

WALNUT CREEK SUPPLY

THE COMPLETE CARE GUIDE

Dog

Puppy to senior, small to large: feeding, training and everyday care



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New owner? Go straight to Section 1. It is written so you can set up a safe, correct home and get through the first 48 hours without reading anything else first.

Somewhere in the first week, nearly every new dog owner has the same quiet moment: the house is dark, the dog is finally asleep, and you are standing in the hallway thinking, "Okay. This is real. This is ours." Dogs have shared our homes, farms, and front porches for well over 15,000 years, and they have never treated the arrangement as casual. This guide covers dogs of every size and age, from an 8-week-old puppy who fits in two cupped hands to a gray-muzzled senior who has earned the best spot on the couch. Where puppies, adults, seniors, small breeds, and large breeds need different care, we say so plainly. Where a decision belongs to your veterinarian (vaccine schedules, spay and neuter timing, medications, raw feeding), we give you solid general guidance and then point you to the person who can examine your actual dog. We are a family business in Christiana, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and we grow our own food and keep our own animals, so none of this is theory to us. Start with the Quick Start, keep the toxic foods table handy, and know that you are already doing the most important thing: showing up.

SECTION 1

Quick Start: Your First 48 Hours

1. **Dog-proof before the dog arrives.** Get down on your hands and knees and look at your home from nose height. Pick up electrical cords, shoes, children's toys, medications, and anything that smells interesting and is small enough to swallow. Move trash cans behind a door or into a cabinet. Check that houseplants are dog-safe (sago palms are among the most dangerous). A puppy investigates the world with its mouth, and a newly adopted adult may chew out of stress, so assume anything reachable is fair game.
2. **Set up the dog's home base.** Choose one quiet, easy-to-clean room or corner, ideally close to where the family spends time. Put a crate (or a gated pen) there with a comfortable bed, a water bowl, and a couple of chew toys. This becomes the dog's safe place, not a punishment room. Dogs are den animals by instinct, and a cozy, predictable spot lowers stress dramatically in a new house.
3. **Stock the food the dog is already eating.** Ask the breeder, shelter, or rescue exactly what food and how much, and buy that same food for the first week or two, even if you plan to switch. Changing food and changing homes in the same 24 hours is a recipe for an upset stomach. You can transition gradually later (see Diet & Nutrition).
4. **Make the first stop the potty spot.** Before the dog even sees the inside of your house, walk it on a leash to the spot in the yard where you want it to go. Wait quietly. When it goes, praise warmly and offer a small treat. That first success sets the pattern for house training.
5. **Introduce the house slowly, on a leash.** Let the dog explore one room at a time with you holding the leash or standing right there. Resist the urge to give a full tour, a pile of visitors, and a trip to meet the neighbors in the first hours. Newly adopted adults in particular need time to decompress. Many rescue groups use the **3-3-3 guideline**: roughly three days to decompress, three weeks to learn the routine, and three months to feel truly at home. Expect the real personality to show up around week three, not day one.
6. **Start a routine immediately.** Dogs thrive on predictability. Pick feeding times, potty times, walk times, and bedtime, and stick to them. A young puppy needs a bathroom break first thing in the morning, after every meal, after every nap, after every play session, and about every one to two hours in between. An adult dog needs a break at least every four to six hours, and most prefer more.
7. **Plan the first night.** Put the crate near your bed so the dog can hear and smell you. A puppy will likely cry for part of the night; take it out for a quick, boring potty trip once or twice (many 8-week-old puppies need one around 2 or 3 a.m.), then put it right back without play. A soft toy, a warm (not hot) water bottle wrapped in a towel, and a ticking clock or soft white noise can help. Adult dogs often sleep best in a crate or on a bed in your bedroom at first.

8. **Put identification on the dog today.** Before it ever goes outside the fenced yard, attach a collar with an ID tag listing your phone number. Frightened new dogs bolt more often than anyone expects. If the dog is microchipped, confirm the chip is registered to **your** name and **your** phone number, not the shelter's or breeder's. (More in Home Setup & Safety.)
9. **Book the vet visit within the first few days.** Bring all records from the breeder or shelter. Your veterinarian will do a physical exam, check a stool sample for intestinal parasites, and build a plan for vaccines, parasite prevention, and spay or neuter timing. If you got a puppy, this visit matters even more, because puppies are not fully protected until their vaccine series is complete. Also write down the location and phone number of your nearest 24-hour emergency veterinary hospital and put it on the refrigerator.
10. **Keep it calm, short, and kind.** For the first 48 hours, the most useful things you can give your dog are food, water, rest, gentle routine, and your calm presence. Skip the dog park, the pet store crowds, and the long hike. Do not worry about training perfect behavior yet; just reward what you like (going potty outside, lying quietly, taking a treat gently) and gently prevent what you don't. You are building trust, and trust is the foundation for everything else.

First-Time Starter Bundle

What needs to be in the house on day one, and what to look for in each category. Your vet and your dog's size and age will refine this list, but this is a sound starting point for any dog.

Essentials

- **A complete and balanced food for the dog's life stage and size** — puppy, adult, or senior, and a large-breed puppy formula if the dog will be 50 pounds or more as an adult. Look for an AAFCO (Association of American Feed Control Officials) "complete and balanced" statement on the bag, explained fully in Diet & Nutrition.
- **Two bowls, one for food and one for water** — stainless steel or ceramic are easy to sanitize and don't harbor bacteria in scratches the way worn plastic can. Size them to the dog: shallow for flat-faced breeds, heavier and wider-based for puppies who like to tip things.
- **A properly fitted flat collar with an ID tag** — snug enough that two fingers slide underneath, loose enough that the dog can't back out of it. The tag carries your phone number at minimum.
- **A well-fitted harness** — especially useful for small dogs (protects the delicate windpipe), flat-faced breeds, strong pullers, and as a car-restraint attachment point. Y-shaped front-clip or back-clip styles that don't restrict shoulder movement are best.
- **A standard 4 to 6 foot leash** — fixed-length, comfortable in the hand, in nylon or leather. Retractable leashes give poor control and can cause rope burns and sudden-stop injuries, so skip them for training and busy streets.
- **A crate or pen sized to the adult dog** — the dog should be able to stand up, turn around, and stretch out. For a growing puppy, choose a crate with an adjustable divider so you can expand it as the puppy grows.
- **A comfortable, washable bed** — chew-resistant for puppies, orthopedic memory-foam style for large breeds and seniors.
- **Baby gates or an exercise pen** — to block off stairs, kitchens, and rooms you can't supervise.
- **An enzymatic cleaner** — made for pet accidents. It breaks down the odor compounds that tell a dog "this is a bathroom," which ordinary household cleaners leave behind.
- **Waste bags and a small holder** — for every walk, every time.
- **Grooming basics matched to the coat** — a brush or comb suited to short, long, or curly coats; dog-specific shampoo; nail clippers or a nail grinder; cotton balls or gauze for ear cleaning with a vet-recommended cleaner.
- **A dog toothbrush and dog-formulated toothpaste** — never human toothpaste, which can contain xylitol and is not meant to be swallowed. Start the brushing habit in puppyhood.
- **Veterinarian-prescribed flea, tick, and heartworm prevention** — heartworm is a mosquito-borne parasite that lives in the heart and lungs. Your vet picks the product and dose by weight and local risk.

