



HOUSETRAINING YOUR NEW ADULT DOG

But my new dog is an adult! Does he really need housetraining help?

Almost all newly adopted adult dogs need to learn—or relearn—when and where to eliminate. Even if you suspect that your dog has been *previously* housetrained, it's still a good idea to treat him as if he hasn't when you first bring him home—just to prevent mistakes and ensure housetraining success.

Your Two Main Goals

When you start housetraining a dog, you'll need to focus on two things:

- preventing mistakes from happening
- providing plenty of opportunities for success (i.e., eliminating outside) and rewarding your dog every time he gets it right

If you carefully manage your dog's behavior inside your home from the very beginning *and* you make it very clear that you LOVE it when he goes to the bathroom outside by rewarding him generously with treats and praise, you'll have a housetrained dog before you know it.

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure—seriously.

Why is preventing mistakes essential in the beginning? It's extremely important to make sure that your dog doesn't get into the habit of eliminating in an inappropriate place—like on your lovely Persian rug. Once he's eliminated on it a few times, to him, it's going to start smelling and feeling like The Right Place to Go. If you spend some extra time and energy on preventing mistakes in the early stages of housetraining, you'll succeed much sooner.

The Great Crate

The easiest way to prevent your dog from making mistakes is to use a crate. Crates are great! Remember that dogs' ancestors lived in dens, so dogs do naturally tend to like small, cozy places to call their own. (Please see our handout, *Crate Training Your Dog*, for detailed information about how to acclimate your dog to his new crate.) Unless they've been forced to live and eliminate in very small, confined spaces, most dogs will avoid urinating and defecating where they sleep, eat and hang out. So if you set up an appropriately sized crate for your new dog, he probably won't go to the bathroom when he's in it. The crate should be big enough for your dog to turn around, lie down and sit comfortably when he's inside it—but no bigger.

Once you've set up your dog's crate and introduced him to it, you can make a new rule: *When you can't keep your eyes on your dog to supervise him closely and make sure he doesn't eliminate in the house, he ALWAYS goes into his crate.* Stick to this new rule religiously for at least a couple of weeks. Of course, make sure your dog gets frequent playtime with you outside of his crate. A great time to do this is right after he's eliminated (and he's empty). Do make sure, however, that your dog doesn't ever have the freedom to wander around your home alone. Until you're sure your dog is housetrained, he should always be in the same room as you are, directly supervised, or in his crate. Whenever you let your dog out of his crate, immediately take him outside for a bathroom break. If he doesn't go and it's been a couple hours or more since he has, put him back into the crate and try again 30 minutes later. Eventually, your dog will eliminate outside and you'll have an opportunity to praise and reward him for doing so.

If you choose not to use a crate to housetrain, you'll need to set up a dog-proofed confinement area instead, where your dog can stay when you cannot supervise him. Make sure the area you choose is carpet-free, as small as possible and securely sectioned off from the rest of your house with doors, baby gates or an exercise pen.

Send a Clear Message with Rewards

Along with preventing your dog from eliminating where you don't want him to, you'll need to clearly explain to him where you DO want him to go. Rewarding him with lots of praise and treats when he gets it right is the best way to accomplish this. To avoid interrupting your dog as he's eliminating, praise him calmly when he starts to go. Then praise enthusiastically and reward him with a tasty treat right after he finishes. Do this for at least a couple of weeks or until your dog is completely housetrained. Once he has been totally housetrained for about a month, you can stop delivering treats and just praise him instead.

What to Do If Your Dog Does Have an Accident in the House

Although you'll housetrain your dog more quickly if you can prevent mistakes from happening altogether, sometimes mistakes do happen. If your dog does eliminate in the house, here's what you need to do:

- First of all, make a mental note: Your dog may need more frequent opportunities to go out and relieve himself—and he may need more supervision too.
- If you catch your dog as he STARTS to make a mistake in the house, interrupt him by making some sort of noise ("Oops!! Let's go outside!!") and immediately take him out. If he finishes outside, remember to praise him.
- Avoid frightening or punishing your dog. If you do, he may learn to avoid eliminating in front of you at all—and to sneak away whenever he has to go.
- If you don't catch your dog in the act (he's already gone to the bathroom in the house), it is too late to respond. DO NOT punish him by yelling or rubbing his nose in urine or feces. If you do this, your dog will not make the connection and understand that he shouldn't eliminate in the house. Just supervise more closely in the future.
- Clean up the accident with an enzymatic cleaner, like Nature's Miracle, which you can find at almost any pet store. If you use something else to clean up the mess, your dog's powerful nose will still be able to smell the spot later on—and that may cue him to eliminate there again.

Increasing Freedom

When your dog hasn't had any mistakes in the house for at least a couple of weeks, and he's consistently eliminating outside, you can start to increase his freedom in the house. Every week or two, you can make his roaming area a bit bigger, one room at a time. If you allow your dog access to other rooms in your house and he makes a mistake inside, you've probably increased his freedom too soon. Go back to strict supervision for a while.

A Few Final Tips

- Provide very frequent opportunities for your dog to eliminate outside in the beginning. If possible, take him out every couple of hours when you're home for the first few days. Then you can slowly increase the time between bathroom breaks.
- Try to stick to an elimination schedule. Remember that you're not only teaching your dog WHERE to go, you're teaching him WHEN to go too. Good times to give your dog a chance to eliminate include right when he wakes up, right after he eats or drinks, right after a vigorous play session, right after you let him out of his crate or confinement area and right before bedtime.
- Do try to put elimination on cue. Right before or as your dog starts to relieve himself, say something like "Hurry up!" With repetition, you may be able to use your cue to prompt your dog to eliminate when he goes outside.
- During the housetraining process, *always* go outside with your dog. That way you'll know for sure whether or not he eliminates AND you'll be able to reward him when he does.
- When you take your dog outside to eliminate, lead him to the same spot each time. His nose will tell him that he's gone in that area before—and the smell may cue him to go again.
- As you supervise your dog indoors, watch for signs that he needs to go out, like circling, sniffing, pacing, whining and standing near doors.
- After your dog is housetrained, be reasonable about how long you ask him to wait between opportunities to eliminate. Virtually all adult dogs can sleep through the night without needing to go out. During the day, try to give your dog an opportunity to eliminate every 6—7 hours. Some dogs can hold it longer...but do YOU like to wait that long between bathroom breaks? 😊
- If you must be gone for 10 or more hours during the day, consider having a friend, family member or neighbor come over to let your dog out. You can also hire a dog walker or take your dog to a local daycare.
- If your puppy urinates when greeting you or other people, you may be dealing with a behavior called *submissive urination*, rather than a housetraining issue. To help eliminate this problem (no pun intended), greet your dog VERY slowly and quietly when returning home or entering a room—or wait a few minutes, until he calms down completely, before greeting him at all. Ask visitors to do the same. When you arrive home, *immediately* take your dog out, before doing anything else. Avoid leaning over your dog, as this may exacerbate the problem. Also avoid scolding him if he does urinate in front of you during greetings or when you approach. Dogs use submissive urination to "turn off" aggression in other dogs, so if you become "aggressive" when your dog performs this behavior, he may urinate *more*, in an attempt to make you less angry!

Resources & Recommended Reading

If you'd like more information about housetraining, we highly recommend reading *Way to Go!* by Patricia McConnell. You can find it in our SPCA gift shop. For additional advice, you can call our **Behavior Helpline** at (804) 643-SPCA.