations, rest stops, or parks. Instead, pick a gravel road ditch off the beaten path, where your pup is less likely to come into contact with another dog’s germs.

2. DO NOT take your puppy to the airport doggie rest areas. Instead, bring along a pee pad so your puppy can use the bathroom without the risk of picking up a disease.

3. DO NOT let your pup walk around on the ground at the airport too much. Try to keep them inside the carrier or on your lap while you are there.

4. DO NOT let other dogs sniff your puppy!

5. DO Make sure your other dog(s) at home are up to date on their vaccines, especially the combo vaccine for Parvo. If you are unsure about your existing dog’s vaccine status, call your veterinary office, they will be happy to help you!

6. DO NOT take your puppy to places where there are dogs from other households until 2 weeks after their 2nd set of vaccines.

7. Other dogs in the household should be kept home/away from outside dogs until the puppy is fully vaccinated, as well. Adult dogs can transmit disease without showing symptoms themselves.

**VACCINES**

Your puppy has received his first 5-way vaccine for Distemper, Hepatitis, Parvovirus, Parainfluenza, and Leptospirosis. To obtain full protection against these diseases, he will need a series of booster shots given in the correct intervals. You can expect to make several trips to the vet for booster shots during your puppy’s first year of life. As an example, below you will find the vaccine schedule that I use. Your vet might do things a little differently and that’s OK too, a lot of these recommendations are region-dependent.

| Puppy Age | Required Vaccines | Optional but may be recommended |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 6.5 weeks | 1st **DHLPP** vaccine | - |
| 10-12 weeks | 2nd **DHLPP** booster | **Lyme/Lepto** vaccine (may be recommended depending on location)  **Bordetella** (one of the “kennel cough” bugs—recommended for dogs that socialize with other dogs i.e. boarding, obedience class, shows, etc) |
| 14-16 weeks | 3rd **DHLPP** booster  1st **Rabies** vaccine | **Lyme/Lepto** booster |
| 1 year after last booster | **Rabies** vaccine, **DHLPP** vaccine | **Lyme/Lepto** booster  **Bordetella** booster |
| Every 1-3 years | **DHLPP &** **Rabies** (every 1 or 3 years) | **Lyme/Lepto** (yearly)  **Bordetella** (yearly) |

**NUTRITION**

Large breed dogs such as Labradors can develop orthopedic problems if they are not fed a balanced diet while they are growing. Your safest bet is to choose a tried-and-true puppy food for your dog’s first 12-18 months of life. We use/recommend **Royal Canin Labrador Puppy**, **NutriSource Large Breed Puppy** (Chicken & Rice) and **Purina ProPlan Puppy** (Chicken).

**HOW TO FEED YOUR PUPPY**

We generally recommend “modified free feeding” during the first 4 months of your pup’s life. A puppy’s body knows its caloric needs better than the side of the dog food bag does, especially during their very rapid growth periods.

To do this, you can put 1 measuring cup of kibble in the bowl and allow your puppy to eat as much as they want. If they finish the bowl and are still hungry, add another cup of kibble. If they don’t finish it all, pick it back up and save for the next meal. Pups shouldn’t eat more than 2 cups of food in a sitting.

Puppies should be fed in their crate and allowed to “rest & digest” for 2 hours after their meal. (Do not allow a dog to play or run around immediately after eating - it can cause them to bloat).

Young puppies should be fed 3 times per day (morning/noon/night). That can be reduced to 2 meals per day as soon as they are around 6 months old.

As puppies reach their adult height (this is usually around 1 year old), their caloric needs decrease drastically and they can easily become overweight if they are still being fed like a puppy. **Pay close attention to your dog’s body condition throughout their life. If you can’t feel their ribs and backbone, they are overweight.** The easiest way to get weight off a dog is to simply feed less. Switching to an adult diet (which is less calorically dense than a puppy food) at around 1 year old will help, as well. If you are unsure if your dog is overweight, ask your veterinarian!

