

Your complete guide to natural dog care and training



# Whole Dog Journal™



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**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

Nancy Kerns

**TRAINING EDITOR**

Pat Miller

**PUBLISHER**

Timothy H. Cole

**CIRCULATION DIRECTOR**

Greg King

**EDITORIAL OFFICE**

WDJEditor@gmail.com

4006 Hildale Avenue

Oroville, CA 95966

**SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES**

(800) 829-9165

WholeDogJournal.com/cs

PO Box 8535

Big Sandy, TX 75755-8535

CANADA: Box 7820 STN Main

London, Ontario N5Y 5W1

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Minimum order 1,000

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Jocelyn Donnellon, (203) 857-3100

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**Whole Dog Journal** (ISSN #1097-5322) is published monthly by Belvoir Media Group, LLC, 535 Connecticut Avenue, Norwalk, CT 06854. Robert Englander, Chairman and CEO; Timothy H. Cole, Executive Vice President, Editorial Director; Philip L. Penny, Chief Operating Officer; Greg King, Executive Vice President, Marketing Director; Ron Goldberg, Chief Financial Officer; Tom Canfield, Vice President, Circulation. Periodicals postage paid at Norwalk, CT and at additional mailing offices. Copyright ©2018, Belvoir Media Group, LLC. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is strictly prohibited. Printed in U.S.A. Revenue Canada GST Account #128044658. Canada Publishing Agreement Number #40016479.

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Subscriptions: \$39 annually (12 issues). Bulk rate subscriptions for organizations and educational institutions available upon request.

Postmaster: Please send address changes to

**Whole Dog Journal,**

PO Box 8535, Big Sandy, TX 75755-8535

In Canada, send address changes to

**Whole Dog Journal,**

PO Box 39, Norwich, ON, N0J 1P0



# Raising the Bar

*Isolation vastly lowers a dog's quality of life and is nearly unbearable for puppies.*

I know I've hit a spot that's going to be sensitive for some of WDJ's readers when my copy editor sends an article back to me covered with personal comments mixed in with the grammatical and typographical corrections she's supposed to be making. But in the case of trainer Nancy Tucker's article "Home Alone" (page 20), even as she was writing it, the author herself expressed concerns that the piece might be upsetting for some people to read.



However, both WDJ's Training Editor Pat Miller and I love the article, even though we recognize that the points made by its author might be hard for some dog owners to accept, at least at first. Our hope is, though, that it makes people think a little about a very commonly accepted practice; are they unwittingly asking their dogs to do something that is very difficult, with little or no recognition of the hardship?

The thrust of the piece is this: Many dogs find staying at home alone all day to be anxiety-producing and challenging, causing a good number of them to exhibit behaviors that their owners find irritating (barking, chewing, inappropriate elimination indoors, etc.). Educated trainers recognize these behaviors as coping mechanisms – things that some dogs do in an effort to relieve their anxiety and boredom and make it through another day – *not*, as some people believe, things the dogs do out of spite. Experienced trainers have learned that it is far more fruitful – *and* humane – to educate owners about their dogs' emotional and biological needs and take steps to improve the dog's quality of life, than to try to stop the problematic behaviors with crates.

Of course, not *all* dogs find being home alone onerous. The advent of web cams and home-monitoring software has allowed many owners to observe their dogs sleeping on the sofa almost all day long – a reassuring vision, to be sure. But even in the case of dogs who seem to sleep all day, it shouldn't hurt to ask their owners: Is this enough?

Compared to life on a chain or ownerless on the streets, our dogs' lives – mostly indoors, with plush beds and enriching toys and plenty to eat – seem pretty darn good. Who among us has not felt that our own lives, by comparison, are a lot harder? After all, we have to work all day to support their leisure-filled lifestyles!

But we're asking you to consider the social nature of the dog, just for a moment. His forbears chose to be our companions thousands of years ago, and when given an opportunity to choose, it's his strong preference to be with us almost all of the time. Please just think about this if your dog shows signs of being distressed by being home alone, or, especially, if you are planning to bring a puppy home soon. And then consider whether any of Tucker's suggested remedies might be available to you. Your dog will appreciate it more than he can ever say.

NK





# Senior Exams

*A comprehensive physical examination and diagnostic laboratory tests are invaluable for detecting health problems early in our senior dogs.*

Our dogs are part of our families. They play, run, and sleep with us. From bouncy puppies to laid-back adults, we are partnered for life. But what happens when they can no longer keep up? Often, as our dogs age, we start to see a general “slowing down.” Most owners see this as a normal part of growing older and it’s frequently written off. But what if it’s a sign of something more?

There are a number of ways that we can stay on top of health issues that creep up on our dogs with age. Annual veterinary visits are a staple in every healthy pet’s life. A comprehensive physical exam from nose to tail is step one in picking up clues to underlying concerns at every age, but it becomes even more important in the senior years.

In general, a senior pet is thought of as one in the later third of its life. So for our giant breed friends, this could be as early as four or five years of age, while those little Chihuahuas don’t hit senior until 10 or older! It’s at this point that your vet may start recommending biannual physical exams and other regular diagnostic tests to detect concerns as early as possible. As we’ve all heard from our own doctors, early diagnosis is key to successful treatment. Let’s look a little closer at some of those screening tests that may be recommended for your dog.

## ■ COMPLETE BLOOD COUNT

**What it is:** The complete blood count, or CBC, is a blood analysis that investigates the red and white blood cell lines, as well as platelets. Red cells are the oxygen-carrying cells of the body, providing important nutrients to all of the organs and tissues. White cells are often thought of as our infection-fighting cells and while that’s definitely a big part of their job, they also give indications of overall immune health. Platelets are part of the blood-clotting system. The CBC takes in

the number of each type of cell, as well as their sizes and distribution in the total volume of the blood.

**Why run it:** This is a screening test. That means that it rarely holds up a big sign with a diagnosis on it. Instead, the CBC is an indicator of underlying problems. A low red blood cell count (often called a packed-cell volume or hematocrit) means something is bleeding, something is damaging/consuming red cells or the body isn’t producing enough. A high count can point toward dehydration. A small change up or down may make your dog sluggish, which owners frequently misinterpret as “getting old.”

These little changes can point your vet toward an underlying disease process that may be treatable, helping your dog reclaim his youthful energy! A change up or down in the white blood cell lines may indicate an underlying infection (dental disease, anyone?), inflammation (how about those spring allergies?) or even be an early sign of certain cancers.

*Diagnostic laboratory exams can help us find conditions that have not yet made our senior dogs ill, but that are contributing incrementally to their decline. Early detection and treatment can add years to your dog’s life.*



**When it should be run:** An annual CBC is a part of a comprehensive exam at any age, but in senior pets, every six months will help pick up changes as soon as they happen. As with any test, if your dog is showing signs of illness, even if you just had a CBC run last week, it should be checked!

## ■ BLOOD CHEMISTRY

**What it is:** A blood chemistry is a broad term for any test that evaluates how the body's organs are functioning. These come in many varieties and are frequently followed by a number such as 12, 19, or 23. This number indicates how many different parameters are being tested, so for the most information, look for the test with the highest number!

Values that are most frequently included on a chemistry are liver enzymes, kidney-function measurements, blood proteins, and blood sugar. Other values that are sometimes included reflect pancreatic function, electrolytes, and gallbladder function.

**Why run it:** These values point your veterinarian in a specific direction. If your pet is seeming "older," that may be a reflection of lethargy, which in turn



may be a result of liver disease or something similar. Sometimes, a chemistry test gives us an answer, such as in the case of elevated blood sugar in diabetes. In other instances, it indicates where to look next, such as when liver enzymes are elevated. This test gives you a lot of "bang for your buck." It gives a lot of information in a relatively non-invasive way and for a small price tag. Normal values are great, too! When we have a test with normal values, we can more

accurately interpret a change in the future. The best part of a chemistry is that there are instances where it can give you a diagnosis. While it is useful as a screening test, it can also be a test that gives you an answer.

**When it should be run:** Chemistry panels are similar to a CBC, in this respect. They should be run every six months or any time something changes. When early changes to liver or kidney health are detected, sometimes we can use something as simple as diet to manage things. If left undiagnosed for a year or more, our options become much more limited.

## ■ THYROXINE SCREEN (T4)

**What it is:** The T4 or fT4 is an abbreviation for a specific thyroid hormone. It is how vets often refer to a thyroid screen. This test looks at circulating thyroid hormone (T4) or circulating, unbound thyroid hormone (fT4 or free T4). T4 is one of several thyroid hormones produced by the body. It is the easiest and most inexpensive to test, but it is a screening test; an abnormal value requires follow-up testing.

Your dog's thyroid gland secretes several hormones that are responsible at least in part for regulating a multitude of things, including metabolism, energy level, even skin health!