- **A basic canine first-aid kit** — gauze, self-adhering bandage wrap, blunt-tip scissors, a digital thermometer, fine-tipped tweezers for tick removal, saline eyewash, and the phone numbers for your vet, the emergency hospital, and a poison control hotline.
- **A car restraint** — a crash-tested harness that clips into a seat belt, or a secured travel crate.

Ready to set up? Browse the essentials in our collections: Dog Food, Dog Harness, Collar & Tag and Dog Beds.

Enrichment

- **A puzzle feeder or slow-feeder bowl** — turns a two-minute meal into a ten-minute thinking game and slows down fast eaters, which matters for deep-chested breeds.
- **Lick mats and stuffable rubber chew toys** — for calming, for crate time, and for the late-afternoon witching hour. Freeze them with dog-safe fillings for a longer-lasting challenge.
- **A snuffle mat or scatter-feeding setup** — lets the dog use its nose to find food, which is genuinely tiring and satisfying.
- **Durable chew toys sized to the dog** — firm rubber or dense nylon toys that flex slightly. Too small is a choking hazard; too hard can crack teeth.
- **Soft and plush toys for supervised play** — for carrying and cuddling. Remove them if the dog starts shredding and swallowing stuffing.
- **A tug toy and a ball or fetch toy** — for interactive play with you. A flirt pole (a toy on a rope on a stick) is a great way to burn energy in a small space.
- **A long line (15 to 30 feet)** — for practicing recall in open spaces before the dog has earned off-leash freedom.
- **A clicker or a pouch of tiny, soft training treats** — pea-sized treats that the dog can swallow in one second so training stays fast and fun.
- **A cooling mat for summer and a coat or sweater for winter** — for dogs that run hot or cold (see the heat safety guidance in Exercise, Enrichment & Training).
- **Ramps or pet stairs** — for senior dogs, small dogs on high furniture, and any dog getting in and out of the car.

Enrichment, one click away. Shop Dog Toys and Dog Treats.

SECTION 2

Meet Your Dog

The domestic dog (*Canis lupus familiaris*) descended from wolves and has lived alongside humans for well over 15,000 years, longer than we have farmed, longer than we have built permanent villages. No other animal has co-evolved so closely with us. Dogs read our faces, follow our pointing fingers, and respond to the tone of our voices in ways even our closest primate relatives cannot. Today there are roughly 200 recognized breeds, plus uncounted millions of mixed breeds, ranging from a 3-pound Chihuahua to a 200-pound Great Dane, and the care a dog needs varies enormously with its size and age. The table below gives the shared picture; the sections that follow show where it differs.

Trait	Detail
Common name	Domestic dog
Scientific name	<i>Canis lupus familiaris</i>
Origin	Domesticated from wolves more than 15,000 years ago
Adult weight range	3 lb to 200+ lb , depending on breed
Typical lifespan	10–13 years overall ; small breeds often 12–16; giant breeds often 7–10
Activity pattern	Flexible; most dogs adapt to the family's daily rhythm
Social structure	Highly social : dogs do best as part of a family, not alone for long stretches
Temperament	Varies by breed tendencies, early socialization, training, and individual personality
Diet	Omnivore with a carnivore-leaning digestive system: meat, plus digestible grains, vegetables, and fruits
Vet visits	At least yearly for healthy adults; every 6 months for seniors; frequent in the first year

Dog size categories

Size is the single most useful way to predict how a dog will eat, grow, exercise, age, and what health issues to watch for. The categories below are general guides; your vet may adjust them for a particular breed.

Size category	Adult weight	Example breeds	Typical lifespan	Full-grown at about
Small (including toy)	Under 25 lb	Chihuahua, Yorkshire Terrier, Dachshund, Shih Tzu, Pug, Jack Russell Terrier	12–16 years	9–12 months
Medium	25–50 lb	Beagle, Cocker Spaniel, Border Collie, Basset Hound, Bulldog	11–14 years	12–15 months
Large	50–100 lb	Labrador Retriever, Golden Retriever, German Shepherd, Boxer, Rottweiler	9–12 years	15–24 months
Giant	100+ lb	Great Dane, Mastiff, Saint Bernard, Newfoundland, Bernese Mountain Dog	7–10 years	18–24 months

Mixed breeds follow the same size rules, but predicting adult size from a puppy takes some guesswork. Your vet can plot your puppy's weight on a growth curve and give you a reasonable estimate, and a DNA test can offer clues about the mix. Weigh your puppy regularly; steady gain is what you want, not a sudden jump.

Life stages compared

Dogs do not all age at the same speed. Larger dogs grow faster, mature later in absolute terms, and enter their senior years sooner. The table compares when each stage typically begins.

