

## Ten Tips to Make your Dog's Life Happy & Healthy

by Pam Flowers

1. Provide adequate shelter
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### 1 & 2. Provide adequate shelter and clean, dry bedding.

The first protection a dog has against the elements is his coat. But even a hairy Eskimo dog can feel cold and short-haired Chihuahuas can suffer from too much heat. It is your responsibility to provide shelter that offers adequate protection from heat, cold, rain, and wind. Whether your dog lives inside your house or outside in the yard, he should have his own little spot that is his alone.

If he sleeps inside, provide a dog crate lined with a blanket, towel or dog pillow and carefully choose something you can easily remove and wash. Dogs love dens and a crate gives them a sense of security. If you don't want to use a crate, try allowing the dog to select his own sleeping area, as long as it is not inconvenient for you. Most likely, he will crawl under a desk, table or even your bed. It is acceptable to allow your dog to sleep in your bedroom but he should sleep on his own bedding and not in your bed. By being allowed to select his own special sleeping spot, your dog will be more inclined to sleep in the same place each night and not be up roaming around, bothering you.

If your dog lives outside all or most of the time, provide a small house big enough for the dog to turn around inside and stretch out. The shelter should be made with waterproof materials, sturdy enough to keep out wind and rain and positioned to provide shade. There are many commercial doghouses available or you can build one out of plywood that will meet these requirements. Design choices are endless, but it is my experience that dogs love a rectangular, flat-topped house. They love to jump up on their house and look around. This configuration also makes them stable.

The house may be lined with a blanket or straw. The blanket should be removed and washed from time to time and straw replaced if it gets wet or added to when it breaks down. My dogs love straw! They get as excited when I hand out fresh straw as when I show up with hamburgers on their birthdays, and that's pretty excited.

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### 3. Supply clean, fresh water.

The most important and cheapest nutrient you can give your dog is water.

Provide a bowl short enough for her to drink from easily. Stainless steel bowls that are wide, flat on the bottom and have a fairly straight wall are a good choice because they will not break, are easy to clean and difficult to turn over.

It is important for your dog to drink enough water every day so keep a bowl of water in a place where it will not be in anyone's way and the dog can drink undisturbed. Change the water at least daily.

Dogs love to drink from toilet bowls but they can pick up diseases just as easily as people can. Keeping the lid down or the bathroom door closed can stop this practice.

Check your dog's water supply at least twice a day. Some dogs love to play with their water bowls and tip them over about as fast as you can fill them. If she thinks this is fun, surround the bowl with large, flat, really heavy rocks. Then place the bowl in the middle so that the rim is just barely below the top of the rocks. She will still be able to drink but be unable to grasp the edge of the bowl and flip it over. If rocks are not available, build a wooden platform with a well in the middle to hold the bowl.

During warm weather or if your dog lives inside all the time, she will likely drink plenty of water with no enticement from you regardless of the breed. If she lives outdoors, adequate water consumption can become a challenge when the weather turns cold.

Dogs who are bred to live outdoors in the cold, such as Siberian huskies, Alaskan huskies, Eskimo dogs, Malamutes and Mackenzie River huskies have hardwired brains that cause them to instinctively avoid water when the outside temperature drops below freezing. This seems to carry over into avoiding drinking water or at least drinking so little as to provide inadequate hydration. Fortunately, there are two well-proven methods to entice them to consume plenty of water.

In the morning place fresh water in your dogs bowl, add small amount of chopped or ground meat, gravy or meat drippings and stir this around to make a tasty broth. She'll slurp this right down. In the evening, when you feed her main meal, mix warm water with dog food. If you feed canned food, stir in some water. If the food is dry, allow time for the food to soak up the water before serving. By giving her tasty water twice a day, your dog will stay well hydrated.

Check for adequate hydration by examining the dog's skin and gums. Place your hand over her ribs and press gently. Move your hand back and forth slightly. The skin should be loose and move easily with your hand. Another method is to gently lift the skin over the dog's back. When you let go, the skin should instantly return to its normal position. If it moves back into place slowly, the dog is dehydrated. Gums should be moist.

When you are refreshing the water supply, pay attention to how much water has been consumed every day. Significant increase or decrease in intake can signify health problems that may require a visit to the vet. However, water intake of a nursing female will increase significantly.

While an adequate water supply is certainly important, you may wish to remove it from a puppy about three hours before bedtime. This plus taking the puppy out several times to empty its bladder will reduce the likelihood of accidents during the night and speed house training. Offer fresh water when the puppy wakes up.