| DO | DO NOT |
| --- | --- |
| Select a high-quality food that is formulated for **large breeds**, containing 26-30% protein. | Don’t fall for the “Grain-free” or “boutique brand” marketing ploy. |
| Select a food that is appropriate for your dog’s life stage (puppy food before 12-18 months, adult food after 12-18 months) | Don’t feed solely raw or home-cooked diet unless you are under veterinary guidance. |
|  |  |
| Provide fresh water with every meal! Either in a separate dish or served with the kibble like breakfast cereal. | Don’t feed canned food (unless you are committed to brushing your dog’s teeth every single day) |
| Add \*small amounts\* of boiled poultry, venison,or beef on top of your dogs’ kibble meals if you feel the need to add some variety to your dog’s meals. | Don’t add raw fish, chicken or pork to your dog’s diet – they can get deadly parasites and harbor dangerous/zoonotic bacteria |
| Add \*small amounts\* of veggies such as bell peppers, broccoli, spinach, kale, carrots, celery, and squash if you want to add some variety. | Don’t feed veggies cooked in oil/butter    Don’t add any onions/onion powder, garlic/garlic powder, chocolate, or grapes/raisins to your dog’s food as they are toxic |
| Add \*small amounts\* of safe fruit such as blueberries, strawberries, and sliced apples to your dog’s meals if you want to add some variety.    Use **stainless steel or ceramic** bowls | Do not allow your dog free access to food - it will create unhealthy eating habits      Don’t give your puppy any calcium supplements or excessive calcium-rich foods (it can cause abnormal bone growth) |
| Feed adult dogs 1-2x per day, puppies 3x/day | Don’t feed your dog steak trimmings, gravy, grease, or fatty food (it can cause pancreatitis) |
| You may want to add an Omega 3/fish oil supplementand/or a joint supplement such as **Cosequin** if desired (follow label directions) | Don’t feed out of plastic bowls – they harbor more bacteria than stainless steel |
|  |  |
|  |  |

**PROTECTING GROWING JOINTS**

There is a strong genetic component to good joints (that's why we use OFA testing to evaluate the hip and elbow joints of our potential breeding dogs). However, **there is also an environmental component to the development of healthy joints in large breed dogs**. Because of this, i**t is possible for a puppy that came from many generations of excellent hips and normal elbows to develop hip or elbow dysplasia** if they are raised improperly. Here are some things you can do to provide your puppy with a good environment for healthy bone growth & joint development:

1. **Block off staircases** and ledges in your house, just as you would for a human toddler!

2. Carry your pup up/down flights of stairs as long as possible. If your puppy absolutely must do stairs, carpeted stairs are preferred because they are easier for puppy to navigate.

3. If you have slippery floors, buy some area rugs & runners for the rooms/hallways he will be in. Puppies that run around on slick flooring a lot are more likely to develop hip/elbow dysplasia.

4. Allow your puppy to have plenty of self-directed, off-leash play time in the yard every day.

5. Don’t over-exercise or under-exercise your puppy. *See the chart on the next page for more info on puppy exercise!*

6. Don't take your puppy to the dog park until they are fully grown (or never… dog parks are “disease ridden fight clubs for dogs” – use them at your own risk).

7. Don’t encourage your puppy to do repetitive exercises (i.e. fetch) until they are fully grown.

8. Don't let your puppy roughhouse with bigger/older dogs.

9. Spay female dogs at **12-18 months of age** (or after 1-2 heat cycles). Neuter male dogs after **18-24 months of age**. Their hormones play an important role in bone growth, and pediatric spay/neuter has been linked to several orthopedic problems in large breed dogs.

10. Keep your puppy at a healthy weight. Puppies can be kept a little “chubby” (not “fat”) for the first 6 months, and doing so will help them grow to reach their full potential. But after that, they should be kept fit and trim. In a healthy adult dog, you should be able to feel ribs and backbone, but they shouldn’t be prominent. Our females tend to weigh ~65-75lbs and our males tend to weigh ~80-90lbs at maturity (2-3 years old). But this can vary based on your dog’s frame size.