Life stage	Small breeds (under 25 lb)	Medium breeds (25–50 lb)	Large breeds (50–100 lb)	Giant breeds (100+ lb)
Puppy	Birth to about 9–12 months	Birth to about 12 months	Birth to about 12–18 months	Birth to about 18–24 months
Adolescent (a gawky, testing-the-rules phase)	About 6–12 months	About 6–15 months	About 6–18 months	About 6–24 months
Adult	About 1–9 years	About 1–8 years	About 1.5–7 years	About 2–5 years
Senior (starts at roughly)	10–12 years	8–10 years	7–8 years	5–6 years
Typical senior check-up schedule	Every 6 months	Every 6 months	Every 6 months	Every 6 months
Puppy feeding frequency	3–4 meals a day until about 6 months	3 meals a day until about 6 months	3 meals a day until about 6 months	3 meals a day until about 6 months
Adult feeding frequency	2 meals a day	2 meals a day	2 meals a day	2 or more smaller meals a day

Temperament: breed tendencies versus the individual dog

Breeds were developed for jobs, and many of those instincts remain. Herding breeds (Border Collies, Australian Shepherds, Corgis) may nip at heels and need a job to do. Retrievers love to carry things in their mouths. Terriers were bred to dig and chase small animals. Hounds follow their noses, sometimes right out of the yard. Livestock guardians are independent and protective. Brachycephalic ("short-faced") breeds like Pugs, Bulldogs, and French Bulldogs tend to be affectionate but struggle in heat and with strenuous exercise. Knowing the tendencies helps you channel them instead of fighting them.

But breed is a tendency, not a guarantee. Two Labrador puppies from the same litter can differ wildly in confidence, energy, and sensitivity, and a mixed-breed dog can be anything. The things that shape temperament most are the dog's genetics, its experiences in the early weeks and months, how consistently it is trained, and how well its needs for exercise and mental work are met. Judge your dog as an individual, and give it the chance to show you who it is.

What surprises new owners

Five things catch most new dog owners off guard. The first is **how much of a dog's behavior is just being a dog**. Digging, chewing, barking, sniffing everything on the walk, rolling in dead things: these are not misbehavior, they are the species. The goal is to give those instincts an acceptable outlet. The second is **how much sleep puppies need**: 18 to 20 hours a day for a young puppy. A puppy who is wild, mouthy, and biting everything at 7 p.m. is often simply overtired, the way a toddler melts down past bedtime. The third is **adolescence**: somewhere between 6 and 18 months, a well-behaved puppy can suddenly "forget" every cue you taught. This is a normal developmental phase, not a sign you failed. Stay consistent and it passes. The fourth is **the cost**: food, preventive care, grooming, boarding, and the occasional emergency add up, and a single emergency surgery can run into the thousands. Setting aside a pet emergency fund or exploring pet insurance early is wise. The fifth is **how fast time passes**: a 12-year commitment feels long at the start and short at the end. The best dogs are the ones whose people made the most of the years.

SECTION 3

Home Setup & Safety

A dog-ready home is less about gear than about **management**: arranging things so your dog can succeed and can't get hurt while it learns the rules.

Crate, bed, and gates

A crate is a tool for house training, safe travel, vet visits, and recovery from surgery, and most dogs come to treat it as their own bedroom. Choose one big enough for the adult dog to stand, turn around, and lie flat, with a divider if you are buying for a puppy. Make it inviting: a cozy bed, a safe chew, a cover over the top and sides if your dog likes a darker den. Feed some meals in there. **Never use the crate as punishment**, and never leave a dog crated for longer than it can physically hold its bladder. As a rough guide, a puppy can wait about one hour per month of age, and that is the limit, not the target; healthy adults should not go much beyond four to six hours. Adult dogs should not be crated all day while the family is at work; if your schedule requires that, arrange a midday walker or visit.

Place the dog's main bed in a family area, not an isolated back room. Dogs want to be near their people. Provide a firm, supportive bed for large breeds and seniors, and a warm, snug one for small and short-coated dogs. Use baby gates or a pen to keep puppies out of trouble spots when you can't supervise, and keep a drag line or leash on a new adult dog inside the house for the first few days so you can calmly guide it away from problems.

Pet-proofing room by room

Area	Common hazard	What to do
Kitchen	Counter-surfing for chocolate, onions, grapes, xylitol-sweetened foods, bones	Keep food out of reach; use a latching or lidded trash can; never leave a hot pan or open dishwasher unattended
Living room	Electrical cords, remote controls, small toys, houseplants, candles	Bundle or cover cords; check plants against a poison list; keep candles on high shelves
Bathroom	Medications, razors, cleaning products, toilet bowl cleaner	Keep the door closed and medications in a closed cabinet; never leave pills on a counter
Bedroom	Socks, underwear, jewelry, hair ties (common causes of intestinal blockage)	Keep a closed hamper or door
Garage and basement	Antifreeze (sweet-tasting and deadly), rodent bait, fertilizer, paint, windshield fluid	Store in latched cabinets; clean up spills immediately; use pet-safe antifreeze
Yard and garden	Cocoa-bean mulch, slug bait, compost piles, fertilizers, sago palms, sharp tools, toxic mushrooms, pools	Fence off gardens and compost; choose dog-safe mulch; supervise near water
Farm and homestead	Livestock feed, manure, chicken coops, ponds, machinery, snakes	Keep dogs away from medicated feed and fertilizer; supervise around animals and equipment

Fencing and the outdoors

A fence is only as good as the dog's determination. Check the height (small dogs squeeze through gaps; athletic dogs clear 4 feet easily), look for dig-out spots along the base, and check gate latches regularly. Underground "invisible" fences do not keep other animals out and can be crossed by a dog in a high state of excitement. Never leave a dog tied outside unattended, and never leave

one in an open truck bed.

ID tags and microchips

A collar with a tag is the first thing a finder looks for. A **microchip** is a rice-grain-sized transponder placed under the skin between the shoulder blades by your veterinarian; it is not a GPS tracker, but any shelter or vet can scan it to find your contact information. The chip only helps if the registration is current. Register it with the manufacturer's database right away, confirm the details are in **your** name, update them whenever your address or phone number changes, and ask your vet to scan the chip at the annual exam to make sure it still reads. Note, too, that in Pennsylvania dogs three months and older must be licensed each year through the county treasurer's office, and the license tag is a second form of identification. Local leash and confinement rules vary by township, so check yours.

Collar fit, car safety, and children

Check collar fit monthly in puppies, who outgrow collars fast. Two fingers should slide comfortably under it. In the car, a dog should be secured by a crash-tested harness clipped to a seat belt or inside a secured crate, because an unrestrained dog can be injured in a sudden stop and can injure you. Keep heads and paws inside the window.

Supervise all interactions between dogs and young children, always. Teach kids to pet gently, never to hug or climb on a dog, never to disturb it while eating or sleeping, and to recognize the warning signs of a stressed dog: a stiff body, "whale eye" (showing the whites), repeated lip licking, yawning, turning away, a tucked tail, and growling. A growl is communication, not defiance; never punish it, because a dog that is punished for warning may skip the warning next time.