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#### **4. Feed a high quality pet food.**

Several years ago I spent two years trying six of the top dog foods, feeding each brand for at least ten weeks in a search for the best dog food available. One food had a lot of molasses, which the dogs didn't seem to like. Another was too grain-like and dense, which provided a lot of nutrition in a tiny quantity of food but left the dogs wanting more bulk. Upon opening five bags of another brand, I saw a significant difference in appearance and the food from each bag tasted and smelled different. Another food was ridiculously expensive and my dogs didn't like it much. The fifth fell by the wayside because I discovered mold in a newly opened bag.

By process of elimination, I ended up feeding Purina Pro-Plan Dog Food and my dogs have been thriving on it for several years. Their coats are thick, plush and soft, they have an excellent attitude, love to run and play, live to an average age of fifteen and, perhaps best of all, they simply seem content.

Today my dogs eat Pro-Plan Beef and Rice or Pro-Plan Lamb and Rice Performance Formula. As they age, their diet will change and they will go to Senior Pro Plan. The great thing about Pro Plan is that there is a formula for every stage of life from puppy to senior. There are even formula for dogs that have food allergies or weight gain problems. When AKC (American Kennel Club) annually rates the all-breed champions, it is a fact that 6 out of 10 of these dogs eat Pro Plan dog food.

Over the past twenty-two years, my dog team and I have traveled 45,000 miles and we still have quite a few miles to go. Thanks to Pro Plan dog food, I fully expect future journeys to be happy, healthy and successful. For more information on the various Pro Plan Formulas, please visit <http://www.proplan.com>.

Their diet consists of nothing but dog food and water, with one notable exception. When any dog or I have a birthday, we all get hamburgers.

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## **5. Maintain proper body weight.**

Just like humans, being overweight is not healthy for your dog. Obesity leads to heart disease, skeletal problems, diabetes and low energy. Your dog will look and feel better if you maintain him at a proper weight.

Almost every obese dog is overweight because he is fed too much food and gets too little exercise.

To determine if your dog's weight is right, look at his body outline from the top and from the side. Looking down on your dog, he should have a waist. From the side, his belly should be tucked up and the outline of his ribs apparent but not highly visible. If the ribs are highly visible, your dog is under weight.

To reduce your dog's weight, reduce his food intake by 10% and feed that amount for about two weeks. If after two weeks he is still overweight, reduce the amount by 10% again. Repeat this until your dog is at an optimum weight.

While dieting, increase the amount of exercise he gets very slowly. Remember he has a lot to carry around and may be out of shape. Once he has reached optimum weight and becomes more physically fit, you may have to begin increasing his food intake.

It is up to you to maintain your dog at a proper weight. Feeding him too much food or too many treats because it makes you feel good is not a demonstration of love.

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## **6. Exercise your dog regularly.**

Exercise is part of a healthy lifestyle for dogs and people. The best and easiest exercise is walking or running with your dog. All you need is some time and a leash. How far and how fast you go with your dog depends on its age, level of fitness and breed.

Young puppies may be able to walk fast for a short while but tire quickly. If you want to go for a long walk with your young dog, be prepared to carry it part of the way. Adult dogs will likely be able to go as far and fast as you wish. Old dogs suffer from the same infirmities as people such as arthritis, heart disease, low thyroid, and will lose their endurance with age. By regularly exercising your dog, you can help prevent obesity, keep its muscles strong and slow the progression of joint disease. Like you, your dog will feel better if it is fit.

If your dog is out of shape, start slow and build up. When I first start training my dog team in the fall, our first run is no more than  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile. The next day  $\frac{3}{8}$  of a mile, then  $\frac{1}{2}$ ,  $\frac{3}{4}$ , 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. When a dog is fit enough to comfortably run five miles, something almost magical happens and the mileage can increase rapidly. By the end of the first month, we are up to 25 miles a day. Of course, a dog does not have to go that far to be fit, and the size and age of your dog, the time you have to devoted to exercise, and weather conditions will affect how far you want to go each day.

You can easily tell if your dog is getting the right amount of exercise by noting what the dog does when you are finished. If the dog falls over and sleeps for the rest of the day, you probably over did it. If she runs up to you with her favorite ball and wants to play fetch, well maybe you should throw the ball until she uses up some more energy. If she wants to rest and take a short nap, you've found the right amount of exercise for your dog.

