

WALNUT CREEK SUPPLY

THE COMPLETE CARE GUIDE

Large Breed Dog

Joints, bloat, growth and training a dog bigger than you



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CONTENTS

What's Inside

-
- 01 **Quick Start: Your First 48 Hours**
-
- 02 **Meet Your Large-Breed Dog**
-
- 03 **Home Setup & Safety**
-
- 04 **Growing Up Large: Puppy Growth & Joint Protection**
-
- 05 **Weight, Size & Daily Numbers**
-
- 06 **Diet & Nutrition**
-
- 07 **Exercise & Training**
-
- 08 **Joints, Bloat & Heart: Big-Dog Health**
-
- 09 **Common Challenges & Solutions**
-
- 10 **Routine Care Calendar**
-
- 11 **When to See a Vet**
-
- 12 **FAQ**
-
- 13 **Every Purchase Gives Back**

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.

Some dogs take up a little corner of your life. A large-breed dog takes up the couch, the passenger seat, the middle of the kitchen floor, and a very specific, very permanent spot in your heart. If you share your home with a Labrador, a German Shepherd, a Great Dane, a Bernese Mountain Dog or any of their big-boned cousins, you already know the deal: the love is enormous, and so is nearly everything else. The food bill. The leash pull. The tail that clears the coffee table in one happy sweep. The paw that lands on your shoulder when you least expect it.

This guide is for dogs who will weigh **roughly 50 pounds or more as adults**, including the true giants at **about 100 pounds and up**. That size changes the rules in ways that surprise first-time big-dog owners. A large-breed puppy grows so fast that what you feed in those first months can shape their joints for life. Exercise that is perfectly fine for a terrier can hurt a growing Great Dane. A few simple habits around mealtime can lower the risk of a true emergency called bloat. And the lifespan, honestly, is shorter than we would like, which is exactly why every good year counts.

We wrote this the way we would talk to a neighbor over the fence here in Lancaster County: warm, practical, and honest. Feeding your big dog like any dog is a mistake, and we will show you why. We will walk through early joint protection, meeting big energy with the right kind of exercise, and the safety setup that keeps a strong dog and your family happy. Throughout, remember that your veterinarian knows your individual dog. Anything here about medical choices, calories, supplements or timing is a starting point for that conversation, never a replacement for it. Read the Quick Start first, then come back for the rest at your own pace.

SECTION 1

Quick Start: Your First 48 Hours

1. **Dog-proof the house at nose and tail height before your dog arrives.** Walk through every room on your knees. Anything a big dog can reach with a nose, tongue or wagging tail is fair game: food on counters, trash cans, shoes, houseplants, medications, cords, and breakable décor on low tables. Move it up or put it away. A 90-pound dog can clear a coffee table without even trying.
2. **Choose the "dog zone" and set it up first.** Pick a quiet spot with non-slip flooring where the bed, crate and water will live. Large dogs need a surface that gives them traction when they stand up. Slick tile and hardwood are rough on big joints, so lay down runners or rubber-backed mats along the paths your dog will use most.
3. **Set up a sturdy, correctly sized crate.** The crate should let your dog stand without ducking, turn around easily, and stretch out on their side. Choose heavy-gauge construction. Large dogs bend and break light wire crates. Make it cozy with a washable pad, and treat it as a den, never a punishment.
4. **Fit a well-adjusted harness and a strong leash before the first walk.** Use a flat collar for ID tags and a properly fitted harness for walking. Check the harness fit: you should be able to slide two fingers under any strap, but the harness should not twist or slide around the shoulders. Choose a leash in a strong, comfortable-to-grip material that is rated for your dog's weight.
5. **Ask what the dog was eating, and keep it the same for the first week.** Sudden food changes cause diarrhea in any dog, and big dogs can produce big messes. If you want to switch foods, do it gradually over seven to ten days by mixing a little more of the new food into the old each day. If your dog is a puppy, make sure the food you choose is a **large-breed puppy formula** (more on why in the growth section).
6. **Feed several smaller meals, not one giant one, and keep activity calm around mealtime.** Deep-chested breeds are at higher risk of bloat, a dangerous twisting of the stomach. From day one, build the habit: measured portions, two or three meals a day, calm time before and after eating, and no hard exercise right around meals.
7. **Do the nose-to-tail welcome check.** Run your hands gently over your dog: legs, hips, spine, belly, ears, between the toes, and teeth. You are learning what normal feels like so you can notice what changes. Write down any lumps, sore spots, scabs

or limps to mention at your first vet visit.

8. **Book your first vet visit within the first week.** Bring any records you have, and ask about vaccines, parasite prevention, weight, microchipping, and your dog's growth plan. If you have a puppy, ask about the right timing for spay or neuter. That is an individual decision that depends on breed and size, and your vet is the right person to guide it.
9. **Start the rules on day one, kindly.** A cute 40-pound puppy who jumps up on visitors becomes a 100-pound dog who knocks over grandma. Teach "sit to say hello," a calm approach to the door, and four-paws-on-the-floor from the very first day. Reward what you want, and be consistent as a family.
10. **Find your after-hours emergency vet now.** Bloat can strike fast, and you do not want to be searching the internet at midnight. Save the number and address of the nearest 24-hour emergency clinic in your phone and on the refrigerator. Know the route and the drive time.

First-Time Starter Bundle

What needs to be in the house on day one, and what to look for in each category.