SECTION 4

Diet & Nutrition



A complete-and-balanced food for the right life stage and size is the base. Fresh additions and treats stay small, and a handful of common foods are genuinely dangerous.

Dogs are omnivores with a carnivore-leaning digestive system. They thrive on animal protein but digest cooked grains, vegetables, and fruits well, and the right balance depends on age, size, activity, and health. Our approach is the same one we use for every animal we care about: **no mystery ingredients**, clean fuel, no junk. Ingredients you can recognize, in amounts that actually fit the dog.

What "complete and balanced" actually means

The most important phrase on any dog food bag is a small one. Look for a statement saying the food is "formulated to meet the nutritional levels established by the **AAFCO** Dog Food Nutrient Profiles" for a specific life stage. AAFCO is the Association of American Feed Control Officials, the body that sets nutrient standards for pet food in the US (it does not approve or "certify" individual products). The statement should name a life stage: "growth" (puppies), "adult maintenance," or "all life stages." A food that lacks this statement is a treat or a supplement, not a meal, and should not be your dog's main diet.

Two important details: "all life stages" foods must meet the puppy standard, which means they may be too calorie-dense and calcium-rich for adult or senior dogs prone to weight gain. And large-breed puppies need a food that specifically says it is formulated for "growth, including growth of **large-size dogs (70 lb or more as an adult)**." That phrase is the AAFCO signal for

the controlled calcium and calories those growing joints need.

Reading the label

- **Ingredients are listed by weight, heaviest first.** A named meat (chicken, beef, salmon, lamb) near the top is a good sign. "Meat meal" can be a concentrated, perfectly good protein source, but a specific "chicken meal" tells you more than vague "meat and bone meal."
- **Watch for vague terms** such as "animal by-product" or "animal fat" without naming the animal, and for artificial colors and flavors, which add nothing a dog needs.
- **Check the guaranteed analysis** for minimum crude protein and fat and maximum fiber and moisture.
- **Calories matter.** The label lists calories per cup or per can (kcal). Without that number you cannot portion accurately.
- **Grain-free is not automatically better.** Most dogs digest grains fine. The FDA has investigated a possible link between some grain-free, legume-heavy diets and a heart condition called dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM). The link is not fully proven, but it is a good reason to talk to your vet before choosing a boutique diet.

Dry matter protein math

Wet and dry foods cannot be compared by the label's protein percentage, because the water content is so different. **Dry matter** is the food's nutrients with the water taken out. The formula: **protein % ÷ (100 – moisture %) × 100**.

Food	Protein on label	Moisture	Dry matter protein
Dry kibble	26%	10%	$26 \div 90 \times 100 = 28.9\%$
Canned food	8%	78%	$8 \div 22 \times 100 = 36.4\%$
Freeze-dried	38%	5%	$38 \div 95 \times 100 = 40.0\%$

The canned food's 8% looks tiny, but on a dry matter basis it has more protein than the kibble. Apply the same math to fat. Adult maintenance minimums are about 18% protein and 5.5% fat on a dry matter basis; most good foods exceed these comfortably.

How much to feed

The bag's feeding chart is a starting point, not a prescription. Adjust to your dog's body condition, which you can check with the **rib check**: you should be able to feel the ribs easily with light pressure (like the back of your hand), see a visible waist when looking down from above, and see a slight tuck of the belly from the side. If you have to press to find ribs, your dog is overweight; if the ribs are sharply visible, underweight.

The table below shows approximate daily calories for a neutered adult of average activity, with the equivalent in cups of a typical 375 kcal/cup kibble. Use your food's actual kcal per cup from the label. Reduce by 10 to 20 percent for inactive or senior dogs; increase for very active or working dogs.

Adult weight	Approximate daily calories	Approximate cups (375 kcal/cup)	Meals per day
5 lb	200	½ cup	2
10 lb	350	1 cup	2
20 lb	585	1½ cups	2
30 lb	790	2 cups	2
50 lb	1,160	3 cups	2

Adult weight	Approximate daily calories	Approximate cups (375 kcal/cup)	Meals per day
70 lb	1,500	4 cups	2
100 lb	1,950	5 cups	2 or more
130 lb	2,400	6½ cups	2 or more

Puppies need far more calories per pound than adults to fuel growth, and their needs change by the month, so follow the puppy food's chart and your vet's growth-curve advice.

Life stage	Meals per day	Notes
Puppy, 8–12 weeks	4	Toy and tiny breeds: stay on 4 meals to protect against low blood sugar
Puppy, 3–6 months	3	Measure portions; do not free-feed
Puppy, 6–12 months	2–3	Large-breed puppies: lean growth, never chubby
Adult, all sizes	2	Splitting the day into two meals is gentler on the stomach
Senior	2	Often fewer calories, with attention to protein and joint support

Life stage and size

Puppies need a "growth" food. **Large and giant breed puppies** need a large-breed puppy formula: carefully controlled calories and calcium keep them growing at a steady pace instead of too quickly, which protects developing joints. **Do not add calcium supplements** to a large-breed puppy's diet; extra calcium can cause skeletal problems. **Small breeds** have fast metabolisms and tiny stomachs; they need smaller kibble, calorie-dense meals, and (for tiny puppies) frequent feeding to avoid low blood sugar. **Adults** need a maintenance diet matched to their activity level. **Seniors** often need fewer calories to prevent weight gain, joint-supportive nutrients (omega-3 fatty acids), and enough high-quality protein to preserve muscle; contrary to old myths, healthy older dogs do not need low-protein diets, and your vet can tailor the plan if kidney disease or another condition is present.

Fresh, raw, and freeze-dried foods

Many of our customers ask about alternatives to kibble, and we want to give you the honest picture.

- **Gently cooked fresh foods** (refrigerated or frozen) are popular with owners who want visible, whole ingredients. They tend to be highly palatable and can be an excellent option if the recipe is **complete and balanced**. They cost more and need freezer space.
- **Raw diets** are favored by some owners, who report shinier coats, smaller stools, and enthusiasm at mealtime. But the evidence for benefits comes largely from anecdote, while the risks are well documented: raw meat can carry **Salmonella** and **Listeria**, and dogs can shed these bacteria in their saliva and stool even when they appear healthy. That matters for households with infants, elderly people, or anyone with a weak immune system. The FDA, CDC, and AVMA discourage feeding raw. Homemade raw diets are frequently nutritionally unbalanced.
- **Freeze-dried raw foods** are shelf-stable and convenient, but freeze-drying does not reliably kill bacteria. Foods treated with high-pressure processing reduce but do not eliminate the risk.
- **Homemade cooked diets** can work, but studies show most online recipes miss essential nutrients. If you want to cook for your dog, work with a **board-certified veterinary nutritionist** to build a balanced recipe.