11. Feed dry dog food **formulated for \*large breed\*puppies** for an optimum rate of bone growth.

12. Consider adding a dietary joint supplement containing glucosamine/chondroitin such as **Cosequin**. *\*Do NOT give supplemental calcium to puppies\**

**PUPPY EXERCISE GUIDELINES BY MONTH**

| 2 months | • Exercise should consist of sniffing around the yard, either solo or with a puppy of a similar age/size.  • Encourage your puppy to explore his environment.  • Start teaching basic commands such as “sit” and “stay” |
| --- | --- |
| 3 months | • Exercise should still be self-directed and supervised in the yard.  • Introduce leash training, but keep walks short (<10 mins), slow, and on a grassy surface.  • Continue working on basic commands such as sit, stay, and come. Lots of treats and positive reinforcement is key! 😊 |
| 4 months | • You should begin socializing your puppy with other people & dogs at this age.  • Self-directed but supervised play outside in the yard is still very important.  • Finding an easy-going senior dog to play with your puppy and teach them some dog manners would be very beneficial at this age.  • Make sure that your puppy is only playing with dogs that are either very gentle, or a similar size/age.  • Walks should still be short (10-15 mins) & easy (slow pace). Softer surfaces such as grass/dirt paths are preferred over concrete.  • You can introduce wading/swimming at this age as well! |
| 5 months | • Continue working on socialization and obedience.  • You can teach your dog to fetch/retrieve at this age, but make sure not to over-do it (since repetitive high-impact activities are not good for puppy joints).  • Self-directed but supervised playtime in the yard is still very important!  • Limit games of fetch to <5 ball tosses.  • Daily walks should still be short and at an easy pace, and softer surfaces such as grass/dirt paths are preferred.  • This is a great time to start puppy obedience class! |
| 6 months | • Walks and hikes up to 1 mile are safe. Let your pup set the pace and don’t push them too hard!  • This is an excellent age to introduce swimming. Take your dog to the beach with another dog that is a strong swimmer & watch them have fun!  • High-impact exercise such as fetch and agility is still not advised, since your puppy is still growing very rapidly. Limit games of fetch to <5 tosses. |
| 8 months | • Puppies start to gain more focus at this age, and it’s a great time to add some advanced tricks & more retrieving skills.  • I like to teach my puppies to retrieve bumpers on land & water at this age. Limit games of fetch to <10 tosses.  • Walks and hikes up to 2 miles are safe. |
| 12 months | • Walks, hikes, and swimming are all safe activities as your dog has done the majority of his skeletal growth. Make sure your dog is “in shape” for the type/intensity and duration of activity you are going to ask of him. (I.e. don’t ask a dog to walk 3 miles with you if he hasn’t been gradually introduced to that level of activity).  • Still try to limit the repetitive high-impact exercise (i.e. fetch or roughhousing at the dog park) since your dog will continue to fill out a lot after 12 months of age. |
| 18 months | All doggie activities should be safe at this age as long as your dog has been gradually introduced to that level of activity. Go have fun!! |

TIP: As a vet, I see so many injuries occur when dogs that get minimal exercise all week (while owners are at work) go crazy with the exercise on weekends. Prevent those “weekend warrior” injuries by keeping the exercise consistent day-to-day. If your dog doesn’t hike lots of hills during the week, don’t expect him to climb a mountain with you on the weekend! If you want to do those high impact or strenuous activities with your dog, make sure you train him appropriately so that he is able to build up the physical strength to do those things without getting injured.

**HEALTHY SOCIALIZATION**

Lots of people think that “socialization” = putting your dog in a yard with a dog they’ve never met and letting them run around like idiots. This inevitably creates a dog who is extremely excitable around other dogs. Healthy socialization looks more like walking/training your dog where there are other dogs & people in the area, encouraging your dog to focus on you. It’s natural for a dog to run around and play like an idiot with his house/pack mates or a few close doggy friends. It’s NOT natural for a dog to be expected to play nicely with strange dogs from other households at places such as the dog park or doggy daycare. Think about that while your dog is young, so that you can set him up for success in the future!