Essentials

- **A sturdy crate sized for adult length** — heavy-gauge, with a secure latch, tall enough for your dog to stand and sized so the dog can stretch out. For puppies, choose one with a divider so you can grow the space as they grow.
- **A supportive, durable bed** — thick orthopedic-style foam or similar support that lets a heavy dog lie down without bottoming out. Look for a washable, chew-resistant cover. Big joints appreciate cushion.
- **A properly fitted harness** — padded, adjustable at several points, and sized for the chest girth. Measure your dog's chest rather than guessing from weight.
- **A strong leash and a flat ID collar** — a sturdy leash of about six feet with a secure clip, and a flat collar that holds current ID tags. Skip retractable leashes for a strong dog. They teach pulling and can fail under load.
- **Large, stable food and water bowls** — heavy or non-skid, big enough to hold a full day of water. Consider a slow-feeder style dish for fast eaters.
- **A complete-and-balanced food formulated for your dog's life stage and size** — a large-breed puppy formula for puppies and a large-breed adult formula for adults, labeled complete and balanced by AAFCO standards. No mystery ingredients, no cheap filler.
- **Nail clippers or a grinder made for thick nails** — large dogs have thick, strong nails. A grinder is often easier to use than a clipper on a wriggly giant.
- **A first-aid kit** — gauze, self-adhesive wrap, saline, blunt scissors, and your vet's and the emergency clinic's numbers.

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

Enrichment

- **Heavy-duty chew toys sized for a large mouth** — durable rubber toys that are too big to be swallowed. If a toy can fit all the way to the back of the throat, it is too small.
- **A snuffle mat or food puzzle** — slows the pace of mealtime and gives a big brain a job to do.
- **A long line for recall practice** — a lightweight 15 to 30 foot lead for safe practice in open spaces before you trust your dog off leash.
- **A car harness, seat cover or travel crate** — keeps your dog safe and your seats clean on every ride.

Enrichment, one click away. Shop Dog Toys.

SECTION 2

Meet Your Large-Breed Dog

"Large breed" is not one kind of dog. It is a family of dogs that share a few things in common: they grow a lot, they grow quickly, and they carry the benefits and the cares that come with a big frame. Understanding where your dog fits makes everything easier, from feeding to exercise to choosing a vet visit schedule.

What counts as large and giant

There is no single official line, and different sources draw it differently. As a practical rule of thumb, **large breeds are dogs who will reach about 50 to 100 pounds as adults**, and **giant breeds are dogs who will reach about 100 pounds or more**. Many feed makers and veterinarians use around 55 to 70 pounds of expected adult weight as the point where a large-breed puppy formula makes sense. If your puppy's parents are big or your mixed-breed puppy is likely to land in this range, treat them as a large breed from the start and ask your vet.

Size group	Typical adult weight	Typical lifespan	Notes
Large	About 50 to 100 lb	Often 10 to 12 years	Includes many retrievers, shepherds and working breeds; individual dogs vary
Giant	About 100 lb and up	Often 7 to 10 years	Grow fast, mature slowly, and age earlier; individual dogs vary

These are general ranges. A lean, well-cared-for dog may live longer than the typical range, and lifespans vary a great deal by breed, genetics and luck. Keeping your dog lean, active and up to date on vet care is the best lever you control.

A tour of familiar big breeds

Here is a friendly overview of popular large and giant breeds. Weights are approximate and vary by individual, sex and line, so use them as a rough guide only.

Breed	Size group	Approximate adult weight	Temperament in a nutshell	Care notes
Labrador Retriever	Large	55 to 80 lb	Friendly, eager, food-motivated	Loves to eat, so watch the waistline; needs daily exercise and a job
Golden Retriever	Large	55 to 75 lb	Gentle, social, trainable	Long coat sheds heavily; needs regular brushing and plenty of activity
German Shepherd	Large	50 to 90 lb	Loyal, smart, driven	Needs mental work and firm, kind training; watch the back end as they age
Rottweiler	Large	80 to 130 lb	Confident, devoted, calm at home	Needs early socialization and steady training; strong and powerful
Boxer	Large	55 to 80 lb	Playful, goofy, high energy	Short face makes them heat-sensitive; stays puppyish for years
Standard Poodle	Large	40 to 70 lb	Smart, athletic, eager	Curly coat needs regular grooming; deep chest, so bloat habits matter
Bernese Mountain Dog	Large to giant	70 to 115 lb	Sweet, steady, family-loving	Thick coat, heat-sensitive, and a shorter average lifespan than many breeds

Breed	Size group	Approximate adult weight	Temperament in a nutshell	Care notes
Great Dane	Giant	110 to 175 lb	Gentle, goofy, sensitive	Tall and deep-chested, so bloat habits are especially important
Saint Bernard	Giant	120 to 180 lb	Mellow, patient, drooly	Heavy drooler; heat-sensitive; grows fast and needs careful puppyhood
Mastiffs (English, Bullmastiff, Neapolitan and others)	Giant	100 to 200+ lb	Calm, protective, affectionate	Massive frames, heavy joints, and lots of drool; low exercise stamina
Newfoundland	Giant	100 to 150 lb	Sweet, patient, water-loving	Thick coat, heat-sensitive, loves swimming; heavy shedder and drooler

SECTION 3

Home Setup & Safety

A home that suits a large dog does not need a mansion. It needs thoughtful space, safe footing, strong gear and a plan for the things a big dog can reach. Here is how to set it up.

Space and the "dog zone"

Most large dogs do fine in an ordinary home if they get daily exercise, and plenty do well in apartments when their needs are met. What matters more than square footage is that your dog has a comfortable resting place, room to turn around, and regular outings. A fenced yard is a wonderful bonus, but it is not a substitute for walks, training and time with you. Many big dogs left alone in a yard become bored, noisy or destructive.