If you choose any raw or fresh diet, talk to your vet first, wash your hands, bowls, and surfaces thoroughly after every meal, and keep the dog's licks away from small children.

Switching foods safely

Dogs have sensitive digestive systems, and abrupt changes cause diarrhea. Transition over **7 to 10 days**, or longer for sensitive dogs.

Days	Old food	New food
1–3	75%	25%
4–6	50%	50%
7–9	25%	75%
10	0%	100%

If stools turn loose, slow down and return to the previous ratio for a few days. Rotating between protein sources within the same brand or line can add variety, but make each change gradually, too. Persistent diarrhea, vomiting, or itching warrants a vet check.

Treats

Treats should make up no more than about 10% of daily calories. Count them. For a 10-pound dog on 350 calories a day, that's 35 calories, which is fewer than most commercial biscuits. Choose single-ingredient treats (freeze-dried meat, dehydrated sweet potato), tiny training treats, or healthy human foods from the safe list below. If you use lots of treats for training, reduce meals slightly to compensate.

Safe human-food extras

Food	How to serve	Notes
Cooked chicken, turkey, lean beef	Plain, boneless, unseasoned	Great training reward; trim fat and skin
Cooked egg	Scrambled or hard-boiled, plain	Cook thoroughly; a few times a week for most dogs
Carrots	Raw or cooked, in pieces	Crunchy, low calorie, mild dental benefit
Blueberries	Fresh or frozen	Antioxidants; tiny, low-calorie treats
Plain pumpkin	Canned, 100% pumpkin only (not pie filling)	Spoonful can ease mild diarrhea or constipation
Green beans	Plain, cooked or raw	Low-calorie filler for dogs on diets
Plain cooked white rice	Small amount	Bland-diet component for mild upset stomach
Apple slices	Seeds and core removed	Fiber and crunch
Seedless watermelon	Small cubes	Hydrating summer treat
Plain peanut butter	Small amount, xylitol-free only	Check the label every time

Foods that are toxic to dogs

Some of the most dangerous items live in an ordinary kitchen. If your dog eats any of these, **call your vet, an emergency clinic, or a poison control line right away**, without waiting for symptoms. The **ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center** is at (888) 426-4435 and the **Pet Poison Helpline** is at (855) 764-7661; a consultation fee may apply, and it is worth it.

Item	Why it's dangerous	What you may see
Xylitol (birch sugar; in sugar-free gum, candy, baked goods, some peanut butters, some toothpastes)	Triggers a rapid insulin release and sudden low blood sugar; larger doses can cause liver failure	Vomiting, weakness, stumbling, seizures within 30–60 minutes; emergency
Chocolate and cocoa (dark and baking chocolate are worst)	Theobromine and caffeine overstimulate the heart and nervous system	Vomiting, restlessness, rapid heartbeat, tremors, seizures
Grapes, raisins, currants	Unknown toxin; can cause sudden kidney failure, with no reliably safe dose	Vomiting, lethargy, decreased urination
Onions, garlic, chives, leeks	Damage red blood cells and cause anemia; cooked, raw, and powdered forms all count	Pale gums, weakness, dark urine; may be delayed 1–3 days
Macadamia nuts	Unknown toxin	Weakness (especially hind legs), vomiting, tremors, fever
Alcohol (including in foods and mouthwash)	Causes drops in blood sugar, body temperature, and breathing	Stumbling, vomiting, slow breathing
Caffeine (coffee grounds, tea, energy drinks, pills)	Overstimulates heart and nervous system	Restlessness, racing heart, tremors
Raw yeast dough	Expands in the stomach and ferments into alcohol	Swollen belly, retching, stumbling
Cooked bones	Brittle bones splinter and can puncture the gut or cause obstruction	Vomiting, straining, bloody stool
Corn cobs	Don't digest; a common cause of intestinal blockage	Repeated vomiting, loss of appetite, no stool
Cocoa bean mulch	Contains theobromine, with a sweet smell that attracts dogs	Same as chocolate
Sago palm and lily-of-the-valley	Sago palm seeds cause liver failure; lily-of-the-valley affects the heart	Vomiting, bloody stool, collapse
Avocado (use caution)	Dogs are less sensitive than some animals, but the pit is a choking and obstruction hazard and the fat can cause pancreatitis	Vomiting, belly pain
Fatty table scraps and grease	Can trigger pancreatitis	Vomiting, hunched posture, belly pain
Medications (ibuprofen, acetaminophen, naproxen, antidepressants)	Never give human pain relievers; many cause stomach ulcers or organ damage	Vomiting, black stool, lethargy

Water

Fresh water should be available all day, in a bowl that is cleaned daily. A rough guide is about **one ounce of water per pound of body weight per day**, more in hot weather, with exercise, or on dry food. Sudden increases in drinking or urination in an adult or senior dog are worth a vet visit, because they can signal diabetes, kidney disease, or other illnesses. Bring a water bottle and collapsible bowl on every walk, drive, and hike.

Shop the food and supplies: Browse Dry Dog Food and Dog Wet Food.

SECTION 5

Exercise, Enrichment & Training

A tired dog is a good dog, but a **mentally** tired dog is a happy one. Most behavior problems come down to unmet needs for movement, sniffing, chewing, and company.

How much exercise

Dog	Daily exercise	Notes
Puppy	Several short play and walk sessions	A common rule of thumb is about 5 minutes per month of age, twice a day; it is a guide, not a law
Large and giant puppy	Gentle, free play only	No forced running, repetitive jumping, or long hikes until growth plates close (roughly 12–24 months); ask your vet
Small adult	30–60 minutes	Short legs take more steps; indoor play counts
Medium and large adult	60–120 minutes	Sporting, herding, and working breeds need the high end plus a job
Brachycephalic breeds	Short, easy sessions	Avoid exertion in warm weather
Senior	Shorter, more frequent walks	Keep moving; steady activity protects joints and muscle

Let your dog **sniff**. A slow "sniffari" where the dog chooses the route is more mentally satisfying than a fast march, and it tires them out more than you'd expect.