**Why run it:** Hypothyroidism, a condition in which the thyroid gland does not produce adequate hormone, is one of the most commonly diagnosed conditions in older dogs. It causes pets to just seem old – they become lethargic, overweight, have poor hair coat, and can have appetite changes. Often, these changes are subtle and are easily attributed to "old age."

This condition is also one of the easiest to treat! It only requires supplemental thyroid hormone. This is inexpensive and usually easy to give (what dog doesn't like peanut butter?). It can really change a dog's life when you get that balanced out! As anyone

with thyroid disease themselves can attest to, when thyroid hormones are off, you feel crummy.

**When it should be run:** Generally, a yearly thyroid screen is sufficient for most dogs. If it is abnormal, your veterinarian may recommend a more in-depth panel to fully diagnose the condition or may simply recommend monitoring this screen more frequently. It all depends on your dog's specific situation.

There is a caveat to this test. Thyroid hormone is a finicky thing. If your dog is sick in some other way, his thyroid hormone value may be artificially lowered. This is a condition called "sick euthyroid" and is not true hypothyroidism. This is why the confirmatory panel is so important to run. Be sure to follow your veterinarian's advice when it comes to starting supplementation or running additional tests.

## ■ URINALYSIS

**What it is:** The urinalysis, often abbreviated UA, is exactly what it sounds like: an evaluation of your dog's pee. Urine is a great indicator of a lot of different conditions. We evaluate urine for protein content, pH, crystals, cells, and a whole host of other things. Each bit of information provides insight into your dog's overall health.

**Why run it:** When your veterinarian asks for a urine sample, it's not always to look for infection. Basic urine screens, as part of a comprehensive exam, can give signs of diabetes, early kidney disease, bladder stones, even bladder or prostate cancer. The urine is a sensitive marker for these things and we frequently see changes to it before seeing changes to blood tests. Dilute urine or urine with a high protein content may be reflective of kidneys that aren't working as well as they should. A high sugar content means diabetes.

Of course, it's always good to look for infection, too! Bacteria can be a normal part of urine that was caught via "free catch" (straight from the stream, as it were!), but if the sample





Photo by Dr. Kyle Grusling

was obtained in a sterile method, lots of bacteria means infection. Sometimes, after running a blood profile, your veterinarian will ask for a urine sample. It's important to interpret these tests together to get all of the puzzle pieces.

**When it should be run:** Annual urinalyses are a great place to start in a senior dog with no obvious health concerns. If something abnormal pops up, your veterinarian will recommend a monitoring plan tailored to your dog. If a blood analysis shows something funky, a urine sample may be requested to get more information.

If your four-legged friend is ever exhibiting signs of a urinary-tract problem, such as increased frequency of urination, straining to urinate, or blood in the urine, see your vet and be prepared to check a urine sample!

**Pro-tip:** If you think your dog is straining to poop, he may *actually* be straining to pee! Come to your vet appointment with a urine sample in addition to a fecal sample and your vet will be impressed!

## ■ THORACIC RADIOGRAPHS

**What it is:** Radiograph is the fancy word for an x-ray. Thoracic (chest) x-rays are

a great tool to assess your dog's health. An x-ray can frequently be taken on an awake patient, but if your furry friend is a bit nervous, sedation provides a safe and effective way to take perfect pictures.

Chest x-rays allow your veterinarian to evaluate the lungs and heart, as well as portions of the spine, trachea, esophagus, and sometimes even the first part of the abdomen.

**Why take them:** One of the most frequent things veterinarians hear from clients with older dogs is "he's just slowing down!" When that happens, it can mean any number of things that are tough to puzzle out.

In some cases, a dog's reluctance to play fetch may be related a difficulty catching his breath. Chest x-rays give a peek into heart and lung conditions that affect energy level, breathing, and comfort. These include primary heart disease, asthma, allergies, even cancer.

The "Big C" is a word that dog owners never want to hear, but our pets are not immune. Lungs are a frequent spot that cancer spreads. We can see spots in the lungs, called metastases, as a sign that cancer is occurring somewhere in the body. Primary lung and heart tumors also happen and can be picked up with x-rays.

*Why wait for your dog to show symptoms of advanced disease, when radiographs can help your veterinarian catch problems at an earlier stage?*

**When to take them:** Chest x-rays taken yearly, as well as before any anesthetic procedure, will provide your veterinarian with important health information. Knowing your pet has a happy heart and healthy lungs can provide a measure of comfort to you, as well.

## WORTH THE EXTRA EFFORT AND EXPENSE

Senior dogs are great companions. Whether they came into our lives as puppies or were adopted in their twilight years, we want to keep them comfortable and healthy for as long as possible. The screening tests discussed here are the first step in early disease detection. While it looks like a lot of information and a lot of poking and prodding, most of these tests can be run using just a small sample of blood and urine.

Don't ever dismiss your senior dog's behavior change as "just" old age; even if he *is* getting old! Sure, we all enjoy a snooze in the sun and maybe we don't lose that winter weight as easily as we did in our younger years, but in our dogs, these can be signs of easily treatable problems. You and your veterinarian can custom design a screening program for your senior dog to ensure a long, healthy life.

Next month, I will discuss "next step" tests, including abdominal ultrasound, echocardiograms, ECGs, and full thyroid panels. 🐾

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*After graduating from Michigan State University College of Veterinary Medicine in 2011, Kyle Grusling had internships in small animal clinical medicine and surgery, then practiced emergency medicine for three years, before deciding to pursue a career in general practice at Northland Animal Hospital in Rockford, Michigan. When she's not at work, Dr. Grusling enjoys spending time with her husband, Joe, two sons, Mason and Beckett, as well as their two cats and their Golden Retriever.*



# Wait and Stay

*You can easily teach your dog these highly valuable impulse-control exercises.*

**I**mpulse control is the ability to resist a temptation, urge, or impulse. It's what allows you to stay on your diet, be faithful to your spouse, and quit smoking. It's also what keeps your dog from counter surfing, chasing a fleeing squirrel, jumping on guests, darting out an open door, and doing a host of other behaviors that she finds very reinforcing – and you find annoying or worse.

When the use of aversives was the norm in dog training, we simply punished our canine companions harshly enough that they were afraid to do these unwanted behaviors. With the advent of positive-based training, its emphasis on relationship, and our appreciation for getting our dogs to do stuff, today's more enlightened humans use a kinder, gentler approach to teach impulse control. We teach dogs that if they choose to control their own impulses, good things will happen!

*It's not an overstatement: Impulse-control exercises, such as "wait before I release you to go through the gate or door," can save your dog's life.*

This month, we will look at some of these useful behaviors and address several more in next month's issue. Once your dog has learned the concept of impulse control – and how rewarding it can be – the applications for its use are almost infinite.

## WAIT AND STAY

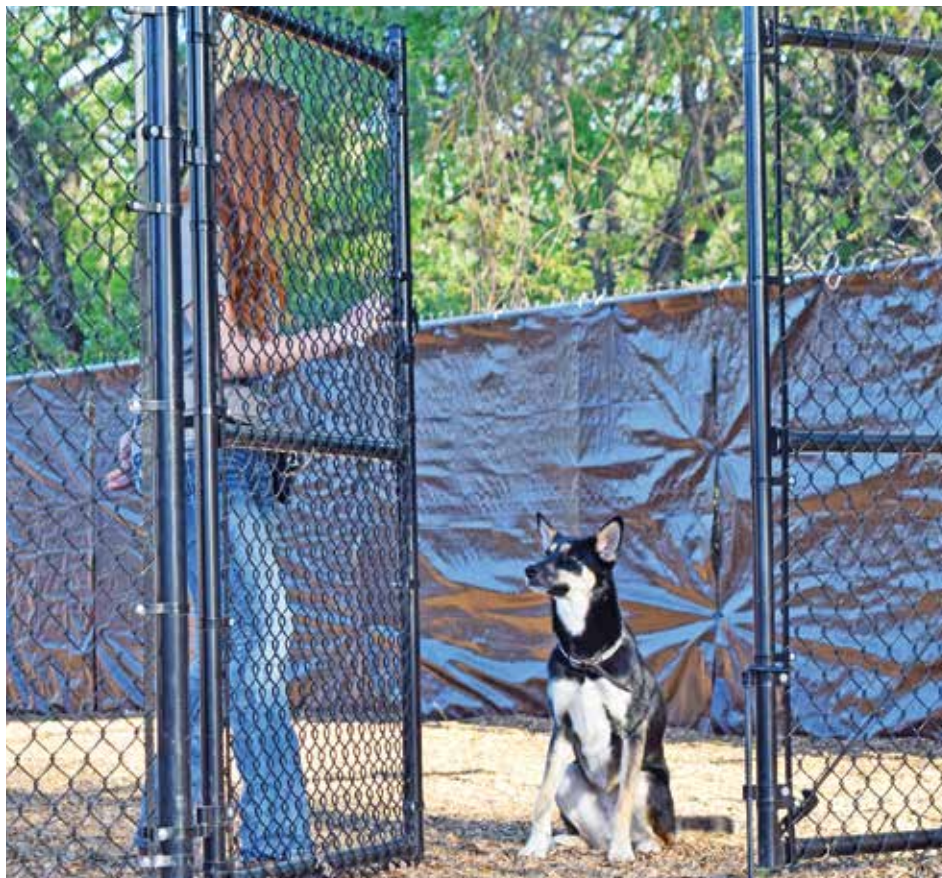
It certainly comes in handy if your dog will stay put when you ask her to. While some people may use the "Wait" and "Stay" cues interchangeably, I find there is real value in making a distinction between the two. In my world, "Stay" means "Stay in the exact position I left you in until I ask you to get up," while "Wait" just means "Pause."