Flooring, traction and joints

Slick floors are hard on big dogs. A dog who slips on hardwood or tile may tense up, strain muscles and develop a fear of walking on certain surfaces. For puppies with soft growing joints and seniors with stiff ones, slippery floors can be a genuine injury risk.

- Lay down **runners or rubber-backed rugs** along main walking paths and by food and water.
- Use **non-skid mats** under bowls and at the top and bottom of stairs.
- Keep **nails trimmed short** so toes can grip.
- Trim the **hair between the paw pads** on long-haired breeds, which can reduce slipping.
- Add **traction pads or grippy socks** if your vet suggests them for a senior dog.

Raised surfaces, stairs and jumping

Jumping on and off high surfaces puts repeated stress on joints. This matters most for puppies whose growth plates are still open, and for older dogs with arthritis.

- Use a **ramp or sturdy steps** for the car, the bed and the couch.
- For giants and young puppies, consider **limiting stairs** while they are small and growing, or carrying a small pup up and down.
- Teach a **"wait" at doors and car openings** so your dog does not leap out the moment the door opens.

Strong leash, well-fitted harness

A large dog that pulls can drag a person off their feet. Safe, comfortable gear makes training easier.

- Choose a **flat, secure collar** for ID tags and a **properly fitted harness** for walks.
- Pick a **sturdy leash of about six feet**, with strong hardware and a comfortable grip. Avoid retractable leashes with big dogs.
- Check the fit often. Puppies outgrow gear quickly.
- Never leave a harness or collar on an unsupervised dog in a crate, where straps can snag.

Crate and containment

A crate gives a dog a safe den and gives you a way to manage the house when you cannot supervise. A big dog needs a big, tough crate. Choose heavy-gauge construction with a reliable latch. Size it so your dog can stand without ducking, turn around and lie flat. Introduce it with treats and meals, and never use it as punishment. Do not leave a dog crated for longer than they can

comfortably hold their bladder, and puppies need much shorter stretches than adults.

Car and travel safety

An unrestrained 90-pound dog in a sudden stop becomes a dangerous projectile. Plan for safe rides:

- Use a **crash-rated style restraint or secured travel crate** rather than letting a big dog roam loose in the car.
- Teach your dog to wait before jumping out and to use a **ramp or steps** into higher vehicles.
- Never leave a dog in a parked car. Temperatures can climb to dangerous levels in minutes, even on mild days.

Furniture, counters and nose height

A dog with a 30-inch shoulder height can lift a roast off the counter with a casual stretch. Keep food, trash and medications out of reach, use a covered trash can, move breakables out of tail-sweep zones, secure cords, keep toxic houseplants out of chewing range, and use baby gates to close off rooms during meals.

Strength around children and elders

Large dogs are usually gentle, but they are strong, and even affection can knock someone over. A wagging tail at toddler height, a happy jump on an older person, or a tugging match gone wrong can cause injuries.

- **Supervise all interactions** between big dogs and young children, and teach children how to approach and pet calmly.
- Teach your dog **four paws on the floor** and a reliable "sit" for greetings.
- For elderly family members, keep the leash handling to the person who can control the dog safely, and use a harness that gives control without strain.
- Give your dog a **quiet retreat** where children are not allowed to follow.
- Never leave a baby or small child alone with any dog, no matter how sweet.

The cost realities, gently

We say this with love: a big dog costs more than a small one. It is much kinder to know that up front than to be surprised later. Here is how the costs scale.

Expense	How it scales with a large dog	What to plan for
Food	Several times what a small dog eats	A significant monthly line item; quality food matters most for joints and weight
Medications and preventives	Dosed by weight, so heavier dogs need larger doses	Flea, tick and heartworm preventives and any prescriptions cost more as weight rises
Boarding and daycare	Many facilities charge more for larger dogs	Plan ahead for travel; consider a trusted sitter
Grooming	Longer sessions and more product	Budget for professional grooming or good home tools
Gear	Bigger, sturdier and replaced as puppies grow	Expect to size up several times in puppyhood
Vet care	Anesthesia, imaging, surgery and drugs scale with size	Consider pet insurance or a dedicated savings fund for emergencies
Cleanup	More waste, more towels, more laundry	Stock up on bags, enzyme cleaner and washable covers

Setting aside money each month for the unexpected is one of the kindest things you can do for a big dog. Ask your vet about wellness plans, and look into pet insurance early, while your dog is healthy.

Check your local rules

Rules vary widely by town, county and state. In Pennsylvania, for example, dogs three months of age or older generally must be licensed each year, with the license in place by January 1. Many places also have leash laws, vaccination requirements (rabies in particular), limits on the number of dogs, and rules for certain breeds. Landlords and homeowners associations may have their own size or breed limits. Please check your state, county and municipal rules and confirm the details with your local licensing office.

SECTION 4

Growing Up Large: Puppy Growth & Joint Protection

If you remember one section of this guide, make it this one. Large and giant puppies grow astonishingly fast, and what happens during those months of rapid growth can echo through your dog's joints for years. The good news is that the protective steps are simple, and they are mostly about restraint: lean body, careful food, and sensible exercise.

Why growth matters so much

A large-breed puppy may go from a few pounds to dozens of pounds in just a few months, and some giants keep climbing for well over a year. Their bones, cartilage and joints are building at top speed, which makes them more sensitive to being overfed, over-supplemented or overworked. Developmental joint problems have several causes, including genetics, and no owner can control all of them. But the parts you do control, which are diet, weight and exercise, matter a great deal.