**PARASITE PREVENTION**

Pups should get started on a **monthly heartworm preventative** as soon as they go to their new homes at 8 weeks. Heartworm-carrying mosquitoes are everywhere nowadays (even in the northern states!). It’s a really sad disease because it’s totally preventable. Heartworm medications containing ivermectin or moxidectin (such as HeartGard) are very safe and effective. As a bonus, ivermectin also treats various intestinal parasites. Don’t skip it! 😊

I do not recommend using oral flea and tick medications (such as Bravecto, Nexgard, or Simparica) on puppies less than 6 months of age. Once they are older, those drugs may be warranted for flea/tick prevention. You can have a conversation with your vet and decide if this is the best way to go for your dog. I tend to use Vectra or Frontline (topical products) for flea and tick prevention since they have provided more reliable protection in my experience.

**TIPS FOR WHEN YOUR DOG GETS ITCHY**

Itching is the #1 reason people bring their pets to the vet. Labs as a breed are prone to skin/ear issues, especially in hot/humid climates. All dogs will get an itch from time to time, but it becomes a problem when you notice them itching more than a few times a day, or you notice any areas of redness or hair loss. There are a few cheap, easy things that can help an itchy dog to save you a trip to the vet if the problem is mild Here are some things to try:

1. Make sure your dog is flea-free, and switch flea medicationsif needed. Many areas have flea populations that are resistant to various topical medications. A single flea can cause intense itch!

2. If your dog is prone to itching, start feeding a **daily** **fish oil supplement** to help their skin produce more oils. Expect to give the supplement for a few months before you see noticeable improvement, but it should help if you give it consistently!

3. Bathing can cause itch. A lab’s thick, water-resistant double coat makes it hard to get all the soap out during a bath. If you leave any soap on their skin, it will cause them to itch after a bath. So, take your time & rinse thoroughly against the hair with **cool** water.

4. If you live in a hot/humid climate, or your dog likes to swim, your dog is at an increased risk for skin infections. Their dense coats trap moisture next to the skin, setting up an environment for overgrowth of yeast and bacteria. Bathing your dog as needed with a shampoo containing antifungal & antibacterial properties should help. Make sure to leave the shampoo on for 10 minutes so it has time to kill all of the yeast/bacteria present on the skin, and rinse with cool water.

5. Make sure to clean your dog’s ears with an **ear flush containing antibacterial, antifungal, and drying properties** after every bath or swim. Labs can get ear infections caused by moisture trapped in the ears.

6. If you notice your dog has a mild ear infection and you catch it early, it can sometimes be treated at home by thoroughly flushing/cleaning the ear and drying it 1-2 times per day until it resolves. If you treat it for a few days and it doesn’t get better, or it gets to the point of being swollen, painful, or contains excess drainage, then it is time for a trip to the vet for prescription strength ear medication! Ear infections are no joke, and if they go on long enough without treatment, your dog’s hearing can be damaged.

If you’ve tried all of this and your dog is still itchy, it’s time for a trip to the vet! Mild skin allergies are a common nuisance in all types of Retriever breeds, especially the Lab (both American and English types). It is my goal to 100% eliminate allergies from my lines, so **please contact me if your dog has been diagnosed with a skin or food allergy!** This information will help me with future breeding decisions. I also send out a yearly health survey via email; your participation is greatly appreciated!

**BASIC OBEDIENCE**

No matter how great their bloodlines are, or how much socialization they get as youngsters, puppies will never become great adult dogs without consistent training throughout their lives.Don’t wait until your puppy is “grown” to start enforcing house rules and behavior expectations.Labs respond to positive reinforcement training wonderfully due to their people-pleasing nature. Keep training sessions short (10 minutes, 2x a day) and keep the mood light, with lots of treats and praise.

I highly recommend signing up for obedience classes with your pup as soon as your pup has had his second set of vaccines. Classes are easy to find in any city, and they are totally worth the time and effort. Feel free to contact me if you need help finding an obedience club in your area!

**HOUSE TRAINING**

An 8-week-old puppy is the canine equivalent to a 2-year-old child. Young pups don’t have much bladder control and will need to go outside very frequently to avoid an accident. During their active times, they may need to go every 15-30 minutes. When they are in “sleepy mode” they may only need to go every 3 hours. After a meal or a water break, pups will need to relieve themselves soon afterward.

As the weeks go by, they will gain better control of their urinary muscles. Try your best to be extremely consistent and clear in what your expectations are from day one.

