

An A-Z Guide for Dog Owners



RSPCA 
Pet Insurance

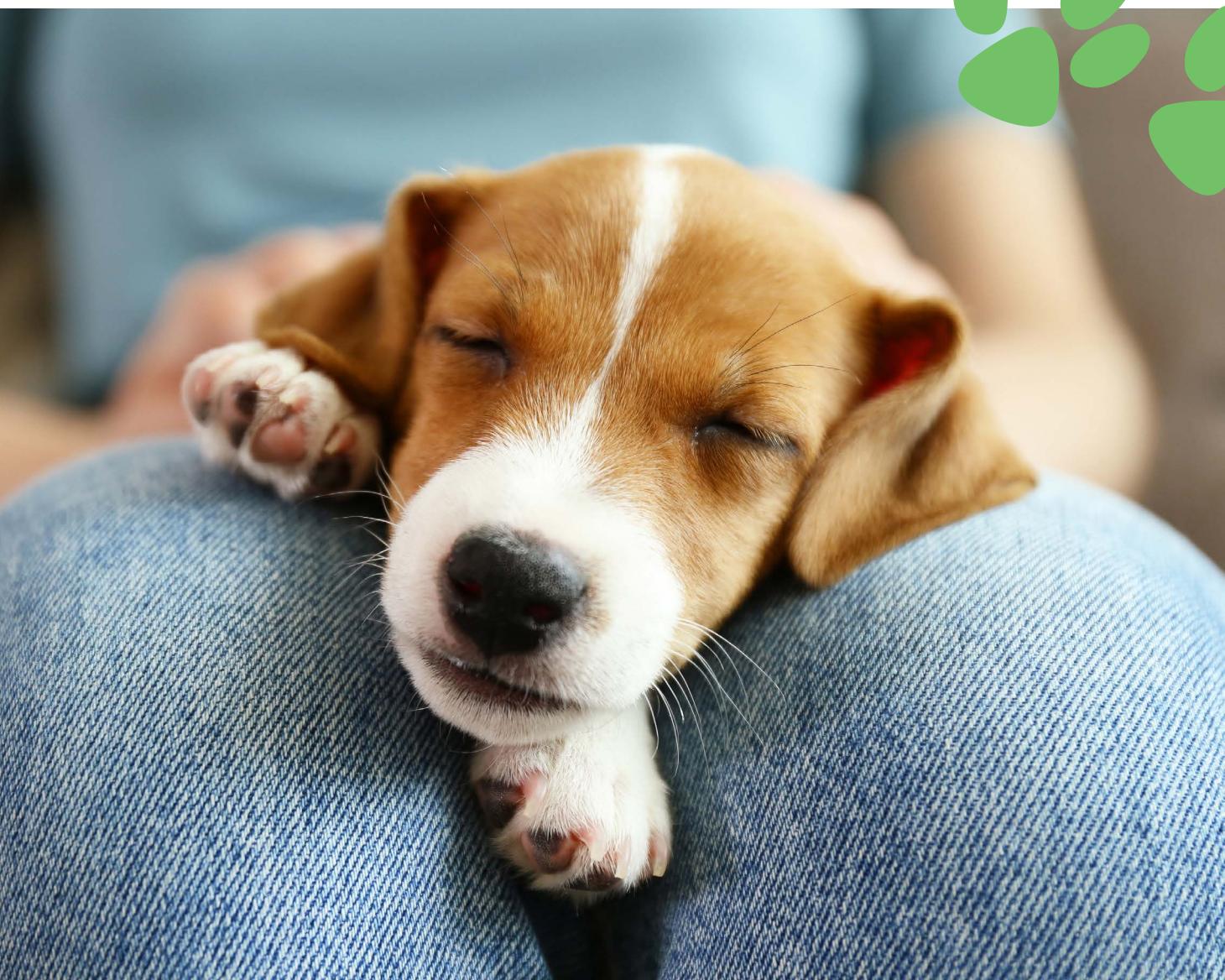
Contents

Introduction	01
A-Z Guide	02
Q and A with Dr Rosemary	10
Conclusion	11

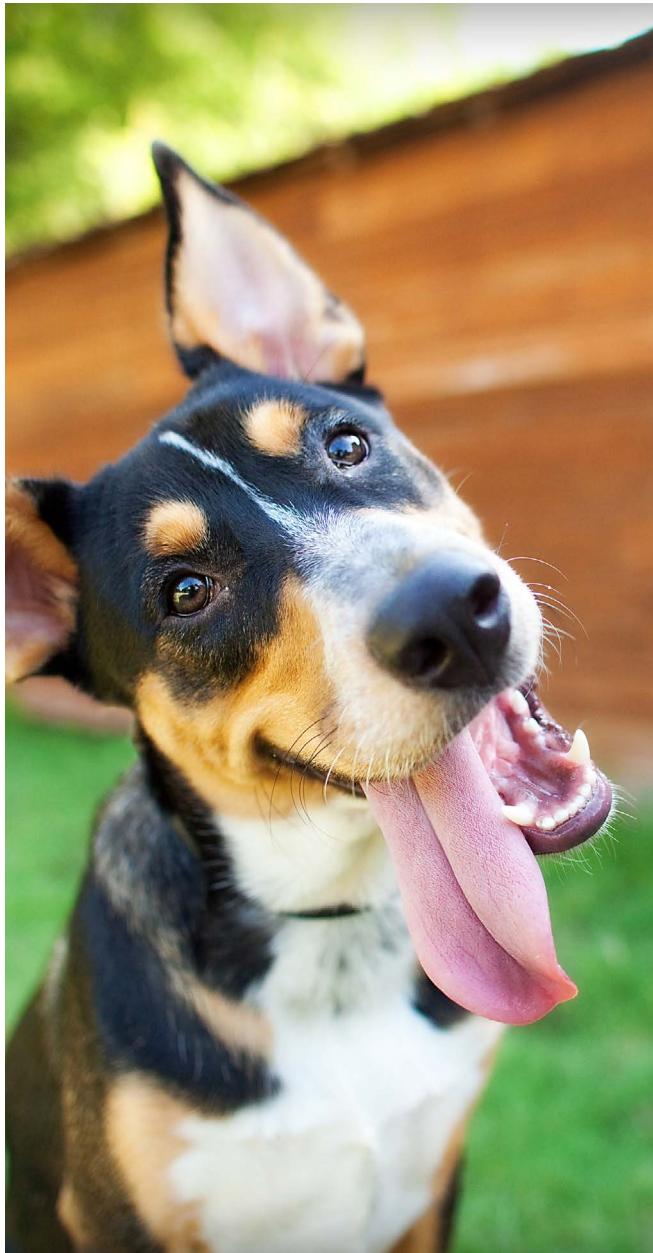


Introduction

Bringing a new dog into your family is an exciting time and most of us can't wait until our new companion arrives at their forever home. From a dog's perspective, there is no such opportunity for anticipation – they just suddenly arrive somewhere new, with unfamiliar sights, smells and people. As joyful as they may appear, change is stressful for animals, so setting up routines and being prepared will make the transition as easy as possible for everyone. With this in mind, we've provided the following tips for how you can care for your dog to give them comfort and provide safety for them.



A-Z Guide



Adopt or buy

The first decision when bringing a dog into your family is how and where you will find your new canine family member. Adopting through a reputable animal welfare or rescue organisation allows you to meet a range of dogs of differing sizes, ages, temperaments and breeds who have all been assessed as suitable for rehoming. Shelter staff are familiar with them all and will help you find the best match between the dog's needs and your home, as well as your family situation and lifestyle.

If you choose to buy a dog, try to do your research on potential pet shops, as some of them have been known to source animals from puppy farms. You may choose to find a breeder with known high standards of animal care, who welcomes you to visit their property and meet the puppy and his or her [parents](#). While the internet is a great way to research and look for your new best friend, you should try to avoid buying a pet online. Poor practices can place animals at serious risk, and can also mean consumers risk being deceived and [disappointed](#).