Enrichment

Rotate toys so they stay interesting. Use puzzle feeders, lick mats, and snuffle mats at mealtime. Scatter a handful of kibble in the grass. Hide treats around the house for a nose-work game. Teach a new trick every few weeks. Arrange safe social time with friendly, vaccinated dogs and people. Dogs left bored will invent their own entertainment, and you won't like it.

Training with positive reinforcement

Reward what you want; calmly prevent or redirect what you don't. Keep sessions short (five minutes, several times a day), end on success, and use treats the dog values. Start with **sit, down, come, leave it, drop it, wait, and loose-leash walking**. Never use physical punishment, shock, or intimidation; research consistently shows it increases fear and aggression without teaching the dog what to do instead. Find a certified trainer for group classes, which are also socialization.

Socialization

The most important learning window is roughly **3 to 14 weeks of age**, and it continues through adolescence. During this time, gently introduce your puppy to a wide variety of people, surfaces, sounds, other dogs, car rides, and handling, always with treats and at the puppy's pace. Because puppies are not fully vaccinated until about 16 weeks, ask your vet how to socialize safely in the meantime: carry your puppy around the neighborhood, host healthy vaccinated dogs at home, and attend puppy classes that require vaccines. Skip dog parks and pet-store floors until your vet clears you. The behavioral damage of under-socialization generally outweighs the infection risk when you are careful.

Heat safety

Heatstroke is an emergency. A dog's normal temperature is 101 to 102.5°F; 104°F is dangerous, and at 106°F organs begin to fail. Never leave a dog in a parked car, not even with the windows cracked; the inside of a car can rise 20 degrees in ten minutes.

Walk in early morning and evening. **Test the pavement** with the back of your hand for five seconds; if it's too hot for you, it's burning paws. Carry water, offer shade, and avoid hard exercise in the heat. Dogs at higher risk include brachycephalic breeds, thick-coated dogs, puppies, seniors, and overweight dogs. Signs include heavy panting, thick drool, bright red gums, vomiting, stumbling, and collapse. If you see them, move the dog to shade or air conditioning, wet it with **cool (not ice-cold)** water, run a fan, and head to the vet immediately, even if the dog seems to recover.

Cold-weather limits

Small, short-coated, thin, and senior dogs chill fast. Below about 45°F, many small dogs need a coat; below 32°F, limit outdoor time; below 20°F, even hardy breeds need caution. Wipe paws after walks to remove road salt and ice melt, and clean up spills of **antifreeze**, which is sweet and deadly. Winter is a good season to indoor-train and play.

SECTION 6

Grooming, Dental & Preventive Care

Coat, nails, ears

Coat type	Examples	Brushing	Baths
Short, smooth	Beagle, Boxer	Weekly	Every 6–8 weeks or as needed
Double coat	Husky, Golden Retriever, German Shepherd	2–3 times a week; daily in shedding season	Every 6–8 weeks; do not shave
Long, silky	Shih Tzu, Yorkshire Terrier	Daily	Every 3–4 weeks
Curly or wiry	Poodle, Schnauzer	Daily comb-out; professional trims every 4–8 weeks	Every 3–4 weeks

Nails should be trimmed every three to four weeks; when you hear them clicking on the floor, they're too long. **Ears** should be checked weekly: healthy ears are pale pink and nearly odor-free. Clean only as your vet advises, and never push cotton swabs deep. Check paws for cuts, burrs, and ticks after every walk. Mats should be gently removed or shaved by a groomer, never pulled.

Dental care

By age three, most dogs have some degree of dental disease, and untreated gum disease can affect the heart and kidneys. **Brush daily** with dog toothpaste and a soft brush; start slow and make it a treat. Dental chews and diets approved by the Veterinary Oral Health Council can help. Avoid very hard chews (antlers, hooves, real bones, hard nylon) that crack teeth; if you can't dent it with a thumbnail, it's too hard. Schedule an oral exam at every annual visit and professional cleanings when your vet recommends them.

Core vaccines

Core vaccines protect against the most serious, widespread diseases. The **DHPP** combination covers distemper, adenovirus (hepatitis), **parvovirus** (a highly contagious, often fatal viral gut disease that survives in soil for months), and parainfluenza. **Rabies** is required by law. Puppies typically start vaccines at 6 to 8 weeks, with boosters every 3 to 4 weeks until about 16 weeks, then another booster a year later. Your vet will advise on non-core vaccines (Bordetella for kennel cough, Lyme, leptospirosis) depending on lifestyle and Pennsylvania's local risks. The schedule is the vet's to set.

Parasite prevention

- **Fleas** cause itching, allergy, and tapeworms. Year-round prevention is simplest.
- **Ticks and Lyme disease.** Pennsylvania is one of the highest Lyme-risk states. Use vet-recommended tick prevention, check your dog after every walk through brush or woods, and remove ticks promptly with fine-tipped tweezers, pulling straight up near the skin.
- **Heartworm** is a mosquito-borne parasite that lives in the heart and lungs and can be fatal. Monthly prevention, prescribed by your vet, plus an annual blood test, is the standard.
- **Intestinal worms** (roundworms, hookworms, whipworms, tapeworms) are common in puppies. Your vet will deworm and test stool samples at least annually.

Never use a dog's flea product on a cat; some (permethrin) are toxic to cats.

Spay and neuter

Spaying and neutering prevents unwanted litters and some cancers and infections. Timing varies: many vets now advise waiting longer for large breeds because early surgery is linked to joint problems. Discuss the right time for your dog with your vet.

Veterinary visits

Puppies visit every 3 to 4 weeks until 16 weeks. Healthy adults need an exam once a year, and **seniors every six months** with blood and urine tests. Do not skip them: dogs hide pain and illness.

SECTION 7

Puppy, Adult & Senior: Life Stages

Puppy

Puppies should stay with their mother until at least 8 weeks. Expect rapid learning, 18 to 20 hours of sleep daily, teething from 3 to 6 months (provide safe chews), and a fear period around 8 to 10 weeks and again during adolescence. **House training** takes consistency: take the puppy out after waking, eating, playing, and every one to two hours; praise and reward immediately; clean accidents with enzymatic cleaner; never punish. Most puppies are reliable by 4 to 6 months, though small breeds can take longer. Tiny puppies can develop **hypoglycemia** (low blood sugar), with weakness, trembling, and wobbling; rub a bit of honey or corn syrup on the gums and head for the vet.