As you get to know your puppy, you will learn the “warning signs” (often sniffing, circling, pausing what they are doing, or wandering off). When it’s time to go outside, put your pup on a 6ft leash and take him to the potty area. Let your puppy sniff around the radius of the leash, but try not to follow them wherever they please, as you want to reinforce that this is “potty time” not adventure/play time. As soon as the puppy “goes”, give lots of praise & treats (if your neighbors don’t think you’ve gone crazy, you are not praising your puppy enough!). Let your pup play around and explore outside for a few minutes before you return to the house, so he associates going potty outside with positive events.

If you are lucky to catch your puppy in the act of urinating/defecating in the house, clap and shout “NO”, scoop the puppy up, and place them outside where you want them to go. Your goal is to communicate to your pup that pottying in the house is a crime. Always praise & give treats when your puppy “goes” outside.

*Tip: Reserve the word “NO” for serious offenses only; like potty accidents or rummaging through the trash. If you pester your dog with that word too often, it will lose its effect! A sharp “uh-uh” is usually enough of a verbal correction for minor offenses such as play biting, jumping, etc.*

**CRATE TRAINING**

First, make sure you have a crate that is neither too large nor too small. It should be big enough for your pup to comfortably stand up, lie down, and turn around in. It should be small enough that your pup can’t urinate/defecate in one side and sleep in the other. It should also have plenty of ventilation. Line the inside with a soft crate mat (preferably not filled with “stuffing” as puppies can tear these apart and ingest the contents). A blanket that smells like their momma/littermates will help them feel less anxious for the first few nights.

**The crate should only be used for naptime during the first few days**. Play with your pup until he seems tired, then lure into the crate using some food. Once in and settled, let your pup sleep in the crate, but remain nearby in case he gets anxious. Immediately let your pup outside to go potty as soon as he wakes up. Every time you let your pup out of the crate, take him outside to go potty immediately. This reinforces that the crate is for quiet time, and potty time comes right after crate time. Consistency is the key to success!

Your puppy should sleep in the crate at night until he is reliably potty trained. They will cry for their littermates for the first few nights, and it will break your heart. Do not reinforce crying/barking by talking to your puppy or letting them out to comfort. I’ve found that having my puppy’s crate right next to my bed at night helps them feel less lonely and fall asleep more quickly. For a pup who is extremely anxious at night, I will keep their crate on my bed for the first few nights so they don’t feel like they are sleeping all alone. Be sure to take your pup outside every 3 hours throughout the night for the first couple of weeks until they gain better control of their bladders. **It is very difficult to break the habit of soiling their crate once they start, so it’s best to prevent it from happening altogether!**

The quickest way to sour your puppy to the crate is to leave them in there for longer than they are “ready” for. If there is nobody in your household that is home most of the day to take care of the puppy, consider bringing your puppy to work, working from home, or hiring a responsible puppy sitter for the first couple of weeks. You can gradually work up to longer periods of time as your puppy begins to take to the crate.

To reinforce the idea that crates are a “good thing”, you should feed your dog his meals in the crate. I also like to fill up a Kong with yogurt, freeze it, and give it to puppies in their crate, so they have something to pass the time with until they doze off to sleep. I have found that this decreases the whining significantly.

The rule of thumb is that a pup can spend an hour in the crate for every month he is old. So, a 6-month-old puppy should be able to spend 6 consecutive hours in the crate without an issue. However, it is our opinion that no dog of any age should be crated for more than 6 hours a day on a regular basis.

*If you routinely leave your dog alone for more than 6 hours daily (not including the overnight hours), consider building a kennel enclosure or “dog-proofing” a spare room in your house so your dog can get up and move around while you’re away. Even though crates are a fantastic training tool, nobody wants to be locked in a cage all day!*

If you have made it this far, good for you! I hope this document has provided a little bit of guidance and things to think about. But please remember that there is more than one way to raise a dog “right”. I encourage you to always advocate for your dog and do what you feel is right. If you have any questions or concerns about your pup at any time, don’t hesitate to contact me and I’ll do my best to help in any way that I can.

The puppy months are hard but so very rewarding, and they fly by! So soak up every moment. I hope you enjoy your new best friend!

Claudia