Feed a large-breed puppy formula

A **large-breed puppy formula** is made with controlled levels of calcium and calories so that big puppies grow steadily rather than too fast. A regular puppy food is built for dogs who will be small or medium and is often too rich in calories and minerals for a giant in the making.

- Choose a food labeled **complete and balanced for growth of large-breed dogs** under AAFCO nutritional standards.
- Follow the label as a starting point, then adjust with your vet based on how your puppy looks and feels.
- Stay on a large-breed puppy formula until your vet tells you it is time to switch, which is usually when growth is nearly finished and often somewhere around 12 to 18 months, later for some giants.
- Do not add extra calcium or mineral supplements on your own. Too much calcium in a growing large-breed puppy can interfere with normal bone development. A properly formulated large-breed puppy food already has what they need.

Keep them lean: the rib check

The goal for a growing large-breed puppy is slow, steady growth, not the fastest growth. A chubby puppy might look adorable, but extra weight raises the risk of joint trouble. Check your puppy's body condition regularly with this simple hands-on test:

1. **Feel the ribs.** Run your hands along the sides of your puppy's chest. You should be able to feel the ribs easily under a thin layer of padding, much like feeling the back of your hand. If you have to press to find them, your puppy is carrying too much.
2. **Look from above.** You should see a gentle waist behind the ribs.
3. **Look from the side.** The belly should tuck up slightly behind the ribs rather than hang level or sag.

Weigh your puppy regularly, even if it means stepping on the scale holding them and subtracting your own weight, and ask your vet about a healthy growth curve for your puppy's breed. If the numbers climb too fast, talk to your vet about trimming portions.

Exercise rules while growth plates are open

Growth plates are soft areas of developing cartilage near the ends of the long bones. They are where bones lengthen, and while they are open they are more vulnerable to injury than the mature bone around them. In large dogs, growth plates close gradually, **roughly between 12 and 24 months depending on the dog**, with giant breeds often on the later side.

What is gentle and good for a growing large-breed puppy:

- Free play on soft ground, such as grass, with other puppies and friendly dogs.
- Short, relaxed, varied walks on a leash.

- Exploring different surfaces and gentle hills at their own pace.
- Swimming, if your puppy enjoys it and conditions are safe.
- Training games, scent games and puzzle toys.

What to avoid or limit until your vet gives the go-ahead:

- **Long, repetitive runs** such as jogging, biking alongside a bike, or marathon-style fetch on hard ground.
- **Jumping from heights** such as off decks, truck beds or high furniture.
- **Forced stair climbing** over and over, especially in the youngest, heaviest puppies.
- **Sharp pivots and hard stops** during intense ball chasing on slick surfaces.
- Agility-style jumping at full height. Low-impact foundation skills are fine; ask your trainer and vet before ramping up.

A general guideline you may hear is a few minutes of structured walking per month of age, once or twice a day, on top of free play. Treat that as a rough guide only, since a puppy who naturally rests when tired is telling you something. Let your puppy set the pace, and end sessions while they still want more.

Spay and neuter timing

When to spay or neuter is a decision to make with your veterinarian, and the honest answer is that it varies. Research on timing in large and giant breeds is mixed, and what is best can depend on breed, sex, size, lifestyle and household needs. Some research suggests that earlier or later timing may influence joint development and certain health risks differently depending on the breed, but results are not consistent and individual dogs differ. Your vet knows your dog and the research landscape best. Bring it up at the first visit, ask about the trade-offs for your specific breed, and make a plan together. Please also check local rules and any adoption contract requirements.

SECTION 5

Weight, Size & Daily Numbers

Numbers help you notice changes early. This section gives you ballpark figures to start with. Every dog is different, and your veterinarian will refine them for your dog.

Body condition: the single best number

Instead of chasing a particular number on the scale, learn to read your dog's body condition. A lean, fit large-breed dog should have:

- Ribs you can feel easily with light pressure, but not see sharply.
- A visible waist when viewed from above.
- An abdominal tuck when viewed from the side.
- No thick fat pad over the spine or hips.

Many vets use a nine-point body condition scale, where a four or five out of nine is considered ideal. Ask your vet to show you what that looks like on your dog, and to give you a target weight. Keeping your dog on the lean side of normal is one of the most powerful steps to protect their joints and potentially their lifespan.

Daily calories: a starting estimate

Calories depend on age, activity, neuter status, metabolism and the food itself. The ranges below are very rough starting points for a healthy adult dog at a lean weight with moderate activity. Your vet will adjust them. Check the calorie content on your dog's food label (calories per cup or per can) and watch your dog's body condition. If ribs disappear under padding, trim a little. If ribs show too sharply, add a little.

Ideal adult weight	Approximate calories per day	Notes
50 lb	1,000 to 1,300	Moderately active adult
75 lb	1,400 to 1,800	Active dogs may need more
100 lb	1,700 to 2,200	Giants often need fewer calories per pound than smaller dogs
150 lb	2,300 to 3,000	Watch body condition closely; mastiff-type dogs may need less

Puppies need more calories per pound while growing, but you should still feed to keep them lean. Seniors usually need fewer calories. Treats count too, so subtract them from the daily total.