Besides keeping your dog healthy, there are mental and social benefits to regular exercise. An under-exercised dog with lots of pent up energy will be bored and may become a nuisance barker, chew furniture or may even develop aggressive behavior. Exercise will help your dog relax and it helps you and her form a strong bond.

Remember, if your dog is pregnant, she still needs regular exercise. As delivery day draws near, she may or may not tire more easily. Be very certain to monitor her for adequate hydration and don't let her overheat.

Just too tired to get up and take the dog out? Don't want to get your feet wet in that downpour? Here's an idea! My friends Doug and Lori in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada have taught their Basset, Lucy, to do laps. They can sit in a chair and say "Do your laps," and Lucy will walk back and forth endlessly as long as they keep telling her to do this. In fairness, to Doug and Lori, they do this to keep an excited Lucy occupied while they are putting on coats and boots to walk her regardless of the weather. Doing laps in the kitchen is not a substitute for going for a walk but if a hurricane, blizzard, flood, or tornado is happening in your neighborhood, you may be able to get away with this temporarily.

When finished exercising, offer your dog a bowl of fresh water and drink a glassful yourself.

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## **7. Play with your dog daily.**

Dogs are pack animals and so have the potential to be able to deal with a variety of circumstances. Properly socialized, he can happily be in the company of many people or other dogs and is also able to tolerate periods of solitude. Too much of either situation is hard on him.

Dogs were never meant to spend their entire lives alone in the backyard or anywhere else. Like people, they need companionship to thrive. They need to feel they are welcome and useful members of their pack. And they need to play.

When you return home, tired and needing a rest but your dog is jumping all over you, playing may be the last thing you want to do. But try and see the same situation from your dog's point of view. He's been alone all day and his best friend, his hero, his companion through thick and thin just came home. His enthusiastic greeting may be the happiest, most thoughtful and genuinely felt expression of acceptance of you in your entire day. And the best thing about it, is that he is willing to greet you this way every single day.

If his greeting is a bit too enthusiastic, it will prove useful to both of you if you greet your dog quietly, stroke his chest and shoulders and speak softly when you first enter. If necessary, hold him by the collar at arm's length. When he tries to jump up, stop petting him and say quietly and sternly, "No". When he stops jumping up, begin petting him again. He will soon learn that calm greetings get him what he really wants, which is to be close to you, feel your welcome touch and hear your soft, loving voice.

When you're rested up, take your dog for a walk, play tug, fetch, rollover, shake a paw, throw a Frisbee. Spend time every day just playing and you will notice it's not just fun for your dog, it's fun for you too. When you go on that errand, try to take your dog whenever possible because anything that physically involves you with your dog will be seen by him as fun. Even a daily, short period of intense one-on-one attention from you will go a long way toward meeting his social needs. During the rest of the evening, simply being in your company is welcome and necessary companionship for your dog.

If you meet your dog's emotional need for companionship and play, your dog will feel happy and secure. Discipline problems will be fewer and training easier.

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## **8. Take your dog to the vet at least once a year.**

One of the most important people in the life of your dog will be his veterinarian. So, before you get a dog, get a vet.

Talk to people you know and ask their opinion of local vet clinics. Visit the clinic and talk to the staff. The clinic should be clean, the staff willing to provide you with basic information about the frequency and cost of vaccinations and other regular health requirements for your dog. If they are not friendly and courteous or will not give you information, find a different clinic.



Sojo & Lucy digging in the ice.  
Roald looking at the camera.

During your dog's first visit, you and your dog should feel comfortable with the vet. Your dog deserves to be treated with patience, compassion, and genuine concern. And you deserve the same treatment as well. Once he learns to feel comfortable at the vet clinic, he will come to understand that no matter what happens there is nothing to be afraid of. When he is sick or injured, he will come to understand that you are trying to help him by going to the vet.

It is extremely important to follow the recommended regimen of vaccinations to prevent your dog from acquiring a number of serious illnesses. It is also important to bring your dog to the vet once a year for dental hygiene and an overall checkup.

Post the vet's phone number with your other emergency numbers and have a clear understanding of your vet's emergency response policies.

For the safety and comfort of your dog and other animals, your dog should be on a leash for the entire time he is in the clinic unless you are asked to remove it. If you forget your leash, the clinic will have one you can borrow.

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## 9. Keep you dog under your control at all times.