Boarding

One option for dog owners who are unable to take their pets away with them when they travel is to find a trusted dog sitter to look after their dog at home. This is not always possible, so sometimes boarding is an essential service. Thankfully there are lots of options for pet-friendly accommodation. A good boarding facility will be well-staffed and will provide secure, comfortable and clean housing, daily exercise, social interaction with people (and dogs if appropriate) and will screen dogs for vaccination status before accepting them. It's important to visit any facility before booking your dog for a [stay](#).

Car safety

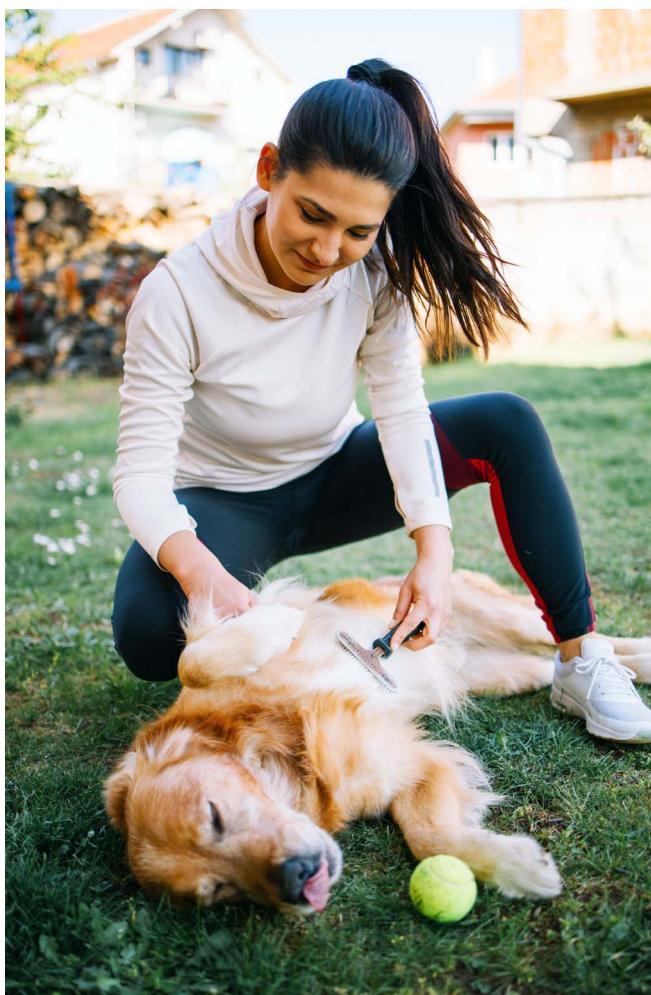
Dogs may need some time, patience and training to get used to car travel. Dogs need to be safely secured in the car to prevent them causing accidents, jumping out or being injured during a collision. Make sure your dog is restrained in the back seat by a safe and appropriately fitted dog harness and safety belt or a crate that allows them to move [comfortably](#). And remember never to leave your dog unattended in a car, even in mild weather, because it only takes minutes for dogs to suffer or even die from heat stress in this [situation](#).

Desexing

Desexing dogs is a safe procedure that stops them from producing unwanted puppies and also has health benefits for them. Desexed dogs are less likely to develop certain health problems, such as mammary cancer in females and prostate disease in [males](#). Male dogs who are desexed are also less likely to roam. Your veterinarian will advise on the best timing of desexing for your dog, but pre-pubertal desexing (before they reach sexual maturity) is increasingly recommended, because it is the most effective way to prevent unwanted litters and the surgery is faster and easier, and anesthetic recovery and wound healing times are also shorter, providing further animal welfare benefits.

Exercise and play

All dogs require daily exercise, which should include at least one walk and may also include games, running in an off-leash area and socialising with other dogs (if



your dog enjoys that) - be sure to train your dog to come when called before allowing them off leash. Without regular exercise and play, dogs may become bored and frustrated and could express this through destructive behaviours or excessive barking. Never exercise your dog immediately before or after eating as this may be associated with the development of a painful and potentially fatal condition called [bloat](#) or gastric dilation and volvulus (GDV).

Feeding and nutrition

A balanced diet is essential for your dog's health. The easiest way to provide this is through a high quality, balanced premium commercial dog food suited to their age and health status. Never feed your dog cooked bones because these can splinter and cause intestinal blockages that can be very dangerous and require surgery. Also be aware that many food items, such as chocolate, onions, raisins and fruit stones are [toxic to dogs](#) - this can include some commercially available dog [treats](#).