Meals per day

Life stage	Typical meals per day	Why
Puppy (up to about 6 months)	3 to 4	Small stomachs, steady energy, easier digestion
Puppy (6 to 12 months)	3, moving toward 2	Gradual shift as they grow
Adult	2 or more smaller meals	Eases the load on the stomach and fits bloat risk reduction
Senior	2	Keep consistent; adjust portions as activity changes

Water

Fresh water should be available at all times. As a rough starting point, many healthy dogs drink roughly an ounce of water per pound of body weight per day, and more in hot weather, with exercise or on dry food. Big dogs can drink a lot at once, so offer water in several refills and in moderate amounts after hard exercise instead of letting a very hot, panting dog gulp a huge bowl. A sudden big change in thirst is worth a call to your vet.

Exercise minutes by age

These are general starting ranges. Always follow your vet's advice for your dog's breed and health.

Life stage	Daily exercise	What it looks like
Puppy under 6 months	Short sessions of play and walking, several times a day	Free play, training games, gentle walks; stop before tiredness
Adolescent (6 to 18 months)	About 30 to 60 minutes total, split up	Controlled leash walks, play, training; avoid repetitive high impact
Adult	About 45 to 90 minutes	Brisk walks, hiking, swimming, play, sports and training
Giant breeds (adult)	Often 30 to 60 minutes, gentle	Steady walks and play; many giants are happy couch dogs
Senior	20 to 45 minutes, split into easy outings	Short walks, gentle stretches, swimming; adjust to comfort

SECTION 6

Diet & Nutrition



Large dogs need food formulated for their size, fed in measured meals and kept lean. A slow feeder helps dogs that gulp.

Feeding your big dog like any dog is a mistake. Large and giant dogs have nutritional needs that differ from small dogs, especially during puppyhood, and they carry specific risks, such as bloat and joint strain, that feeding habits can influence. Clean Fuel, No Junk is the way we think about it: a complete, balanced food in the right amount, served in a way that suits a deep chest.

Choose a complete and balanced food

Look for a statement on the label that the food is **complete and balanced** for your dog's life stage according to AAFCO (the Association of American Feed Control Officials) nutritional standards. That statement means the recipe meets minimum nutrient requirements.

- **Large-breed puppy formula** for puppies, to keep calcium and calories in the right zone for steady growth.
- **Large-breed adult formula** for adults, which often has moderate calories and sometimes added joint-friendly nutrients.
- **Senior or weight-management formulas** as needed, if your vet recommends them.

Read the ingredient list for real, recognizable ingredients and a clear protein source. Ask your vet before switching to a homemade, raw or grain-free diet. Homemade diets in particular can be unbalanced without professional formulation, and some

diet types have been linked to health concerns in certain dogs. A veterinary nutritionist can help you if you want to cook for your dog.

How much to feed

Start with the label's feeding guide, then adjust to your dog's body condition. Use a **measuring cup or kitchen scale** every meal, since eyeballing a big scoop is how a 2-pound-a-month weight gain sneaks in. Reweigh and recheck often during puppyhood.

Bloat (GDV) risk-reduction habits

Gastric dilatation-volvulus, known as **GDV or bloat**, is a life-threatening emergency in which the stomach fills with gas and may twist. Deep-chested large and giant breeds are at higher risk. No habit can eliminate the risk entirely, but these steps are commonly recommended to lower it. Talk with your vet about the plan that fits your dog.

- **Feed several smaller meals** instead of one large one.
- **Avoid vigorous exercise right around meals.** Keep things calm for an hour or so before and after eating, or as your vet advises.
- **Slow down fast eaters** with a slow-feeder bowl, puzzle feeder or snuffle mat.
- **Avoid big gulps of water** right after eating or intense exercise.
- **Keep mealtimes calm**, with no wild romping and no stress.
- **Do not rely on raised bowls.** Some studies have suggested raised feeders may not help and could even raise risk in some dogs, and the research is mixed. Ask your vet before using one.
- **Ask your vet about preventive surgery.** For some very high-risk dogs, a surgery that tacks the stomach in place can be discussed, sometimes during spay or neuter. This is a vet decision.
- **Know the signs** (see the Joints, Bloat & Heart section) and keep your emergency vet's number handy.

Treats, chews and table scraps

Treats are for training, bonding and fun, not for packing on pounds.

- Keep treats to **no more than about 10 percent of daily calories**, and subtract them from meals.
- Choose **small, soft training treats** for training sessions, and break them into pea-sized pieces.
- Use **fresh green beans, carrot pieces or small bits of plain cooked lean meat** as low-calorie rewards, if your dog tolerates them.
- Skip **fatty table scraps**, bones that splinter and rawhide chunks that can cause blockages. Ask your vet about safe chews for your dog.

Toxic foods to keep away

Some foods that are fine for people can make dogs seriously sick. If your dog eats any of these, call your vet, an emergency clinic, the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center at (888) 426-4435 or the Pet Poison Helpline at (855) 764-7661 right away. Fees may apply to poison hotlines.

Food	Why it is a problem	What to do
Xylitol (a sweetener in sugar-free gum, candy, some baked goods and some peanut butters)	Can cause a dangerous drop in blood sugar and liver damage, even in small amounts	Emergency: call immediately; check labels before sharing anything

Food	Why it is a problem	What to do
Chocolate and cocoa	Contains compounds that affect the heart and nervous system; dark and baking chocolate are the most dangerous	Call right away; the amount and type matter
Grapes and raisins	Can cause kidney failure in some dogs, and the toxic dose is unpredictable	Call right away, even for small amounts
Onions, garlic, chives and leeks	Can damage red blood cells	Call your vet; effects can be delayed
Macadamia nuts	Can cause weakness, vomiting, tremors and fever	Call your vet
Alcohol and raw yeast dough	Alcohol is toxic, and rising dough can expand in the stomach and produce alcohol	Emergency: call immediately

This is not a complete list. When in doubt, call.