Adult

Adulthood is the long, steady middle of a dog's life, and the goal is to keep it that way. Maintain a lean body weight, daily exercise and mental work, dental care, and annual exams. Adults can still learn new skills at any age.

Senior

Seniors begin to slow, and signs include graying muzzles, stiffness after rest, a bluish haze in the eyes (usually harmless lens aging), hearing loss, and sleeping more. Care shifts to comfort: orthopedic bedding, ramps and traction rugs, shorter walks, regular nail trims, and a vet visit **every six months** with blood work. Watch for **canine cognitive dysfunction**: disorientation, staring at walls, night waking, and new house-soiling. Keep a quality-of-life journal marking good and bad days, and talk to your vet honestly and early. The right time is hard to know, but you will not face it alone.

SECTION 8

Small Breeds vs Large Breeds

Topic	Small breeds (under 25 lb)	Large and giant breeds (50 lb and up)
Lifespan	Longer, often 12–16 years	Shorter, 7–12 years
Growth	Mature by 9–12 months	Mature slowly, 15–24 months
Puppy food	Small-breed or standard puppy food; frequent meals	Large-breed puppy formula with controlled calcium and calories
Metabolism	Fast; low blood sugar risk in tiny puppies	Slower; weight gain strains joints
Common health concerns	Dental disease, collapsing windpipe, luxating kneecaps, heart valve disease	Hip and elbow dysplasia, arthritis, GDV (bloat) , some cancers
Exercise	Moderate; indoor play counts; protect from jumping off furniture	Substantial, but gentle on growing joints
Housebreaking	Often slower (tiny bladders)	Usually quicker; more room to make mistakes
Weather	Chill easily in winter	Overheat more easily in summer
Handling	Can be picked up, but support the whole body	Cannot be lifted easily; teach manners early

GDV (gastric dilatation-volvulus), or bloat, is a life-threatening emergency in which the stomach fills with gas and may twist. It strikes deep-chested breeds (Great Danes, Standard Poodles, German Shepherds, Weimaraners, Irish Setters). Signs include unproductive retching, a swollen hard belly, restlessness, and drooling. It can kill within hours. To lower risk, feed two or more smaller meals, discourage gulping with a slow feeder, and avoid heavy exercise right after meals. Ask your vet about a preventive stomach-tacking surgery (gastropexy), often done at spay or neuter time for high-risk breeds.

For small breeds, protect tiny knees and backs by limiting jumping, use a harness rather than a collar, and brush teeth daily.

SECTION 9

Common Challenges & Solutions

Obesity

What you see: no waist, ribs hard to feel, slow to play, panting on short walks. **Why:** too many calories and too little exercise; extra weight shortens life and worsens arthritis. **What to do:** measure meals, count treats, add walks, and follow your vet's weight-loss plan. **When to call a vet:** before starting any diet, or if weight changes without a diet change.

Joint disease and arthritis

What you see: stiffness after rest, hesitation on stairs, limping, reluctance to jump. **Why:** aging, injury, or developmental problems such as dysplasia, worsened by extra weight. **What to do:** keep your dog lean, use ramps and rugs, ask about joint-support supplements with omega-3s, and never give human pain relievers. **When to call a vet:** any persistent limp over a day or two, or sudden inability to stand.

Dental disease

What you see: bad breath, red gums, tartar, drooling, dropping food. **Why:** plaque turns to tartar and infects the gums. **What to do:** brush daily and schedule exams. **When to call a vet:** loose teeth, swelling under the eye, or refusal to eat.

Ear infections

What you see: head shaking, scratching, odor, redness, dark discharge. **Why:** yeast or bacteria, often from allergies or moisture in floppy ears. **What to do:** dry ears after swimming and keep them clean per your vet's guidance. **When to call a vet:** at the first signs, since infections rarely resolve on their own and can reach the middle ear.

Skin allergies

What you see: itching, paw licking, red belly, recurring ear infections. **Why:** fleas, food, or environmental allergens like pollen. **What to do:** keep up flea prevention and bathe with a gentle shampoo. **When to call a vet:** open sores, constant scratching, or recurring infections; your vet can identify the cause.

GI upset

What you see: vomiting, diarrhea, gas, reduced appetite. **Why:** diet changes, scavenging, parasites, or infection. **What to do:** in an otherwise bright adult, a short bland meal of plain cooked chicken and rice may help. **When to call a vet:** puppies and tiny dogs promptly, any dog with blood, repeated vomiting, lethargy, or symptoms past 24 hours.

Separation anxiety

What you see: howling, destruction, or accidents when left alone, drooling, frantic greetings. **Why:** distress at being alone. **What to do:** practice very short absences, keep departures calm, provide chews, and increase exercise. **When to call a vet:** when it is severe or injurious; behavior plans and medication may help.

Destructive chewing

What you see: ruined shoes, furniture, and trim. **Why:** teething, boredom, or stress. **What to do:** manage the environment, provide safe chews, and exercise first. **When to call a vet:** if the dog is swallowing non-food items.

House training setbacks

What you see: accidents in a previously trained dog. **Why:** schedule changes, stress, urinary tract infection, or age. **What to do:** return to basics and clean with enzymatic cleaner. **When to call a vet:** sudden new accidents, straining, or frequent urination.

Resource guarding

What you see: stiffening, growling, or snapping over food, toys, or spots. **Why:** instinct to protect valued items. **What to do:** never punish; trade for better treats and give the dog space. **When to call a vet:** a sudden change may be pain; involve a certified trainer or veterinary behaviorist.

Fear of fireworks and storms

What you see: panting, trembling, hiding, escaping. **Why:** noise sensitivity. **What to do:** offer a quiet den, play white noise, and make sure ID is current, since July 4th is the busiest day for lost dogs. **When to call a vet:** well beforehand, to discuss training and medication.

Leash pulling and jumping up

What you see: straining, lunging, jumping on guests. **Why:** it works for the dog. **What to do:** stop moving when the leash tightens, reward loose-leash walking, and ignore jumping. **When to call a vet:** if behavior suddenly worsens.