"Stay" is vital for rally, obedience, and other canine competition venues, and for the occasional "I really need you to not move until I release you" situation. I actually use "Wait" a whole lot more than I do "Stay" in everyday life. In fact, it's probably my most-used cue.

Perhaps I'm heading out to meet a client. I say "Wait" as I open the door to tell my dogs Bonnie and Kai they aren't going with me, but they are free to move around the house. If I said "Stay," I would be asking them to freeze and not move until I return two hours later. I may have well-trained dogs, but that's not going to happen!

Now I'm headed down the stairs, and I ask them to "Wait" on the landing until I get to the bottom, so I don't trip over them. They can move around the landing, but not dash down the stairs until I give them permission with an "Okay!"

In contrast, I might use "Stay" to park Kai firmly in one spot when I'm speaking with a boarder in the barn and I don't want him running around under horse hooves while we talk.



*Thanks to Morgan Macy, training assistant at The Canine Connection in Chico, CA, for demonstrating these techniques.*





*Start teaching the “food bowl wait” with the food bowl held high. Look for your dog to shift her eyes from the bowl to your face.*



*Click (or use another marker) to indicate she’s doing it right, and then immediately deliver a treat to her lips (so she doesn’t get up).*



*Lower the bowl, continuing to look for her to make eye contact with you. Mark each success, lift the bowl, and give her a treat.*



*It gets more tempting to look at or go for the bowl the lower it goes. If she dives for the bowl, just lift it up and start again.*



*Good dog! With the bowl on the ground, she’s maintaining eye contact. Click, give her a treat, and then release her to eat the food in the bowl.*

## WAIT TRAINING

My favorite way to teach “Wait” is to teach “wait for the food bowl,” then generalize it to other situations. Here’s how:

**1** At meal time, have your dog sit by her feeding location, and tell her “Wait!” Hold her bowl at your shoulder level, click (or use a verbal marker of your choice), take a treat out of the food bowl and feed it to her. (Hold the bowl off to the side so you won’t be lowering it directly under her nose.) If she loves her regular food you can use that. If she’s not wildly enthusiastic, use higher value treats that you’ve put into her food bowl with her food. If she gets up before you click, tell her “Oops,

sit!” and try again. If she gets up after you click and treat, just ask her to sit again before the next repetition. Repeat several times, telling her “Wait” for each repetition.

**2** Start with the bowl at your shoulder level, tell her “Wait,” lower it a few inches, click your clicker if she’s still sitting and quickly raise the bowl back up after you click. Take a treat out of the food bowl and feed it to her. If she gets up when you lower the bowl, try again, and lower it only a fraction of an inch.

**3** Gradually lower the bowl a bit more, still starting at shoulder level, telling her “Wait” each time, with

several successful repetitions at each new position before going lower. If you get two “oopses” in a row, you’ve gone too quickly; back up to where she can succeed and proceed more slowly with your bowl-lowering.

**4** When you get the bowl all the way to the floor, set it down, click, and pick it back up before giving your dog the treat. Repeat several times, telling her “Wait” each time. (Be ready to raise it back up quickly if she tries to go for it!)

**5** Next, when you get the bowl to the floor, click, but leave the bowl on the floor while you feed her the treat. Repeat several times, telling her “Wait” each time.

**6** Finally, tell her “Wait,” set the bowl on the floor, click and treat, and tell her, “Okay, you can have it!”

Some dogs will get it in just one session. These are dogs who naturally have better impulse control. Those who are more challenged by their impulses will need to practice over a period of several days or more before you can get the bowl all the way to the floor, depending on their energy level and attention span – and yours. At each meal-time session, practice as long as is practical for you and your dog, then just go ahead and set the bowl on the floor with an “Okay you can have it!”

Eventually you will be able to just ask her to wait while you put the bowl on the floor, and you won't have to click and treat, her meal is the reward!

A great thing about teaching "Wait" with the food bowl: Most owners feed

their dogs twice a day, so you have two natural built-in practice sessions every day! Note: If you have multiple dogs, and they will invade each other's dining space, you may have to separate them to teach this.

When your dog can wait for her food bowl reliably, it will be easy for you to generalize the behavior (and practice impulse control) in more challenging situations. You, like me, may come to find this is your most-used cue!

## More Good Reasons to "Wait"

Circumstances arise every day where "Wait" comes in very handy:

**WAIT AT THE DOOR:** It's important for your dog to learn that an open door doesn't mean she gets to go running out, but rather, she needs to wait for an invitation. Start with her sitting at the door, ask her to wait, and reach a few inches toward the door knob. If she stays sitting, click, and treat. If not, "Oops" and start over, with even less of a reach toward the door. As she is successful, gradually reach closer and closer to the doorknob, eventually jiggling it, then opening the door a crack, then a bigger crack, until you can step outside without her following you.

**WAIT IN THE CAR:** Practice "Wait!" in the car so she also understands that an open car door is not an invitation to jump out. This can be especially useful if your car ever breaks down on a busy highway. (Crates and seat belts are the best approach to keeping your dog safe in your car.)

**WAIT ON A HIKE:** You can also use "wait" to ask your dog to pause if she's wandering too far ahead of you when you're on an off-leash outing. I use this one frequently on our around-the-farm hikes. Hearing the "Wait" cue, my dogs pause for several seconds, then continue their hiking fun. If I need a longer pause I just cue it again.

**WAIT TO GREET:** Your dog is very friendly and eager to dash up to greet that dog on the path ahead (or perhaps a senior citizen in the park) who looks less-than-enthused about a nose-to-nose encounter. A well-trained "Wait" will pause your dog long enough to let you grasp her collar, attach your leash, and orchestrate appropriate greetings.

**WAIT FOR THE LEASH:** Because a leash is such reliable predictors of walks, lots of dogs get quite excited when their human picks it up. Ask your dog to sit and wait for the leash. If she jumps up when you pick it up say "Oops," set the leash down, and ask her to sit and wait again. Repeat until she will remain seated and "wait" until her leash is attached.

**WAIT, IT'S A GAME!:** Everything's more fun if we make it a game, right? With your dog on leash, run with her a few steps, then say "Wait!" and stop moving. When she stops, pause several seconds, then say "Let's go!" and take off running again. Encourage her to get excited! Then say "Wait!" and stop again. Vary the amount of time you pause so she never knows when the "Let's go!" is coming. When she's really good at stopping at your "Wait!" try it off leash running next to her (in a fenced area at first, if needed), and eventually with her farther and farther away from you.



## TEACHING STAY

Stay is a more challenging behavior, since the criteria are less flexible. It takes more focus and concentration for both you and your dog. You have a greater responsibility; once you tell your dog to stay, you have to remember to subsequently release her from the stay.

Stay has three elements, often referred to as the three Ds: duration, distraction, and distance. In order, these refer to the *length of time* your dog stays, the *reliability* of your dog's stay in the presence of distractions, and the *distance you can move away* from your dog while she stays put.

It is critical to work on duration and distraction before you work on distance. If your dog won't do a reliable stay with distractions when you are standing in front of her, it's wholly unrealistic to expect her to do it when you are across the room.

The most common mistake in teaching stay is advancing too quickly. If you ask your dog for too much and she makes a mistake, you may be sorely tempted to correct her for "breaking" the stay. *Don't*. Remember that you want her to succeed so you can reward her for doing the right thing.

**1** Ask your dog to sit, with your treats out of sight. Calmly praise when she sits and after one second, click and feed the treat (delivering it right to her mouth so she doesn't jump up), then use a release word and encourage her to get up. (See "Choosing a Release Cue," next page.) You can praise her for getting up, but don't click the release, since it's the "stay" behavior that you want to reinforce and reward.