Supplements: an honest conversation

Walk down any pet aisle and you will see shelves of joint and wellness supplements. Here is the honest picture:

- **Glucosamine and chondroitin** are common joint ingredients. Evidence on how well they work is mixed, and results vary from dog to dog.
- **Omega-3 fatty acids** (fish oil) have some research support for helping with inflammation and joint comfort, but quality and dosing vary a lot, and too much can cause problems.
- **A complete and balanced diet** is the foundation. Supplements are add-ons and not substitutes.
- **Never add calcium** to a large-breed puppy's diet unless your vet says so.
- Supplements are not tightly regulated like medications, so quality varies.

Ask your vet before starting any supplement, especially if your dog is on medication. Your vet can recommend products and doses that fit your dog.

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

SECTION 7

Exercise & Training

A big dog with nowhere to put their energy will find somewhere, and it is usually your sofa. Meeting big energy with the right exercise, and teaching manners early, is the heart of living happily with a large dog.

Manners early

A 15-pound puppy who jumps is cute. A 90-pound adult who jumps is a hazard. Start now, with short, upbeat sessions:

- **Sit, down, stay and wait** at doors, car openings and food bowls.
- **Four paws on the floor** for greetings: reward sitting, and calmly turn away from jumping.
- **Drop it and leave it**, which protect your dog from swallowing the wrong thing.
- **Settle on a mat**, which gives a big dog an off switch.
- **Handling practice**: touch paws, ears, mouth and belly, with treats, so grooming and vet visits stay easy.

A puppy class is wonderful for socialization, and a good trainer uses rewards and clear communication rather than harsh corrections.

Leash skills for a strong dog

- **Loose-leash walking**: Reward your dog for staying beside you, and stop moving the moment the leash goes tight. Walking forward must only happen on a slack line. Practice in boring places first.
- **Harness categories**: A back-clip harness is comfortable but can encourage some dogs to pull. A front-clip harness, which attaches at the chest, gently turns a pulling dog back toward you. Some trainers use a head-halter style for very strong dogs, which needs careful introduction. Whatever you choose, make sure it fits, and ask a trainer to help you. Avoid tools designed to cause pain.
- **Recall**: Teach "come" with high-value treats and happy voices, never punishment. Practice on a long line in safe, fenced areas, and do not trust off-leash reliability until it is proven in many settings.
- **Short, frequent sessions** beat one long drill, especially for young dogs.

Sports and work for the breed group

Breed group	Examples	Activities that fit
Retrievers	Labrador, Golden	Fetch, swimming, dock diving, scent games, retrieving training
Herding and working	German Shepherd, Boxer	Obedience, tracking, nose work, structured fetch, agility foundations after growth
Guardian and giant	Rottweiler, Mastiffs, Saint Bernard	Steady walks, calm training, weight pulling or carting for fit adults with vet approval
Mountain and farm	Bernese Mountain Dog, Newfoundland	Hiking in cool weather, carting, swimming, water rescue-style training
Poodle	Standard Poodle	Agility, trick training, swimming, nose work

Check with your vet before starting any intense sport, particularly for young dogs and giants.

Mental enrichment

Mental work tires a dog out in ways walks alone cannot. Try snuffle mats, food puzzles, scatter feeding in the grass, hide-and-seek, trick training and sniff-focused walks where your dog sets the pace. Even ten minutes of nose work can settle a restless dog.

Heat tolerance

Thick-coated dogs like Bernese, Newfoundlands and Saint Bernards, and flat-faced dogs like Boxers and some Mastiffs, overheat easily. Exercise in the early morning or evening, offer shade and water, avoid hot pavement, and never leave a dog in a parked car. Excessive panting, drooling, bright red gums, stumbling or vomiting can signal heat stroke, which is an emergency.

Limits by age

- **Puppies:** gentle play and short walks; no repetitive high impact while growth plates are open.
- **Adolescents:** build up slowly, avoid forced jumping and long runs, and keep training consistent through the teenage phase.
- **Adults:** vary activities, warm up before hard play, and cool down afterward.
- **Seniors:** more frequent, shorter, softer outings. Swimming and slow hill walks can maintain muscle gently.

SECTION 8

Joint, Bloat & Heart: Big-Dog Health

This section explains the conditions big-dog owners hear about most. We are not diagnosing anything here. Only your veterinarian can do that. The goal is to help you recognize when something deserves a call.

GDV (bloat): a life-threatening emergency

Bloat means the stomach fills with gas, and in GDV it can also twist. It can become fatal within hours. **Go to an emergency vet immediately** if you see:

- Unproductive retching, trying to vomit and bringing up little or nothing
- A swollen, hard or tight belly
- Restlessness, pacing, or inability to get comfortable
- Heavy drooling
- Pale gums, rapid breathing, weakness or collapse

Do not wait to see if it passes. Call the clinic on the way, so they can prepare. Review the prevention habits in the Diet & Nutrition section.

Hip and elbow dysplasia, and arthritis

Dysplasia means the joint did not develop with a perfect fit, which can lead to wear, pain and arthritis. Signs include bunny-hopping, difficulty rising, reluctance to climb stairs or jump, stiffness after rest, and lameness. Genetics play a major role, and weight, nutrition and exercise during growth also matter. Ask your vet about screening, ask breeders about their health testing, and keep your dog lean. Treatment options range from weight management and medication to surgery, and your vet will help you choose.