Grooming and bathing

Regular grooming removes dirt and other materials from your dog's coat, helps reduce shedding and prevents matting and knots, which can become painful and can also trap moisture close to the skin, and may lead to infections. Grooming can also be a bonding experience for you and your dog and provides the opportunity to inspect your dog's skin for any abnormalities or parasites. Dogs with thick or long coats should be groomed daily. When bathing your dog, only use dog shampoo and be careful to towel dry them properly in [cold weather](#). A monthly bath should be sufficient as excessive bathing tends to dry out and [irritate the skin and hair](#). If your dog needs clipping, leave this to the professionals to prevent any injury from clippers.

Housing

Dogs should be kept in a safe environment that meets their physical and behavioural

needs. This includes providing them with an interesting environment, fencing to prevent them escaping, and outdoor areas that have shelter and shade. All dogs need a comfortable, safe place to sleep. Their bedding must be warm and dry, with blankets and rugs washed regularly. Dogs with arthritis and older dogs may require extra padding. Most dogs prefer to sleep indoors to be near their human families, and their beds should be placed somewhere free of draughts. If there is no option other than for them to sleep outdoors, provide them with a sturdy kennel that protects them from wind, rain and strong sunlight, is close to the house and fitted out with suitable warm and [comfortable bedding and a supply of fresh, clean water](#).

Identification

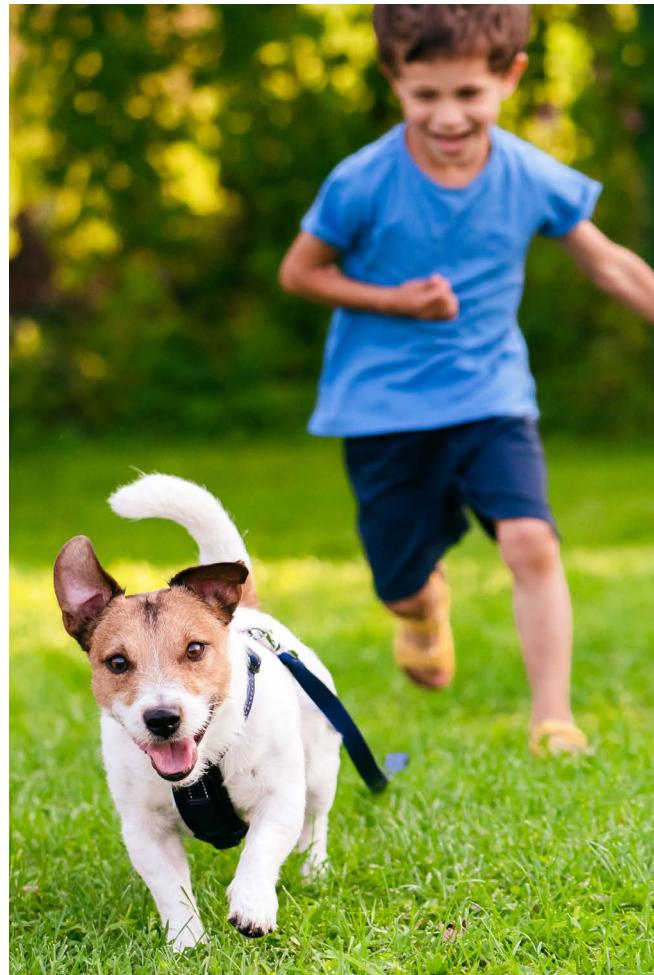
As a responsible dog owner, you will need to ensure your dog is easily identified so they can be returned to you if they become lost. Fit your dog with an identification tag on their collar including their name and your contact details, and also make sure your dog's microchip details are up to date. In most states, microchipping is a legal requirement and is performed by a [veterinarian](#). Make sure you always keep your contact details on the ID tag and on the microchip registry up to date, head to this website for information on how to [update your pet's microchip details](#).