**2** Gradually increase the length of time you expect her to stay. When



she is staying for several seconds at a time, add the verbal “stay” cue in a pleasant tone of voice after you cue the sit. Remember, you aren’t trying to intimidate your dog into staying, you are using the word as information, a cue for a behavior.

**3** As your stays get longer, you can click and treat during the stay, then give another verbal “stay” cue to remind your dog not to move, since she may think the click ends the stay. Reward with treats several times during the stay, then release her before she decides to get up on her own. You want her to succeed. If your dog does get up before you release her, just say, “Oops, sit!” and make your next stay shorter, to help her get it right.

**4** When your dog will stay for 10-20 seconds you’re ready to add small distractions. Ask her to “Stay” and take one small step to the side, then step in front of her again. Click, reward, and release. Do another “stay” and take a hop on one foot. Click, reward, and release.

Gradually build distractions until she will stay as you hop up and down without stopping, do jumping jacks, clap your hands, sit or lie down on the ground in front of her, spin in circles, bounce a ball, have someone go by on a skateboard – or whatever other creative distractions you can invent. *Gradually* is the key. If you go directly from one hop to the skateboard you’re probably going to lose her.

Gradually is also subjective, depending on your dog. Bailey the Bloodhound may progress to a 20-second stay in the first session, while Chili Pepper the Chihuahua may excel at three seconds. Some dogs will achieve a solid “stay” at a distance with distractions within a few days; others will take longer.

**5** When your dog can do 20- to 30-second stays with distractions you’re ready to work on distance. Lower your expectations for the other two elements: shorten the time and remove the distractions. Ask your dog

## Choosing a Release Cue

The release cue is a word that means “Get up now, the stay is over.” Lots of people use the word “okay,” which is fine, but if you choose to use this as your dog’s release cue, be aware that it’s a word used frequently in conversation, making inadvertent and/or ill-timed releases a possible hazard.

I use “okay” as my release word, but in a very specific, high-pitched, happy tone of voice, to distinguish from the “okay” I use in casual conversation.

Other commonly used cues are “Free!” “Free dog!” “Release!” “Break time!” “At ease!” and “Go free.” You can use any word you want, as long as you keep it specific to mean, “The stay is over and you must get up now.” Be sure to encourage your dog to get up any time you use it.



to stay and take one step away. Click, return, reward, and release. Gradually increase distance, slowly, so your dog will succeed. Always return to your dog to reward and release her. You want the stay to be rock-solid.

If you start calling your dog to you from the stay, she may start breaking the stay in anticipation of the joy of running to you – and the reward. If she thinks the stay is never over until you return to her, the behavior will become solid as granite. Once her stay is very solid, you may occasionally call her from a stay. Even then, you will want to return and release at least 10 times for every one time you call her to you.

**6** When your dog will stay at a distance, combine all of the elements. Again, lower the bar, adding distractions when you are one step, then three steps, then five steps away, always returning to reward and release. You can even leave the room while she is on a stay, briefly at first. Take one step out, step back in, return, reward, release. Gradually increase the length of time you stay out of sight. You can set up a mirror in the doorway to keep an eye on your dog, always remembering to return before she moves out of her stay position.

Remember, you want her to suc-

ceed. If she makes several mistakes in a row you are asking too much, and she is learning that breaking the stay makes you return to the room. Any time she starts making mistakes, return to an easier version of the exercise and get several successes in a row before you raise the bar again.

## DOWN-STAY

The down-stay is exactly the same, except you start by cueing the down position.

Whether your goal is to get your dog to park herself on a down-stay while you walk the final 20 feet to the end of the drive to fetch your newspaper, or you have visions of the two of you earning a perfect 200 score together in the rally ring, you can get there with a positive stay – no harsh words, no collar corrections, and no damage to the relationship of trust and respect that you and your dog both value so highly. 🐾

*Author Pat Miller, CBCC-KA, CPDT-KA, is WDJ’s Training Editor. She and her husband Paul live in Fairplay, Maryland, site of her Peaceable Paws training center. Miller is also the author of many books on positive training. Her newest is Beware of the Dog: Positive Solutions for Aggressive Behavior in Dogs. See “Resources,” page 24.*



# Better Safe Than Sorry

*How to avoid the most common reasons for visits to an emergency veterinary hospital.*

Every year, thousands of dogs are treated in emergency veterinary hospitals across the country. I know; I spent nearly a decade as an emergency-room veterinarian. I always found it interesting that many of the most common injuries and illnesses I saw in emergency practice were also some of the easiest to prevent! Many of these problems can be avoided with a little common sense and preventative medicine.

Here, in no particular order, are a dozen simple tips to help you avoid a visit to the pet emergency room.

■ **Keep your dog's toenails trimmed.** As an emergency vet, I saw at least one torn toenail per shift. Bleeding toenails are not life-threatening, but they are extremely painful for the dog and can become infected.

Keep your dog's nails short so that the tips do not snag. In some extreme cases, small breed dogs with long thick hair that obscures their feet will have toenails that have grown into the footpads. This is a painful condition and can lead to infection. Check your pet's nails frequently! When in doubt as to whether they are too long, consult with your vet or groomer. (And read "When Nails Are Not Tough," page 16.)

■ **Do not give your dog donut-shaped marrow bones.** Marrow bones can easily slip over the lower jaw of a dog and become lodged behind the canine teeth. While they go on with ease, it usually requires a trip to the emergency veterinarian to have them removed (often under sedation). Don't believe me? Try a Google image search for "marrow bone dog jaw" – and don't be surprised by how many photos you will find.

■ **Keep fish hooks stored away from curious noses.** The smell of fish on a hook can

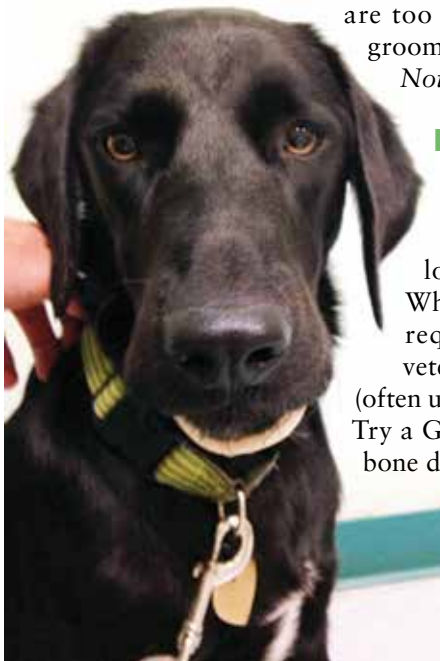
often be too enticing for a dog. Even worse, the sight of a live, wriggling fish on the end of a fishing pole can drive a dog to unpredictable behavior. It is easy for a dog to grab or paw at a hook, but not so easy to dislodge it. Many hooks are trebled – possessing three barbs that must be cut and then pushed backward through the wound. This generally requires heavy sedation to accomplish, especially when stuck in a sensitive area such as the nose, tongue, mouth, or foot pad.

■ **When driving, secure your dog with a well-fitted harness and dog seatbelt, or in a carrier that is firmly fastened in the car.** Do not let dogs stand in truck beds unsecured. Do not let them hang out of an open window. It is very common for a sudden turn to cause a dog to lose its balance and fall from the window or truck bed. In the event of an accident, a tethered or crated dog has less chance of injury, as well as causing injury to others in the car.

■ **Make sure that your yard is secure and that your dog has an identification microchip.** Hit-by-car injuries can be severe and deadly, as can fights with other dogs and wildlife. Always supervise your dog when he's loose in the yard; dogs can be very adept at climbing over or digging under fences and underground fences (which are not recommended by WDJ; see "Not Shocking," December 2017) don't work for every dog. They also do not prevent other animals – domestic or wild – from wandering into your yard. It's fast and easy to microchip your dog, and the chip will identify him if he gets loose for a quicker return to your home.

■ **Recognize the common diseases that occur in your dog's breed, so you can take appropriate action, fast.** For example: Brachycephalic breeds such as Bulldogs and Boxers often have upper-airway problems. They oxygenate poorly due to a combination of very short noses, small nostrils, and excessive tissue in the oropharynx (area of throat in the back of the mouth). This can lead to heat stroke.

*This dog has a donut-shaped marrow bone stuck around his lower jaw. He's in a veterinary emergency room, awaiting treatment. A veterinarian will soon sedate him and saw the bone off.*





Heat stroke can happen to *any* dog if left in the wrong circumstances, but brachycephalic dogs are particularly prone to this. They can also overheat from simple excitement.

Need more examples? Geriatric Labradors are known to frequently suffer laryngeal paralysis, and as they age, this can become severe, leading to swollen upper airways and difficulty breathing. They produce a characteristic stridorous breathing – a high-pitched, wheezing sound.