Cranial cruciate ligament injuries

The cranial cruciate ligament stabilizes the knee. When it tears or weakens, a dog may suddenly hold up a back leg, limp, or show stiffness after exercise. Overweight dogs and certain breeds are at higher risk. Do not wait out a persistent limp, since early evaluation helps.

Dilated cardiomyopathy

Dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM) is a disease in which the heart muscle weakens and the heart enlarges. It is more commonly seen in some large and giant breeds. Signs can include tiring easily, coughing, fainting or fast breathing, though some dogs show nothing until late. Ask your vet whether your breed warrants heart screening.

Osteosarcoma and other cancers

Large and giant breeds are more prone to certain cancers, including bone cancer (osteosarcoma). A persistent limp, a bony swelling on a leg, new lumps or unexplained weight loss are reasons to schedule a visit. Early checks matter, and your vet can discuss options.

Wobbler syndrome

Wobbler syndrome affects the neck vertebrae in some large and giant breeds, pressing on the spinal cord. A wobbly, uncoordinated gait, especially in the back legs, neck pain or stiffness warrants a vet visit.

Heat stroke

Heat stroke happens when a dog cannot cool down. Heavy panting, drooling, bright red gums, vomiting, weakness or collapse need action: move to shade or air conditioning, apply cool (not ice-cold) water, and head to a vet immediately.

Obesity

Excess weight is the most preventable big-dog health problem. It strains joints and heart, and can shorten life. Keep your dog lean with measured meals, limited treats and regular exercise.

SECTION 9

Common Challenges & Solutions

Every big dog comes with a few predictable growing pains. Here is how to handle the most common ones.

Pulling on the leash

What you see: your dog drags you down the street, leash tight. **Why it happens:** pulling works. The faster they pull, the faster they get where they want. Excitement and strength make it worse. **What to do:** reward slack-leash walking, stop when the leash tightens, use a front-clip harness, and practice in low-distraction areas first. Keep walks interesting with sniff breaks as rewards. **When to ask for help:** if pulling continues despite consistent training, or if your dog lunges at people or dogs, call a qualified trainer. Sudden new pulling or reluctance may point to pain, so mention it to your vet.

Jumping up

What you see: paws on shoulders, chests or visitors. **Why it happens:** dogs greet face to face, and jumping has been rewarded by attention. **What to do:** turn away or step back, reward four paws on the floor, teach "sit to greet," and ask guests to follow the rule. **When to ask for help:** if jumping becomes knocking down children or elders, enlist a trainer and use a leash or gate for safe greetings.

Counter surfing

What you see: your dog helps themselves to food on the counter. **Why it happens:** at nose height, the reward is huge, so it repeats. **What to do:** clear counters, never leave food out, teach "off" and "go to your mat," and reward staying on the floor. **When to call a vet:** if your dog eats something toxic, such as chocolate or anything with xylitol, call your vet or a poison hotline immediately.

Destructive chewing

What you see: shredded shoes, chewed furniture, gnawed door frames. **Why it happens:** puppies chew to relieve teething, and adolescents chew from boredom or excess energy. **What to do:** supply appropriate chews, exercise and mental work, manage access with gates and crates, and swap stolen items for a trade. **When to call a vet:** if your dog swallows pieces and vomits, strains or stops eating, call right away, since blockages are emergencies.

Drooling

What you see: strings of drool on floors, walls and you. **Why it happens:** loose lips and jowls in breeds like Saint Bernards and Mastiffs. It increases with heat, excitement and food. **What to do:** keep a drool rag handy, wash bowls often, and wipe the face and folds. **When to call a vet:** sudden heavy drooling, a bad odor or trouble swallowing can signal dental problems or something stuck, so schedule an exam.

Shedding

What you see: tufts of fur on every surface. **Why it happens:** double-coated dogs shed year-round, with seasonal heavy "blowouts." **What to do:** brush often with the right tool, bathe occasionally, and feed a complete diet. Shaving a double coat is not recommended. **When to call a vet:** bald patches, red skin or itching beyond normal shedding.

Separation anxiety

What you see: howling, destruction or accidents when you leave. **Why it happens:** bonded dogs can panic when alone, especially if they have not practiced it. **What to do:** build alone time gradually, exercise before you leave, provide a safe space and enrichment, and keep departures calm. **When to ask for help:** if distress is severe, talk to your vet and a qualified trainer. Medication and structured training can help.

Joint stiffness

What you see: slow to rise, stiff after naps, hesitant on stairs. **Why it happens:** age, arthritis, weight and past injuries. **What to do:** keep your dog lean, provide a thick supportive bed and traction, offer gentle regular exercise, and use ramps. **When to call a vet:** schedule a visit for any new or worsening stiffness. Do not give human pain medication, which can be dangerous.

Bloat scare

What you see: a dog who gulps food, then paces, drools or looks uncomfortable. **Why it happens:** fast eating, swallowed air and deep chests; sometimes it is simple gas. **What to do:** if you see the emergency signs, go to the vet immediately. Otherwise, slow down meals and keep things calm. **When to call a vet:** when in doubt, call the emergency clinic. It is always better to be told it was nothing.

Limping

What you see: a dog who favors a leg, on and off or constantly. **Why it happens:** strains, sore pads, nails, tick-borne illness, joint disease or injury. **What to do:** rest, check the paw for thorns, cuts or swelling, and avoid hard exercise. **When to call a vet:** a limp lasting more than a day or two, or any severe limp, swelling or crying out, needs an exam. Sudden severe lameness should not wait.