Jumping the fence

Dogs that jump the fence and run away are at high risk of injury and it's likely their behavioural needs are not being met. If your dog develops this behaviour, make sure you're giving them enough exercise and other stimulation and that they are not left alone for long periods in the yard. Seek your veterinarian's advice about any underlying anxiety. You can also have your fence altered in ways that prevent your dog from getting out by jumping over the top, although you also need to ensure they are unable to escape in other ways such as by digging underneath.

Keeping weight under control

Being overweight or obese is a welfare problem for many dogs. It increases the risk of diseases such as diabetes, heart problems and some cancers, worsens arthritis, and also reduces their quality of life by preventing them from enjoying exercise and other activities. Ask your veterinarian to show you how to assess your dog's body condition and seek advice about keeping your dog in the healthy weight range through diet and [exercise](#). Try to avoid feeding them leftovers and limit the treats!



Leads and other walking equipment

Your dog will need a lead of suitable size and in good condition. You can train your dog to walk without [pulling on the lead](#) by using 'loose lead walking', which means you only continue the walk when they stop pulling. In the meantime, a front-attach



harness can also discourage pulling on the lead. They will also need a comfortable collar that is fitted correctly, which means you should be able to slide two fingers under the collar between the collar and your dog's neck. Never use a check chain, because these can cause pain and can severely injure your dog's neck.

Mental stimulation

Like us, dogs need mental stimulation throughout the day, and this is especially important when they spend time alone. If this need is not met, they may develop problem behaviours such as excessive barking, which is often due to boredom. Make sure your dog receives morning exercise and set them up with enriching activities they can occupy themselves with when nobody is home. Examples may include interactive toys, long lasting chews, food puzzles, the classic Kong toy stuffed with food (where they need to work to

retrieve the food inside), or hidden food around the home to seek out. Alternate their toys at least once a week to keep the sense of novelty. Remember that dogs are social animals and do not enjoy being left alone all day. If you [work long hours](#) and nobody is there with them, consider using a dog walker or dog day care centre.

Nails

Dogs wear their nails down through exercising on hard surfaces, but they will still need to be clipped sometimes, and the dew claws on the sides of their front feet always need regular clipping, about every one to two months. Dogs who exercise less or only exercise on soft surfaces will need this done more often. Without being kept at the correct length, nails can split, curl around and dig into the pad causing pain and injury, become caught up in materials such as blankets or cause accidental injury to people or other dogs. One way you can tell when your dog's nails are ready for a trim is that you will hear them 'clicking' as they walk. Nails should not be able to touch the floor when your dog is standing. Ask your vet to explain what to look for when assessing the length of your dog's dew claws. Your veterinarian can advise you on how to clip your dog's nails safely but if you are unable to do this, they will be happy to perform a doggie pedicure as [needed](#).

Outdoor safety

Taking your dog outdoors is a healthy and fun activity for you both but be alert to some of the potential hazards. Whether you are in a backyard, park or other recreational area, it's important to be able to identify toxic substances. These include a range of plants (such as: azaleas, tulips, and bird of paradise), rodent baits, snail and slug baits, garden mulch and fertilisers. All of these are highly toxic to dogs and if your dog shows symptoms of having ingested any of these substances, such as vomiting, staggering or collapsing, seek urgent veterinary [attention](#).

When walking through bushland, be alert to snakes, that come out of hibernation after

winter. Avoid long grass and keep your dog on the lead to prevent them from chasing snakes. You also can reduce the likelihood that your dog will be exposed to snakes on your own property by cutting the grass and clearing piles of wood or other [rubbish](#). Dogs bitten by snakes typically present with sudden weakness, collapse, twitching and vomiting, and require immediate veterinary attention. If this occurs, remain calm, take down a description of the snake and proceed immediately to the veterinarian, but call ahead to ensure they have anti-venom [onsite](#).



Another risk to prepare against when outdoors is heatstroke, which is also a preventable medical emergency. Avoid exercise during hot, humid conditions, ensure your dog has access to shade and water and never leave them in a car or other vehicle, even if you are parked in the shade with the windows down. On very hot and humid days, dogs are best kept

indoors with access to cooling, as well as cool, fresh and clean [water](#). And remember to avoid walking in bush or scrub areas that harbour paralysis ticks, use tick prevention and check your dog's coat daily because tick paralysis is potentially fatal and requires urgent veterinary [treatment](#).