Great Danes and other large-breed dogs are prone to a condition called “bloat” or gastric-dilatation and volvulus, the symptoms of which are discomfort, abdominal distention, salivating, and non-productive retching. This is a fatal condition if not treated with rapid recognition at home and emergency surgery.

Becoming familiar with the symptoms of these conditions can help you stop a crisis before it occurs. When in doubt, ask your vet for any breed-specific symptoms and preventative steps you should be aware of, such as prophylactic gastropexy for your giant-breed dog (see “A Different Tack,” WDJ June 2016).

■ **Keep medications secure.** Common household pain relievers like naproxen and ibuprofen can cause GI ulcers and kidney failure if ingested by your dog. Further, popular over-the-counter supplements such as 5-HTP, used in the treatment of a variety of disorders, can have severe consequences for pets. Ingestion of 5-HTP can lead to seizures, heat stroke, coma, and death.

■ **If you have a puppy (or any dog who chews on random items) be sure to pick up small toys, socks, and underwear.** Many dogs love to chew and tear objects. Sometimes, they accidentally swallow them. Toys and clothing can cause obstruction of the GI tract requiring surgery to remove.

■ **Don't feed your dog fatty meats, fat cut from steaks, or fat from a roast poured from a broiler pan.** Pork, beef, and other fatty treats can cause

pancreatitis, as well as significant GI upset including vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal pain, and loss of appetite. Cooked bones and inadequately chewed raw bones can cause obstruction of the GI tract, and in some cases, perforation of the GI tract. The signs of this may not manifest immediately, lulling you into a false sense of security about feeding these table foods.

■ **Keep tasty treats well out of reach.** No, make that, keep *anything* edible out of reach! It's tempting to believe that your dog can't get on the counter, but if you spend five minutes on YouTube, you will rapidly realize how nimble our canine friends can be!

Of particular concern are rising bread dough, chocolate, grapes, raisins, and candy or gum that contains xylitol, a sugar substitute. These are all potentially lethal to your dog.

In addition to keeping your counters cleared of food, take care to keep meat skewers or knives that were used to prepare food out of reach. Dogs have been known to lick skewers and knives, and have even swallowed them. Yes, dogs will swallow knives! (The x-ray below is from a real dog who swallowed a serrated bread knife! And lived, thanks to surgery to remove it.)



■ **Closely supervise and manage any interaction between dogs who are unfamiliar with each other.** When introducing a new dog into the house (particularly small puppies), always closely monitor. Do not leave puppies unsupervised with adult dogs, as this can lead to unintentional injury. Even the best dog has a limit, and sometimes, older dogs will nip or snap. This can lead to head and mouth trauma.

■ **Be careful with lawn and car products.** It's very common for dogs who are outdoors frequently to come into contact with chemicals such as antifreeze, snail bait, and rat poison. Choose a pet-safe antifreeze (the main ingredient is propylene glycol). Avoid using slug and snail baits, as your dog's exposure to these can cause tremors, seizures, and death.

If you choose to use a rat poison in your yard or house, make sure it is contained within dog-proof traps, and always make sure to keep the box (or ask the pest-control company for information on the type used) so that in the event of accidental ingestion, you know exactly what your pet consumed.

Compost piles present another common threat to dogs, as they can grow mycotoxins, a type of mold that when eaten leads to severe tremoring, high body temperature, and seizures. All compost piles should be fenced off from dogs.

## PREVENTION IS THE BEST MEDICINE

Most dog owners can attest that many canine emergencies happen at the most inopportune times – but it's a good idea to cultivate a good relationship with your local general practice veterinarian in case of a daytime emergency. Keep the national pet poison control number (888-426-4435) posted prominently in your house and saved in your cell-phone contacts, too.

If you follow these steps with your dog, you will significantly decrease the chances of needing to visit the veterinary ER. With careful attention to health and your dog's environment, you can keep your canine companion healthy and well for years to come. 🐾

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*Catherine Ashe graduated the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine in 2008. After a small-animal intensive emergency internship, she has practiced ER medicine for nine years. She is now working as a relief veterinarian in Asheville, North Carolina, and loves the GP side of medicine. In her spare time, she spends time with her family, reads voraciously, and enjoys the mountain lifestyle.*



# Puppy Social Studies

*A guide dog school's guide to smart socialization.*



Photo by Stephanie Colman

*Guide Dogs of America breeds, raises, trains and places highly skilled guide dogs with blind and visually impaired partners, at no charge to the recipient. Its program is a model for super-socializing puppies who become confident, go-anywhere dogs.*

Who doesn't love a puppy? What's not to love about the sweet smell of puppy breath, the adorable antics, and the world of opportunity that presents itself when dealing with a young, moldable mind. Raising a puppy is a big responsibility – even more so when you hope the puppy in question will go on to become a service dog.

Most service-dog organizations rely heavily on volunteers to welcome the organization's puppies into their homes – and hearts – for more than a year, during which time the volunteers are responsible for teaching basic obedience, impeccable house manners, and how to be con-

fidant and calm in a variety of public settings. Socialization is a huge part of raising any dog, but it's especially important when the dog is destined for a career spent largely away from home. When it comes to socializing a puppy, how you do it matters – a lot!

New puppy raisers are often surprised to learn they can't simply put a puppy-in-training vest on the puppy and start taking him everywhere. To be most effective, socialization should be well-planned from birth, it should be ongoing, and care should be taken to ensure that socialization opportunities create good experiences, not just experiences.



It's easy to accidentally overwhelm a puppy, or create a situation where the lesson learned is more about ignoring the handler than about learning to feel confident in the world. Neither scenario is desirable for any puppy, but as a service-dog puppy raiser, when one only has 15 to 18 months to train the dog (depending on the organization), making smart choices about when and how to socialize becomes especially important so you don't lose time helping the puppy recover from a bad experience.

Socialization isn't just for service-dog puppies. The following six tips, based on Guide Dogs of America's (GDA) puppy raising program, can help pet owners maximize opportunities for socialization throughout their dog's puppyhood and adolescence:

**1 Start early!** It's been demonstrated that early neurological stimulation benefits puppies in a variety of ways, from improved cardiovascular performance to stronger adrenal glands, better stress tolerance and improved resistance to disease. Working in partnership with Suzanne Clothier, and following her Enriched Puppy Protocol™, GDA implemented a neonatal socialization program utilizing trained staff and volunteer "puppy huggers." (Despite the name, they are discouraged from actually hugging the puppies; hugging is a primate thing, not a canine thing!)

These dedicated volunteers, with arguably the best volunteer gig ever, regularly handle the puppies, starting at just days old. The volunteers expose the puppies to a variety of experiences designed to promote balanced brain development.

When the pups are four weeks old, they are introduced to a sanitized play yard with access to a variety of small-

scale equipment to explore at their own pace, ranging from low platforms and unstable surfaces to plastic and metal grates. They hear a variety of novel sounds, such as jingling bells, plastic bottles in a bag, and musical baby toys. The puppies are carefully cradled and restrained, and they begin learning to sit and lie down following a food lure. By five weeks old, they're enjoying wagon and car rides while safely crated with a littermate, and they learn to wear a puppy-in-training jacket.

New shifts of volunteers visit daily, and much of their activity is safely on display and in view of members of the public who stop by the nursery yard as part of organized campus tours. They might still be wobbling around on somewhat uncoordinated, chubby little puppy legs, but their absorbent brains are basking in the enrichment! Each week builds on the last, right up until the puppies' transition into loving foster homes at eight weeks old.

"The early work we do with the puppies is all about strengthening the neurotransmitters in their brains, so they can better manage life in the real world," said Carol Ann Heinis, GDA's canine development lead. The takeaway? If you're looking for a puppy, find a breeder, shelter, or rescue group that invests ample time and energy in providing early learning opportunities for the puppies. Early socialization

is largely about teaching a puppy the world is a safe and wonderful place; the benefits will be lifelong!

**2 Find a well-run puppy kindergarten class.** An increasing number of pet owners and behavior-savvy veterinarians recognize the value of well-run puppy kindergarten classes designed for puppies as young as eight weeks old.

In its position statement on puppy socialization, the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB) says, "Enrolling in puppy classes prior to three months of age can be an excellent means of improving training, strengthening the human-animal bond, and socializing puppies in an environment where the risk of illness can be minimized." AVSAB recommends that puppies have at least one set of vaccines at least seven days prior to the first class, and a first deworming, noting that while puppies' immune systems are still developing, "the combination of maternal immunity, primary vaccination, and appropriate care makes the risk of infection relatively small compared to the chance of death from a behavior problem."