Ear and skin problems

What you see: head shaking, scratching, odor, redness, hot spots. **Why it happens:** floppy ears trap moisture, and allergies and skin folds can cause infections. **What to do:** dry ears after swimming, keep the coat clean, and wipe folds gently. **When to call a vet:** foul odor, discharge, tilting the head or open sores need a vet visit.

Weight gain

What you see: disappearing ribs, a thickening middle, slower play. **Why it happens:** extra treats, free feeding and less exercise. **What to do:** measure meals, cut treats, increase walks and weigh monthly. **When to ask your vet:** ask for a target weight and a feeding plan, and rule out medical causes.

SECTION 10

Routine Care Calendar

How often	What to do
Daily	Measured meals, fresh water and a rib check by touch
Daily	Walks, play and a short training session
Daily	Look at eyes, ears, gait and appetite
Daily	Brush heavy shedders; wipe drool and face folds
Weekly	Brush thoroughly; check ears and paws
Weekly	Brush teeth several times a week
Weekly	Wash bedding and bowls; weigh puppies
Monthly	Heartworm, flea and tick prevention as your vet directs
Monthly	Trim or grind nails; trim paw hair if needed
Monthly	Weigh adults and check harness and collar fit
Every 3 months	Review gear and size up growing puppies
Every 6 months	Senior vet visit; dental check
Annually	Wellness exam, vaccines as advised, and heartworm test
Annually	Renew dog license; Pennsylvania requires licensing by January 1 for dogs three months or older

SECTION 11

When to See a Vet

When you are unsure, call. Big dogs can go downhill quickly.

Go now, emergency:

- Signs of bloat: unproductive retching, swollen hard belly, restlessness, drooling, collapse
- Collapse, trouble breathing or blue or pale gums
- Heat stroke signs
- Suspected poisoning or toxic food, such as xylitol, chocolate or grapes
- Seizures
- Severe injury, heavy bleeding or inability to stand
- Straining without producing urine or stool

Book within a day or two:

- A limp lasting more than a day or two
- Vomiting or diarrhea lasting more than a day
- Loss of appetite
- Persistent coughing
- Ear discharge or constant scratching
- New lumps or swellings
- Sudden weight changes

Bring your dog's records, a list of foods and supplements, and your questions to every visit.

SECTION 12

FAQ

What counts as a large breed dog?

There is no single official line, but a large breed dog generally reaches about 50 to 100 pounds as an adult, and a giant breed about 100 pounds or more. Many vets and food makers use roughly 55 to 70 pounds of expected adult weight as the point where large-breed puppy feeding applies. If you are unsure, ask your vet.

How much should I feed a large breed puppy?

Start with the feeding guide on a complete and balanced large-breed puppy formula, then adjust to keep your puppy lean, with ribs you can feel easily and a visible waist. Split the day into three or four measured meals, avoid extra calcium, and weigh often. Your vet can set a growth curve and tell you when to trim or raise portions.

What is bloat in dogs?

Bloat, or GDV, is when the stomach fills with gas and may twist, cutting off blood flow. It is a life-threatening emergency, and deep-chested large breeds are at higher risk. Signs include unproductive retching, a swollen hard belly, restlessness, drooling and collapse. Go to an emergency vet immediately.

How can I prevent hip dysplasia?

You cannot prevent it entirely, because genetics play a major part, but you can lower the risk. Choose breeders who health test, feed a large-breed puppy formula, keep your puppy lean, avoid repetitive high-impact exercise while growth plates are open, and ask your vet about screening and the best plan for your dog.

How much exercise does a large breed dog need?

Most healthy adults do well with about 45 to 90 minutes a day, split into walks, play and training, while many giants are content with 30 to 60 gentle minutes. Puppies need short sessions and free play, and seniors need shorter, softer outings. Adjust for breed, heat and health, and check with your vet.

How long do large breed dogs live?

Large breeds often live around 10 to 12 years, and giants often 7 to 10, though individual dogs vary and many exceed those ranges. A lean body, good nutrition, regular exercise, dental care and routine vet visits are the best tools you have. Giants often need senior care earlier.

When is a large breed puppy fully grown?

Many large breeds reach their adult height by around 12 to 18 months, while giants may keep filling out until 24 months or later. Growth plates close roughly between 12 and 24 months depending on the dog, and mental maturity can take even longer. Ask your vet when to switch to adult food and increase exercise.

Should I feed large breed dogs one meal or two?

Most vets recommend two or more smaller meals a day for large and giant dogs rather than one big meal, which fits the habits that may lower bloat risk. Puppies need three or four. Keep activity calm around mealtimes, consider a slow feeder, and ask your vet about the best schedule for your dog.

How do I train a strong dog to walk on a leash?

Use a well-fitted harness, ideally with a front clip, and a sturdy six-foot leash. Reward your dog for walking beside you, and stop the moment the line goes tight, moving only when it is slack. Practice in quiet places, keep sessions short, and work with a trainer if pulling continues.

What supplements do large breeds need?

A complete and balanced diet is the foundation, and most healthy dogs on a good food do not need extras. Glucosamine, chondroitin and omega-3s have mixed evidence, and never add calcium to a puppy's food. Ask your vet before starting any supplement, especially if your dog takes medication.

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 at checkout, not as an option, but off the top of every order, because responsible pet ownership and community care are the same love pointed in two directions.

For big-dog people, that matters. Large dogs are among those most often waiting in shelters, and many of them are the gentle giants who simply needed someone to take the time. If you are in a position to adopt, a shelter near you may have a wonderful big dog waiting. Thank you for loving a dog the size of a small pony, and for caring enough to read this far. From our Lancaster County family to yours, give your big friend an extra scratch behind the ears. They have earned it.