Preventative treatments

Dogs require regular preventative treatments against a range of parasites, including intestinal worms, heartworms, fleas and ticks. They also need vaccinations to prevent common illnesses and core vaccines are essential to protect against parvovirus, canine adenovirus (hepatitis) and distemper. Non-core vaccinations to protect against parainfluenza virus, Bordetella bronchiseptica and Leptospira interrogans are administered according to your dog's lifestyle and upon the advice of your veterinarian. Many dogs will need the Bordetella vaccination as this protects against Kennel Cough, which dogs are most likely to be exposed to when they come into close contact with other dogs, such as when boarding or at dog parks. Your veterinarian will advise about the best products to use and about how often your dog needs to be vaccinated.

As an owner, you also have a role in preventative care by searching your dog's coat daily to [ensure there are no ticks](#), checking for lumps and wounds, by regularly cleaning their teeth and organising annual dental checks from your veterinarian to identify and address [dental disease](#).

Quality time

The greatest gift you can give your canine friend is your time, and what they really need is quality time, not just being in the house together. Playing with your dog, walking them, training or teaching tricks, going on outings, grooming and massage are all activities that will strengthen that special bond you have. In fact, it is recommended that your dog receives a at least four contact hours of [quality time each day](#).



Routines

Dogs respond well to daily routines and predictability. This is particularly important when they first arrive at a new home. Structuring their day with toileting first thing in the morning, walks, training sessions, play, rest time and feeding, is a way of ensuring their needs are met, including special time with their human family. Rigid schedules are not recommended because this is unrealistic for owners. It is important that dogs can adapt to change rather than becoming anxious or frustrated, for example, if their morning walk occurs later than usual.

Safety in the house

Just as you need to be wary of outdoor hazards, there are also many items in our homes that can potentially cause injury or toxicity to dogs. These include medications, foods that are toxic or otherwise dangerous to pets such as; chocolate, onions and garlic, raisins, grapes, stone-fruits and products containing caffeine, anti-freeze, string or string-like materials such as dental floss or yarn that can cause intestinal obstructions, rodent baits and some indoor [plants](#). It's also important to check that pet toys are free from sharp or removable parts such as squeakers, feathers or string that can be [ingested](#). Having a dog in your family can be like having a toddler, so with this in mind, have a spring clean to make sure there are no hazards that will put your furry friend at risk.

Training and socialising

One of the fun parts of having a companion dog is working with them and training them to learn new things. Dogs usually enjoy their training sessions and can be very quick learners with the right reward-based approach. Reward-based training provides them with mental stimulation, can prevent the development of problem behaviours and enhances the bond you share with them. All training should be based on reward-based positive reinforcement, which means rewarding desirable behaviours with