All things being equal in terms of risk management when it comes to disease, the overall class structure is hugely important. At Guide Dogs of America, puppy raisers attend a GDA-



Photo by Stephanie Colman

*A seven-week-old puppy in the GDA program confidently explores a swinging bridge and assorted objects while getting used to wearing a puppy-in-training vest. Volunteers supervise the puppies' environmental exploration, allowing them to choose to interact with new objects at their own pace.*

## Guide Dogs of America

Guide Dogs of America empowers people who are blind and visually impaired throughout the United States and Canada to live with increased independence, confidence, and mobility by providing them with expertly matched guide dog partners, free of charge.

Volunteer puppy raisers are the cornerstone of GDA's training program. Puppies are welcomed into loving foster homes at eight weeks old, where they learn basic obedience, house manners, and how to be calm and confident in a wide variety of public settings thanks to a thoughtful and ongoing socialization protocol.

GDA's puppy-raiser program is currently limited to Southern California. To learn more about becoming a puppy raiser with GDA, or to apply for a guide dog, visit [guidedogsofamerica.org](http://guidedogsofamerica.org).

led puppy kindergarten class starting at 10 weeks old, and designed in partnership with Clothier. The school keeps classes small to limit the opportunity for a puppy to become overwhelmed or overstimulated by the environment. Small classes also limit dog distractions, making it easier for the puppy to learn to engage with the handler.

Some puppy kindergarten classes focus on dog-to-dog socialization through extensive off-leash playtime and dog-to-people socialization. In contrast, GDA's puppy kindergarten class focuses on creating a solid foundation of basic skills upon which the puppy will build throughout his time with the puppy raiser, and later as a guide dog-in-training. Dog-to-dog and dog-to-people interaction and environmental exploration are part of the class, but puppies are encouraged to check in with handlers often, and handlers are taught to support the puppies emotionally as they encounter new things.

“For a puppy, and especially a service-dog puppy, one of the most important lessons is to find value in working in partnership with the handler,” said Heinis. “For that

reason, we jump into training skills, at an age-appropriate level, right away. Training is a great relationship-builder, and you want a solid relationship when socializing a puppy – both to help him feel safe as you explore the world together and to make sure the puppy still finds you relevant as you present him with all sorts of new and interesting pictures.”

When it comes to defining what makes a good puppy kindergarten class, consider where the puppies are learning to focus the bulk of their attention. The class might not teach what you hope it to teach if the class is structured such that the puppies' attention is largely focused on the environment or group play with other puppies, without building a desire to check in and engage with the handler.

“If you're not teaching the puppy to work with you as a team when you socialize the puppy, then the puppy is just doing what comes naturally and what instincts tell him to do, and he isn't referring back to the bond he has with the person,” said Heinis.

“We know socialization is key, but people often discount the critical role of building a strong connection with the puppy. Without that connection, it's easy to overstimulate the puppy and set him up to practice repeatedly disengaging from the handler in favor of the environment. That's not what we want in a service dog, and it's not helpful in pet dogs either.”

**3 Maximize home-based socialization or other “safe” options.** In addition to a well-run puppy class, there are numerous opportunities for socialization right in your own home. People often think socialization has to involve leaving the house, but any new experience counts as socialization. You can use your imagination – and network of dog-loving friends and acquaintances – to create fun, safe social experiences for your puppy at home.

GDA advises puppy raisers to limit the pups' exposure to the outside world for the first two weeks after they transition into puppy raiser homes at eight weeks old. But that doesn't mean the pups lack socialization during that critical time in a dog's early development.

*GDA puppies meet and play with a variety of trained volunteers throughout their time in the puppy nursery. Volunteers are taught how to safely and appropriately interact with the puppies in order to support overall early socialization goals.*



Photo by Stephanie Colman



“Even things as simple as having the puppy experience different surfaces is meaningful socialization,” says Heinis. “You can have the puppy walk on hardwood, walk on tile, walk on a rubber mat, walk on a shiny surface, stand in the bathtub. Use a food lure and work on position changes on each of the surfaces.”

Heinis says presenting puppies with these different pictures, in a safe environment, is a great way to add to their bank of life experiences while waiting to expand their world via scheduled outings away from home. Car rides, visits with friends and family, and short outings where you carry the puppy and use a blanket if putting him on the ground to rest are also great opportunities for early socialization in cases where you wish to be more conservative when considering possibility of disease exposure.

**4 Develop a relationship.** We can't stress this enough. Bonding with the puppy and building a meaningful relationship is critical to the success of the team.

Of course we can use toys and treats to help support a relationship, but it's important to engage in meaningful interactions where our attention is a key part of the reinforcement package. Don't be a Pez dispenser! When you reward with food, offer genuine praise. When you pet your puppy, pay attention to his body language so you learn which type of contact he likes best. Develop silly, interactive games you both enjoy – and think beyond the typical games like tug and fetch, which can *sometimes* become more about the toy than the interaction with you.

When you're out with the puppy, pay attention to the puppy! Any good relationship is about mutual respect for and enjoyment of each other. A dog-owner relationship need not be about the human's ability to “control” the dog in a dominate-subordinate schema. Think of the goal as working to meet the dictionary definition of relationship: “the state of being connected.”

The relationship is paramount to

successful socialization. If the dog isn't invested in his relationship with the handler, the handler can become a source of frustration for the puppy.

“If the puppy doesn't learn to value interaction with the handler via a solid relationship, attempts to socialize the puppy out in the world can quickly cause the puppy to view the handler as a road block in the way of what he wants,” Heinis said. The most successful socialization happens when the dog-handler relationship is solid.

**5 Keep it up.** While a puppy's early socialization period lasts from seven to 16 weeks, thoughtful ongoing socialization, as a core part of a puppy's – and adolescent dog's – training is important for creating a well-balanced, well-trained animal. GDA puppies in training engage in ongoing socialization throughout their time with puppy raisers, which lasts until the dog is 16 to 18 months old.

**6 Don't accidentally teach undesirable behaviors in the name of socialization.**

Socialization should not be a free-for-all where the puppy is allowed to run up and greet as many people as possible! Encouraging the puppy to partake in every possible human interaction (assuming he's comfortable with the idea to begin with) can backfire as the puppy starts to expect attention from everyone.

“We teach our puppy raisers to ask the puppy for an age-appropriate amount of self-control before they greet a person or explore a new environment,” said Heinis. The goal is for the dog to acknowledge the person holding the leash in order to earn permission to interact with the person. GDA uses the cue, “Go say hi!” as a way to use socialization with humans as a reward for acknowledging the handler.

When leading their human partners, working guide dogs must exhibit the critical skill of ignoring other people in their environment. To help develop that skill, GDA puppy raisers are taught to strike a balance between opportunities

### What you can do

- *Focus on the relationship! When the relationship is solid, socialization is easier because the puppy trusts you to keep him safe. Always advocate for your puppy.*
- *Start 'em young! The primary socialization window is open from seven to 16 weeks of age. This is the period of time during which a young puppy is most adaptable to new experiences.*
- *Keep it up! Even once the primary socialization window has closed, it's still important to provide carefully planned opportunities for socialization in order to arm the puppy with an expansive mental Rolodex of positive life experience he can call upon when encountering new things.*

to let the puppies socialize with strangers and building the puppies' ability to resist the distraction of people in the environment. They're also taught to not allow the puppies to socialize with other dogs while on leash – again, to help prevent the puppies from becoming overly distracted by the perceived opportunity to interact with other dogs. This is great advice for pet owners, too.

GDA's puppies-in-training are easily recognizable throughout Southern California thanks to their bright yellow training jackets and the ability to comfortably adapt to most any situation. While careful breeding plays a role in the puppies' success, early and ongoing socialization and training is critical.

Whether you're training a family dog, a performance dog or a future guide dog, smart socialization is critical to the overall success of the team. 🐾

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*Stephanie Colman is a writer and dog trainer in Southern California. She recently joined Guide Dogs of America in the puppy department where she helps recruit and manage volunteer puppy raisers.*



# When Nails Are Not Tough

*Problems with her toenails can be, at a minimum, very painful for your dog. But they can also signal a deeper health issue.*



to the digit. The skin folds over the nail and attaches at its base forming a structure called the nail fold. Knowing normal anatomy of your pet's nail will allow for successful nail trims and identification of problems that may arise.

## **MOST COMMON NAIL INJURIES**

Trauma is most common nail problem that we see in clinical practice, often involving fracture or complete avulsion (ripping out) of the nail from the nail bed. If trauma affects the vascular portion of the nail, pain and hemorrhage will be present.