To understand how your dog thinks, I strongly recommend a book by Patricia McConnell, Ph.D. called THE OTHER END OF THE LEASH. This book will give you a wonderful insight into your dog's mind and help you understand why your dog does what he/she does. You can also pick up more tips by listening to Patricia McConnell's weekly NPR radio program called CALLING ALL PETS. Her website is [www.dogsbestfriendtraining.com](http://www.dogsbestfriendtraining.com).

It is critical to keep your dog under your control at all times for her safety and the safety of others. Control at all times means twenty-four hours a day. You can control by voice, leash, or confinement.

When you're at home or walking at the dog-park where you can let her off of her leash, voice control is appropriate. The most important command you can teach your dog is come. It's not terribly hard to train your dog to come. Choose a place and time where she will have no distractions and have a nice supply of treats in your pocket. Take a treat out and hold in your left hand. Face her, hold your right arm out at full length straight in front of you with your palm facing the dog like a traffic cop. Tell her to stay and slowly back away three or four steps. Lower your arm, bend forward in a play-bow with your knees slightly bent and your hands on your knees, clap your hands and say come, come.

Now hold the treat out where she can see it and repeat the command come. The dog will come to get the treat. Praise her by saying good dog when she arrives at your feet. Keep repeating this but each time try to move another step away before you say come. Keep the lessons under ten minutes. Eventually she will come because you told her to and you can give her a treat every second or third time, but always praise her.

You can also walk away from her and call her to come. Dogs love to chase and she will follow you, quickly learning to come when called.

When walking along a sidewalk in a city, it is important to keep your dog on a leash. Even the best trained dog may not come if it sees another dog or cat on the other side of the street and decides to try to dash across traffic in pursuit of a little social encounter. There are short leashes, long leashes, leashes that extend and retract, leather leashes, chain leashes and rope leashes. The right leash for you is the one that allows you the easiest and most comfortable control over your dog. My personal choice is one made of thick rope used by rock climbers. It is soft, round, strong, easy to grip and can be purchased at most sporting goods stores in any length.

If you wish to keep your dog confined in a fenced area outside, provide a house that will shelter the dog from heat, cold, rain and wind. Provide shade, fresh, clean water and scoop their droppings daily. The ideal enclosure is made of strong fencing material tall enough to prevent your dog from jumping over – usually four to six feet high. About one and a half to two feet of fencing should be buried around the inside perimeter to prevent digging escape tunnels. The best shape is rectangular rather than square because, for some reason I do not understand, dogs are more active in rectangular enclosures.

My three dogs live in a 25X50 foot enclosure with a big pile of gravel in the middle where they can jump up and play king of the castle. Dogs love to lie, stand or sit on high places rather than flat surfaces, so there are several small piles of gravel to accommodate everyone's needs. They consistently use one end for elimination and the rest of the pen to play endless games of tag and wrestling. I understand not everyone has room to have such a large enclosure, but don't put your dog in something that is so small it can not run around a little. Exercise and the ability to move around is important to your dog's physical and mental well being.

Your dog would likely appreciate something to occupy her time while in an enclosure. A toy stuffed with food or some toy that she cannot destroy will keep her busy and help pass the time. If your dog will tolerate another dog inside her enclosure, you may want to consider a second dog as a companion.

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## **10. Give your dog a purpose.**

Dogs are pack animals and your family is her pack. Just as each human family member needs a specific task to perform within the group, so should your dog. By performing her task within the pack you are giving your dog a feeling of security, that she belongs and has a purpose.

No one, including your dog, likes to hang around all day and do nothing. Bored dogs can become a nuisance and bark a lot or get into trouble around the house. It is up to you to evaluate your dog and give her something reasonable to do based on her size, aptitude, motivation and personality.

Because dogs are pack animals they understand the idea of teamwork. They want you to be the leader of the pack and they want you to tell them what to do. Dogs can be taught to get the paper, bark at approaching strangers and animals, be your friend and confidant, tow you around on skis, protect you when jogging and provide something warm and fuzzy to touch.

I once worked with a woman whose dog went hiking with her every weekend. When they were ready to set out, the woman would lock the car door and throw the keys into the brush. She would tell her dog "fetch" and the dog would dash into the brush and find the keys. Just as the dog started to pick up the keys, she would tell her to "drop it". When they returned from the hike, she would again tell the dog "fetch", only this time the dog was allowed to return to the woman with the keys.

Remember your dog performs its task voluntarily so always, always provide leadership by praising the dog when she has completed her job.