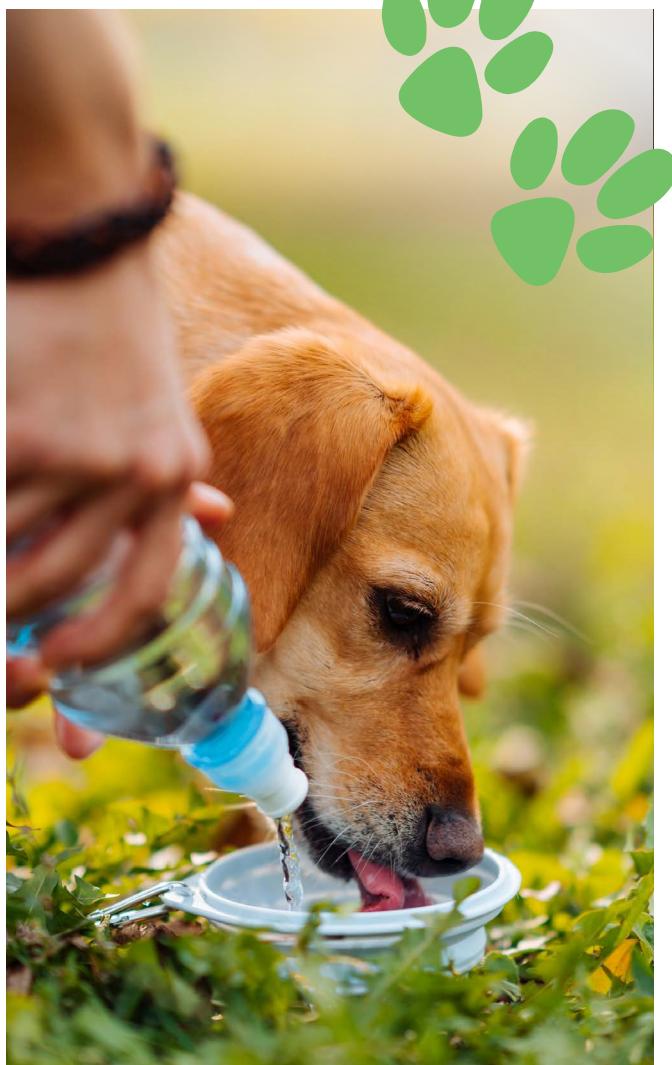


praise and small tasty treats, and ignoring or redirecting unwanted behaviours. Punishment is ineffective, distressing to the dog and typically makes any problems worse. Ideally, [training should begin when your dog is a puppy](#). Firstly, you should introduce them to a range of different experiences in their early socialisation period (up to 17 weeks of [age](#)). Once they have had their puppy vaccinations, you can then enrol them in puppy preschool as a starting point for training. Puppy preschool is offered at most veterinary clinics and your veterinarian can also advise you about options for ongoing [training](#).

Understanding

Every dog has a different personality but there are some common features we need to appreciate to understand them better. Canine body language is fascinating, and is their main way of communicating with us, so we need to observe and

understand their messages. By watching their facial expressions, body posture and the movement of their ears, mouths and tails, you will eventually learn how they are feeling, such as when they are fearful or [stressed](#). For instance, most dogs feel threatened by direct eye contact. It's also important to understand that although we may enjoy certain behavioural expressions such as hugging or kissing on the face, most dogs don't feel the same way, and this can make them feel threatened and potentially likely to react defensively. Gentle stroking and patting whilst avoiding the top of the head is the best alternative to [hugging](#).



Veterinary care

Providing regular veterinary care is a crucial part of dog ownership, so seek out a veterinarian early on in your dog's life and schedule at least annual appointments

after the initial puppy period. Your veterinarian will ensure your preventative treatments and vaccinations are up to date and will do a full health check. As your dog grows older, take them for health checks every 6 months (or as advised by your veterinarian) to maintain wellness and identify and treat any illnesses that may develop.

In addition to regular veterinary health checks, a visit to the vet may be necessary if your dog is injured after an accident or becomes ill. It may be worth considering [pet insurance](#) to help with any eligible vet bills after an accident or an illness, as they can be costly.

Water

Dogs need access to fresh clean drinking water at all times. There are a range of dog bowls available, including bowls that provide for dogs with floppy ears that would otherwise get wet when drinking, which can cause ear infections. Make sure you select large bowls that are freshly filled several times a day. Your dog will need multiple water sources, with bowls both indoors and in their outdoor yard area and kennel, and you can always add ice blocks during very hot weather.

Xmas (Christmas) and other festivities

Dogs are often seen by veterinarians over Christmas and other festive periods after having eaten food that upsets them or is dangerous. Examples include chocolate, which is highly toxic to dogs, raisins/sultanas in Christmas cakes and puddings which can cause kidney failure and fatty foods, which can lead to a painful and serious condition called pancreatitis. Another risk during these festivities is ingesting materials such as Christmas decorations. To prevent these episodes, supervise your dog closely and keep anything dangerous out of reach or fenced off, for example, with a baby gate. If this is not possible, [short term boarding is a safe option](#).

Your family

Your dog will be interacting with all members of the family, including children and other pets, so it's important to get them off to the best start with careful introductions. Take things slowly when introducing them to existing pets, keep your dog on the leash and above all, be patient and don't force them together in an area where neither can escape. Be especially cautious if you have a [cat that has no previous experience with dogs](#).