SECTION 10

Routine Care Calendar

How often	What to do
Daily	Feed measured meals; fresh water; two or more walks; training and play
Daily	Check eyes, nose, and stools; brush teeth
Weekly	Brush coat; check ears, paws, and skin; weigh puppies
Monthly	Heartworm, flea, and tick prevention as prescribed; trim nails; check collar fit; wash bedding and toys
Every 3 months	Review food, treats, and weight; groomer visit for curly coats
Every 6 months	Senior and giant breed wellness exam
Annually	Wellness exam, vaccines as advised, heartworm test, stool test, dental check, microchip scan, license renewal

SECTION 11

When to See a Vet

When in doubt, call. Your dog cannot tell you where it hurts.

Go today: emergency:

- Unproductive retching with a swollen belly (possible bloat)
- Heatstroke signs, difficulty breathing, blue or pale gums
- Known or suspected ingestion of xylitol, chocolate, grapes, antifreeze, rodent bait, or medications
- Seizures lasting more than a few minutes
- Collapse, trauma, hit by a car (even if the dog seems fine)
- Straining to urinate with little or no output
- Repeated vomiting or bloody diarrhea, especially in puppies
- Eye injuries or bites from snakes or other animals

Book within a day or two:

- Limping, loss of appetite, or diarrhea lasting more than a day
- Drinking or urinating much more than usual
- Skin lumps, sores, or ear discharge
- Sudden behavior change

SECTION 12

FAQ

What should I feed my dog?

Feed a **complete and balanced** food that carries an AAFCO statement for your dog's life stage, with a named meat as the first ingredient. Puppies need a growth formula, and large-breed puppies need one made for large breeds. Adults and seniors do well on maintenance or senior formulas matched to activity and body condition. Kibble, canned, and gently cooked foods can all work; raw and homemade diets need extra caution and your vet's guidance. Introduce any new food gradually over 7 to 10 days.

How much should I feed my dog?

Start with the feeding chart on the bag, then adjust to your dog's body condition. A typical neutered adult needs roughly 200 calories a day at 5 pounds, 585 at 20 pounds, and 1,160 at 50 pounds, though activity, age, and metabolism all matter. Use the rib check: you should feel the ribs easily and see a waist. Keep treats under about 10 percent of daily calories and ask your vet to review portions at each visit.

How often should I walk my dog?

Most healthy adult dogs need at least two walks a day plus play, totaling between 30 minutes for small or low-energy dogs and two hours for high-energy breeds. Puppies need shorter, more frequent outings, seniors benefit from shorter, steadier ones, and brachycephalic breeds need gentler routines in warm weather. Let your dog sniff, since that is mental exercise too.

What foods are toxic to dogs?

The most dangerous are **xylitol** (found in sugar-free gum and some peanut butters), chocolate, grapes and raisins, onions, garlic, chives, macadamia nuts, alcohol, caffeine, and raw yeast dough. Cooked bones and corn cobs can cause blockages or punctures, and avocado calls for caution. If your dog eats any of them, call your vet or a poison control line right away instead of waiting for symptoms.

How do I house train a puppy?

Take your puppy to the same spot first thing in the morning, after every meal, nap, and play session, and about every one to two hours in between. Reward the instant it goes outside with praise and a treat. Use a crate when you can't supervise, since dogs avoid soiling their sleeping areas, and clean accidents with an enzymatic cleaner. Never scold; the pup only learns to hide. Most puppies are reliable between 4 and 6 months, though small breeds often take longer.

When is a dog considered senior?

It depends on size. Small dogs are usually considered seniors around 10 to 12 years, medium dogs at 8 to 10, large dogs at 7 to 8, and giant breeds as early as 5 to 6. Senior dogs benefit from veterinary exams every six months, with blood and urine tests, along with joint support, weight management, and gentle exercise.

How often should I take my dog to the vet?

Puppies see the vet every 3 to 4 weeks until about 16 weeks for vaccines and checks. Healthy adults should have a wellness exam at least once a year, including parasite testing and a dental check. Senior dogs, and dogs with chronic conditions, should be seen every six months. Call sooner for any sign of illness.

How do I choose food for a large breed puppy?

Choose a food labeled for the growth of large-size dogs (70 pounds or more as an adult). These formulas control calories and calcium so bones and joints grow steadily instead of too fast. Feed measured meals rather than free-feeding, keep the puppy lean

with visible ribs and a waist, and do not add calcium supplements. Your vet can help you track growth on a curve and tell you when to switch to adult food.

Is raw food safe for dogs?

Raw diets carry real risks. Raw meat can harbor Salmonella and Listeria, which dogs can pass to people even when they seem healthy, and homemade raw recipes are often nutritionally unbalanced. Many owners report benefits, but the evidence is mostly anecdotal, and the FDA, CDC, and AVMA discourage raw feeding. If you want to try it, choose a complete and balanced formula, practice strict kitchen hygiene, and talk to your vet first, especially with children or anyone immunocompromised at home.

How do I keep my dog cool in hot weather?

Walk in the early morning and evening, test pavement with the back of your hand, and always carry water. Provide shade, a cooling mat, or a kiddie pool, and never leave your dog in a parked car. Brachycephalic, thick-coated, overweight, and senior dogs are at higher risk. If you see heavy panting, thick drool, bright red gums, or stumbling, move the dog to a cool place, wet it with cool water, and go to the vet at once.

Ready to shop? Start with Dogs!. 10% of every purchase supports no-kill animal shelters.

SECTION 13

Every Purchase Gives Back

Before we earn a dime, **10% of every purchase at Walnut Creek Supply goes to no-kill animal shelters across the country.** Not an add-on, not an option at checkout. It comes off the top of every order, every day, because we believe responsible pet ownership and caring for the community are one commitment pointed in two directions.

For dog people, that hits close to home. Shelters are full of dogs who were somebody's puppy once. If you are still deciding, consider adopting: a gray-muzzled senior who knows how to be a good dog is a gift. And if you already have yours, thank you for being the person every dog hopes will walk through the door.

We're a family business in Christiana, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. We grow our own food and keep our own animals, and we stock goods we'd put in front of our own dogs: **no mystery ingredients, Clean Fuel, No Junk.** If you have a question about food, gear, or care, call us at **(717) 983-8069**. We'd rather talk it through with you.

Here's to many years of muddy paws and happy tails.

*From our family to yours, **Walnut Creek Supply** — Christiana, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania walnutcreeksupply.com*