The most frequently fractured nail is the dewclaw. The dewclaw resides on the medial (toward the middle) aspect of the limb, about halfway to the wrist, or carpus. The dewclaw is present on the forelimbs of dogs and occasionally on the hindlimbs as

*This little dog suffered a complete nail avulsion – the nail was ripped from the nailbed, causing bleeding and severe pain. The injury likely was caused by her over-long, neglected nails.*

**N**ails: All dogs have them. In fact some dog breeds, like the Great Pyrenees, have 22 of them. Yet nails are commonly ignored by many dog owners. There are numerous common problems with this area in dogs, ranging from minor broken nails to more devastating diseases like cancer. Proper maintenance with nail trims and periodic inspection of the nail and nail fold will ensure early detection of any problems with your canine friend.

A dog's nail consists of a keratinized hard outer shell, which we think of as the claw. However, inside this tough shell lies the important structure called the quick, or living part of the nail. A blood vessel, nerve, and bone are present within the claw in the area closest

well. Some breed standards call for the surgical removal of the dewclaws at several days of age to prevent this very problem.

Since the dewclaws of our canine friends typically do not make contact with the ground when exercising, they do not wear naturally like the other nails. The claws become sharp and hook-like and are easily snagged. Maintenance nail-trimming is imperative for dogs who have dewclaws to prevent them from growing too long and predisposing them to injury.

In the case that your dog does injure a nail, it is best to see your veterinarian for assessment and treatment to prevent a secondary infection. Possible treatments involve controlling hemorrhage, removing the fractured portion



of the nail, and aseptically cleaning the traumatized tissue. Antibiotics and bandages are often warranted.

Owners are often timid about trimming their pet's nails at home. However, with time, treats, and patience you can teach your pet to tolerate pedicures. In case of an accidental clipping of the quick (vascular part of the nail), have styptic powder on hand to apply to the bleeding vessel. For a more natural approach, you can use the Chinese herb Yunnan Baiyao applied topically.

## NAIL FOLDS

Primary diseases of the nail fold are those that occur spontaneously without another underlying condition. Secondary diseases arise as a result of another disease process – allergies, for example. There are numerous diseases, many of them that look very similar, that affect this particular area. We'll discuss the most common diseases of the nail bed, including infection, autoimmune disease, and cancer.

■ **Inflammation or infection of the soft tissues surrounding the nail is called paronychia (pronounced pair-un-NICK-ee-uh).** Since the nails are, in fact, a direct continuation of the skin, it should be no surprise that diseases affecting the skin also affect the nails. Infections in this area are typically secondary to another underlying disease, but can also be seen in immunocompromised patients.

Paronychia in dogs is most commonly caused by hypersensitivity reactions, more commonly known as allergies. Food allergies (food-allergy dermatitis) and environmental allergies (atopic dermatitis) predispose the skin to secondary bacterial and fungal (yeast) infections.

However, other endocrine or hormonal problems like hypothyroidism, Cushing's disease, diabetes mellitus, Addison's disease, and hepatocutaneous syndrome can also make your pet prone to secondary infections. A parasitic disease like demodicosis (mange) is more common in young or immunocompromised pets

and can appear similar to other causes of paronychia.

Infections can be difficult to monitor as the symptoms can be vague and insidious in onset. Signs that your pet may have a nail or nailbed infection could include redness, swelling, or discharge from the skin surrounding the nail, or discoloration or deformation of the claw itself. Your dog may also lick her paw or exhibit signs of pain or lameness on the affected paw or paws. If you are concerned about paronychia, a trip to the vet is warranted. Early detection and treatment will speed recovery.

Your veterinarian will perform a full physical exam to determine the underlying cause of infection. These disease processes can be difficult to differentiate from one another without diagnostic tests.

Your veterinarian will likely recommend skin scrapings for cytologic analysis to help differentiate between the possible causes of the lesions. Cytology involves looking at the cells under a microscope to identifying microorganism like bacteria and yeast as well as parasites. It is also possible

that she may identify other abnormal cells that are suggestive of more severe systemic disease processes, such as autoimmune disease or cancer.

If the skin or nail problems do not resolve with first-line therapeutics, your veterinarian may recommend more advanced diagnostics like bacterial or fungal cultures, skin biopsy, or even x-rays.

If an infection is diagnosed, treatment will be targeted at the claw or nail bed as well as any systemic disorder that may be the primary cause of this secondary infection. Treatment of the secondary infection may involve topical antibiotics or antifungal spray, cream, or shampoo.

In severe or chronic cases, long courses of oral antimicrobials may be warranted. Foot soaks are often beneficial. For parasitic infections, anti-parasiticides will be indicated.

Treatment of nail fold disease can be frustrating for both the veterinarian and the pet owner due to the chronic and recurrent nature of disease. This is especially true if the underlying disorder can't be identified or is difficult to control.

## Home remedies for paronychia

- High quality diet. Optimal nutrition will support a healthy immune system.
- Discuss a proper food trial with your veterinarian if food allergies are suspected.
- Povidone iodine foot soaks. Dilute iodine with water to the color of iced tea and soak for 5-10 minutes daily. Note that iodine may stain light-colored coats.
- Epsom salt foot soaks. Dissolve ½ cup of salt per gallon of warm water. Soak paws for 5-10 minutes daily. Note: Do not use on pets with open sores.
- Omega 3 fatty acid supplements.
- Species-specific probiotics.
- Chineses herbs prescribed by your integrative veterinarian.
- Acupuncture.

An alternative or complementary approach may include dilute povidone iodine solutions, Epsom salt soaks, nutraceuticals including anti-inflammatory dose of omega 3 fatty acids, and probiotics. Your holistic veterinarian may discuss nutrition and possible herbal remedies as adjunctive treatments to a more conventional approach.

Elizabethan collars, socks, or booties are often necessary in the early stages of treatment to prevent patient from self-trauma.



*Check your dog's nails and toes frequently, especially if she has long hair covering her feet. Make sure your veterinarian checks anything that looks out of the ordinary during your dog's wellness exam.*

Like most cancers, cancer of the digit typically is found in the geriatric population. Squamous cell carcinoma and malignant melanoma are the most common cancers of the digit with certain breeds being predisposed. Darkly pigmented, large- to giant-breed dogs including Giant Schnauzers, Rottweilers, Standard Poodles, and Labradors are among the more commonly affected dog breeds. Definitive

diagnosis can be difficult.

If a tumor is suspected, your veterinarian will likely recommend radiographs and possibly a biopsy of the tissue. Occasionally, even after performing the first-line diagnostics, it can be challenging to differentiate between severe infection and cancer.

Amputation of the digit may be recommended both for diagnostic and treatment purposes.

Amputation of a cancerous digit can be curative. However, if the cancer is aggressive or has spread elsewhere, further treatment options are available including chemotherapy, radiation, and immunotherapy. Your integrative practitioners can help assist you with the addition of holistic modalities to support your beloved pet.

### **DON'T IGNORE THE TOES!**

Although often overlooked, nails are important structure for dogs. With proper care and periodic home evaluation, owners can note signs of disease early. Early detection of disease will allow the owner to address the problem efficiently with the help of his or her veterinarian. 🐾

*Lauren Brower Wacholder is an integrative veterinarian at Canyon Animal Hospital in Laguna Beach, California. She practices both conventional and integrative medicine including acupuncture, herbal medicine and cold laser therapy. See "Resources," page 24, for contact information.*

■ **Autoimmune causes.** Infections, however, are not the only cause for inflammation of the nail bed. Other more serious problems can cause similar clinical findings. Autoimmune diseases occur when the body mistakenly recognizes its own body as a foreign invader and attacks healthy cells.

Several autoimmune diseases may affect a dog's nail beds. Lupus or pemphigus foliaceus are among the more prevalent autoimmune diseases. Symptoms of these diseases include crusting, ulceration, and swelling of the tissue around the claw.

Typically, with autoimmune disease, more than one digit is affected. Diagnosis of autoimmune disease is made with a biopsy of the tissue. Treatment involves immunosuppressive medication and antimicrobials to control the secondary infections associated with the disease.

■ **Cancer is also a concern when swelling and inflammation is present around the digit.** When cancer affects the toe, the area around the nail base is often swollen, red, and painful to touch. Cancer usually affects a single digit. Occasionally, a patient will present after the loss of a nail with no known trauma.

## Detect and prevent problems through regular nail trimming



*A fit, healthy dog – with nails that are way too long!*

Proper nail trimming can prevent most, but not all, injuries to the nails. Start counter-conditioning exercises at a young age to make pedicures for your pet much easier and more manageable.

See "A Counter-Conditioning Protocol for Your Dog's Nails," WDJ August 2012, for information on counter-conditioning and proper nail-trimming techniques.





# Smelly Dog?!

*Five things to do if your dog smells bad.*

Most of us love snuggling with our dogs and burying our noses in our dogs' soft, shiny coats. But if you find yourself avoiding that last activity due to your dog's persistent unpleasant odor, read on!

