



## Main Street Veterinary Services

2360 Main Street, PO Box 211 London, ON N6P 1P9

[www.mainstreetvetservices.ca](http://www.mainstreetvetservices.ca)

(519)-203-2000

# 6 Steps To A Happy Puppy

BY SARA JACKSON

**Puppies are a lot of fun, but ensuring they grow into healthy, well-adjusted dogs requires a well-rounded approach. These six steps will get your new puppy on the road to a long and happy life.**

Bringing home a new puppy is exciting, but it's also a big responsibility. You want your little friend to grow into a happy, healthy dog who will be with you for many years, but how do you know where to start? A lot of people find themselves wishing puppies came with an instruction manual, but it's really not that difficult.



## Puppylove

Puppies are a lot of fun, but ensuring they grow into healthy, well-adjusted dogs requires a well-rounded approach that factors in everything from nutrition to socialization. These six steps will get your new friend on the road to a long and happy life.

### 1. Puppy Nutrition

**One of the most important things you can do for your puppy is start him on a healthy diet from day one.** Choose a quality premium product made from ingredients that are as natural as possible. Veterinarian Dr. Mark Newkirk recommends feeding your puppy grain-free foods that have no additives or preservatives. "Label reading is crucial," he says. "Fresh frozen raw foods are the most natural, in my opinion. They come as patties or nuggets, which you thaw out daily. These foods have the needed nutrients in them."

Many pet food companies offer diets formulated specifically for puppies. These tend to be higher in protein, vitamins and minerals than diets for adult dogs.

If you opt for one of these diets, be sure again to choose a premium quality product. They cost more, but look at it as an investment in your puppy's health as an adult. If you're considering a home-prepared diet, be sure you thoroughly educate yourself on what a growing puppy needs in order to thrive. "It's important to follow

recipes to make sure all vitamins, minerals, fatty acids, etc., are included,” advises Dr. Newkirk. It’s wise to work with an integrative or holistic vet who can give you nutritional advice on home-feeding a puppy.

Dr. Newkirk also recommends supplemental vitamins, minerals and fatty acids. Vitamins B and C are extremely helpful, especially for joint-related health. Since your puppy may be prone to digestive upsets, Dr. Newkirk recommends adding extra fiber such as sweet potato, canned pumpkin, coconut or apple to his diet. “Raw eggs two times a week, with the shell (nature’s calcium), are a good extra protein supplement,” he adds.

“One nice ‘side effect’ of feeding a good diet is that there are no fillers, so stool amounts and frequency will be much less. It’s great for house training!”

## 2. Feeding schedule

From the time of your puppy’s birth up to six months of age, he will need to consume as much as two to four times the food an adult dog would eat. This means he should be fed three times a day.

After six months of age, reduce your puppy’s feedings to twice a day. Once he’s a year old, you can reduce this to once per day, or else give him smaller quantities twice a day. “I like feeding twice a day,” says Dr. Newkirk. “How much depends on the breed, rate of growth and so on.”

Puppies are gluttons, so a good rule of thumb is to let yours eat as much as he wants in 15 minutes, then pick up the food dish. If you let him free feed throughout the day, you run the risk of him becoming overweight and developing health problems later in life.



## 3. House training

A puppy’s house training, which can begin after five weeks of age, will be contingent upon his feeding schedule, which in turn will be determined by your schedule. Luckily for you, most puppies don’t like going to the bathroom where they live, so house training should be a breeze. Take him outside immediately after he eats or drinks, but also offer him bathroom breaks after naps, playtime or any time you see him sniffing about the house. This helps get him into the habit of going outside to relieve himself.

Once your puppy has finished doing his business outside, get down to his level and thoroughly praise him. If you are consistent in your training, then after about a week, your puppy should automatically go to the door to be let out whenever the urge strikes him.

Note that even though a puppy can hold his bladder for up to 13 hours, you should never wait this long to take him outside to relieve himself. If you’re not going to be home for a long period, get someone else to take the puppy outside.

## 4. Core vaccines

While over-vaccination has negative effects and is best avoided, it’s nevertheless important that puppies are protected from the most common infectious diseases. A puppy’s immune system has not yet fully developed, making him highly susceptible to distemper, parvo and adenovirus.

Your puppy's vaccination schedule will depend on his lifestyle and vicinity to other animals. He should receive his core vaccines at the age of 12 weeks. Before that, many puppies still have passive maternal antibodies that block immunization, so they may not respond to the vaccine and will therefore be unprotected.

There are four core vaccines: canine distemper (CDV), canine parvovirus-2 (CPV-2), canine adenovirus-2 (CAV-2) and rabies. Although rabies may not be an issue for many dogs, the vaccine is still required by law in most regions.

Once your puppy has been properly immunized, ask your vet if he can be given titer testing thereafter, rather than annual boosters. A growing body of evidence is showing that most vaccines have duration of immunity lasting up to seven or nine years in some cases, making annual vaccination unnecessary.

## 5. Exercise

It's fun to watch your puppy race around the yard at full speed, but **excessive running or any other type of overexertion can prove to be a problem later** in your puppy's life. Up until 18 to 24 months of age, your puppy's bones are still soft and spongy.

"Fortunately most puppies exercise themselves quite well," says Dr. Newkirk. "Bone and joint- related problems usually occur in puppies that are pushed into work, such as agility, retrieving and fly ball." Activities such as jumping and rough play with other dogs should be avoided.

Appropriate exercise for your puppy could include short walks and playing with toys in a contained area. As he grows older, you can extend his walks and playtimes.

## 6. Socialization

Your puppy's brain is more apt to accept new experiences such as people, animals and situations between the ages of four and 12 weeks. At a certain point during this time, puppies go through what is called a fear imprinting stage, so **it's crucial to your pup's development to introduce him to a variety of stimuli every day, while ensuring that each experience is a positive one.** If the experiences are negative, you will wind up with a dog that's anti-social and fearful.



You also need to establish yourself as your puppy's leader. As he grows and experiences more things, his confidence and trust in you will grow, and he'll come to happily depend on you to guide him through life.

Taking a holistic approach to your puppy's physical and mental development will help him grow into a loving, healthy and well-adjusted companion who will give you many years of unconditional love and joy.

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