Children always require supervision around dogs, no matter how gentle the dog's temperament may be, because children can be jerky in their movements, which causes dogs to feel threatened. Also, they tend not to read the warning signs from dogs, which puts them at risk of a dog bite. Begin by teaching your child to stay calm, speak gently to the dog and allow the dog to approach them. When the dog appears comfortable, teach your child to gently

stroke your dog on the shoulder rather than the head, and [reward your dog for calm behaviour](#).

Zoonoses

Zoonoses are diseases that can be transmitted from animals to humans. People at highest risk are young children, adults over 65 and anyone whose immune system is suppressed, such as people on chemotherapy or other immunosuppressive drugs, people who have had organ transplants and pregnant women. Although the risks are minimal, it is possible to catch a disease from your dog. Examples include ringworm, some intestinal worms, scabies and fleas. You can reduce the risk of this by keeping your dog's worm prevention up to date, regular hand washing, not allowing your dog to lick anyone on the mouth and preventing children from playing in soil contaminated by dog [faeces](#).



Q and A with Dr Rosemary



Dr Rosemary Elliott - BVSc (Hons), MANZCVS (Animal Welfare), MPsyCh (Clin), BA (Hons)

Dr Rosemary studied veterinary science at the University of Sydney after establishing her career as a clinical psychologist. Her

experiences during veterinary training fostered an ambition to focus directly on animal welfare and ethics. Rosemary now combines her psychology background and veterinary skills to contribute to and promote animal welfare through writing, research and presentations. She is the current President of Sentient, an independent veterinary association dedicated to animal welfare advocacy. Her particular interests are animal sentience and the human-animal bond.

And finally, here are some answers to commonly asked questions from owners about their dog's health.

Should my dog have a litter before being desexed?

One of the worst myths is that female dogs should have a litter before being desexed. Not only does this increase the risk of pet overpopulation and the number of puppies ending up in shelters, but it is also detrimental to the pet's health because desexing before the first season is highly protective against mammary cancer.

Can I feed my dog a meat-only diet?

Feeding dogs a meat-only diet can actually lead to malnutrition and growth problems. Meat alone is not a complete diet as it lacks calcium and other essential nutrients, so pets should be given a balanced commercial diet with meat kept as a supplement. [Only human grade meat](#)

[should be given to dogs](#) and owners should be aware that feeding raw meat does increase the risk of Zoonotic diseases such as salmonella or E.coli. People who are immunosuppressed should avoid feeding raw meat products to their dog as a precaution.

My dog barks all day. Would getting a second dog stop the problem?

If your dog barks all day, the first step is to find out the reason. While barking is a normal behavior, excessive barking is not, and is often a sign that some important need is not being met for your dog. They may be bored, anxious, territorial or even in pain. Consult your veterinarian first and follow their recommendations. If the problem is caused by being left alone all day without stimulation, it's unlikely a second dog will solve the barking issue and you may end up with two barking dogs!



Conclusion

Bringing a dog into your life is a huge commitment, but the effort involved in learning to care for them pays off in countless ways. Dogs are experts at sharing joy and offering loyal companionship like none other. If you have questions or concerns about how to provide for your dog's needs, seek the assistance of your veterinarian.

You can't always avoid a trip to the veterinarian, but you can be prepared and help your back pocket against potentially huge bills with a [pet insurance policy](#).

Get a quote and buy online now

**For more information
call 1300 855 150
between 8am - 8pm
Monday to Friday AEST.**

RSPCA Pet Insurance is issued by The Hollard Insurance Company Pty Ltd ABN 78 090 584 473, AFSL 241436 is distributed and promoted by Greenstone Financial Services Pty Ltd (GFS) ABN 53 128 692 884, AFSL 343079 and by its Authorised Representative (AR) RSPCA Australia ABN 99 668 654 249, AR 296287 and is arranged and administered through PetSure (Australia) Pty Ltd ABN 95 075 949 923, AFSL 420183. Any advice provided is general only and does not take into account your individual objectives, financial situation or needs. Please consider the Product Disclosure Statement (PDS) to ensure this product meets your needs before purchasing. [PDS and Target Market Determination](#) available at rspcapetinsurance.org.au.



RSPCA 
Pet Insurance