**1 Check for debris.** Many dogs love to roll in stinky things. Look over your dog's body to see if there is a particular problem area, such as *eau d'animal mort* (aroma of dead animal) on his shoulders or cat-poop war paint on his face. He could also have stepped in something nasty, so don't forget the paws!

**2 Examine his skin and coat.** Does his hair feel greasy? Is his skin reddish, with little pustules? Does he have a lot of dandruff? A wide variety of skin conditions can cause your dog to smell funky. Ear infections due to yeast or bacteria can make your dog's ears smell bad.

**3 Give him a bath.** If the bad odor is limited to a small area, you can clean just that area. If the smell is coming from his ears, soak a cotton ball with ear cleaner and squish it inside your dog's ear, then use more cotton balls to wipe out the debris. Q-tips can be used in the folds of the outer part of your dog's ear, but don't stick them in any farther. Then, skip to #5.

If the smell is emanating from some spot on his coat, start with paper towels to get the worst of the gunk off, then break out the hose (outside or in your shower) to get the rest. Use dog shampoo or Dawn dish soap to cleanse the area and leave it smelling fresh. Rinseless shampoos are useful if you don't have the time or place for a full-body bath.

If your dog's odor seems to be more of a whole-body event, though, that full bath is definitely in order. If you can't bear having the swamp monster in your house, check with local pet-supply stores; many feature do-it-yourself dog-wash stations.

If your dog's coat just seems a little oily or

he has some dandruff, he may simply be overdue for a bath. Short-haired dogs in particular seem to get a "doggy" smell when they have gone a long time without a bath. Skin folds on dogs with loose skin require extra attention to keep those areas clean. Suds up!

If your dog's skin seems to have more going on, a medicated bath may be in order. Start with something gentle, like an oatmeal shampoo, then set up an appointment with your veterinarian. Your vet can identify any skin problems and provide you with the right medicated shampoo to resolve the issue. When using a medicated shampoo, be sure to read the directions; many require some soaking time before you rinse to be most effective.

Dry your dog thoroughly afterward, especially if he has a long or thick coat. This is doubly important for dogs with skin disorders, as excess moisture can exacerbate the problem. Blow dryers made for dogs are an excellent investment for the abovementioned dogs. Human hair dryers can be used with caution – only with the heat on the lowest setting so that you don't burn your dog's skin.

**4 Wash his bedding.** If your dog has been marinating that stink for a little while, his bedding is probably due for a wash, too. Fresh, clean bedding will help to keep your clean dog staying that way. Don't forget the blanket in your dog's crate in the car.

**5 Schedule a vet appointment.** If your dog smells funny, but his skin and coat look fine, or if he seems to get smelly quickly after a bath, there may be an underlying problem. Bad breath can indicate dental infections, kidney disease, or diabetes. Ear infections require examination under a microscope to identify and treat the cause of the problem. And skin problems may require testing to rule out allergies. 🐾



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*Some breeds are notorious for getting smelly quickly between baths. This can often be ascribed to allergies or other inherited health problems.*

*Kate Eldredge is a licensed veterinary technician from Plattsburgh, New York. She also trains, shows, and breeds Belgian Tervuren and is working on her canine-rehabilitation certification.*



# Home Alone

*How much isolation a dog can and should be subjected to are two different things. How much time does your dog spend home alone?*

*Do you know what your dog does all day when he's home alone? Many dogs sleep most of the day, but some fret in their owners' absence and look for things to do to alleviate their anxiety – and these stress-relieving things might include barking, chewing inappropriate items, or digging up the carpet!*



**W**e know it's okay to be apart from our dogs and to leave them home alone, but for how long, exactly? Is there a limit to the amount of time our dogs should spend alone?

A lot of dogs might spend most of their waking hours home alone and seem to do just fine, but is it okay? Are they *really* fine? I sometimes wonder if, instead, this is something we say to ourselves to assuage our guilt, or to avoid taking a harder look at a cultural norm that could use an update.

Let's look at how social isolation may affect dogs, and what we can do to minimize negative effects and maximize their well-being.

## **BEING ALONE ALL DAY IS DISTRESSING FOR MANY DOGS**

Let's start with the most basic of truths: Most dogs will spend time home alone on a daily

basis. How long depends on the owners' lifestyle and schedule. Someone who works an eight-hour day and has a commute, followed by errands and evening activities, could conceivably leave their dog home alone for 10 to 12 hours in a single day and on a regular basis.

Dogs have historically been left alone for long stretches without a second thought. As recently as a couple of decades ago, if a family needed to be away from home for a day or two, how the dog felt about being left behind – whether indoors or outdoors – was not an important consideration. As long as he had enough food and water, most owners felt secure in the knowledge that he was all set.

Few people today would admit to leaving their dogs home alone for 24 or 48 hours or more, but leaving the dog home for 10 to 12 hours is not at all uncommon – and questioning this practice can sometimes lead to social ridicule. If an owner decides that after being gone all day, she'd rather not confine her dog or leave him alone for an additional few hours in the evening, she might be met with less-than-understanding responses. "You're not coming out because you want to be home with your dog? That's crazy! You're letting your dog control your life!"

Here's the thing, and I won't pull any punches: 10 to 12 hours is too long for a dog to be alone in a single stretch.

I know, I know. It's a very broad statement and there is always the argument that, "We've always done it this way and our dogs have always been fine!" What this means, though, is that the dogs who appear to be fine have simply learned to cope with something that is entirely out of their control. Being left alone for long stretches of time is not a likely choice that they would make if it was up to them. They've adapted to our routines, but it's far from ideal for them.

We count on our dogs to be there for us when we're ready to interact with them, but in between those moments, we expect them to do nothing and wait. It's a tall order, but lucky for



us, most dogs adapt incredibly well to anything we ask them to.

People whose dogs have difficulty adapting are the ones who come to us trainers, asking for help with behavior problems such as barking and destructive chewing, or emotional issues such as fear, anxiety, aggression, or over-excitement, to name a few. In fact, many of us trainers and behavior consultants are kept very busy as a result of the lifestyle to which many dogs are subjected!

### DURATION OF TOLERABLE ISOLATION DEPENDS ON THE INDIVIDUAL

Trainers are often asked, “What’s the maximum amount of time a dog can be left alone in a single stretch?” There’s no simple answer to this. We know that in most cases, a dog will manage if he has no choice, but we shouldn’t push the envelope just because we can.

Let’s consider the dog’s basic needs. While not all dogs are alike, most adult dogs should be able to go outside to relieve themselves about three to five times a day (more often if they are sick or elderly) and shouldn’t be forced to “hold it” for more than four to six hours at a time, on average. We know they *can*, but they really shouldn’t have to.

Granted, this is relative. Some dogs, if given the opportunity, will go outside to eliminate every couple of hours, while others – even with the freedom to do so – might still only eliminate three times a day.

You know your dog best and are in a unique position to figure out what his individual needs are. When you’re home during the weekend, does your dog stick to his usual weekday elimination schedule, or does he tend to go out more often?

Puppies need to eliminate way more often than adults, and although we can set up their “home alone” environment to include a space where they can eliminate indoors, there is still the question of how long they should be left alone without human company.

Dogs are social animals and should have the opportunity to interact with

people at least several times a day, and with other dogs on occasion, if this is something they enjoy.

It’s even more important to not leave puppies home alone all day. Puppies younger than 14 weeks of age are in a sensitive socialization period and benefit from *lots* of social interaction. They should be in the company of their family for significantly more time than an adult dog.

Again, for emphasis: Leaving a puppy home alone all day is a waste of valuable – *crucial* – socialization time that can confer lifelong benefits.

### HOW TO PREVENT PROLONGED ISOLATION

Following are a few ways you can avoid leaving your dog alone for too long. It can be hard to make this work, but if you dig deep and get creative, you’ll find there are actually more solutions available than you might have thought:

■ **Doggie daycare.** Even if your dog is enrolled for just one day a week, that leaves you with only four more to go to cover an average work week! Of course, not every dog is a good fit for daycare, but for dogs who enjoy

## Using Crates All Day

I have a number of clients who, prior to consulting with me, had resorted to using crates in an effort to prevent their dogs from doing further damage to their homes through destructive chewing or soiling, or to curb barking at the windows. The irony is that the behavior issues were actually created by too-long stretches of isolation. Crating the dogs only made bad situations worse by increasing the dogs’ level of stress and further limiting their ability to interact with their surroundings.

A crate is no place for a dog to spend an entire day. If necessary, confinement in a small space should be temporary and for short periods of time, say, a couple of hours, tops.

There’s often a comparison drawn between crates and “dens” – that somehow a small enclosed space should instinctively make a dog feel relaxed and safe because it resembles a den. However, dogs are not “den animals” at all. And even if they were, they would be able to leave their dens whenever they please, which isn’t the case with crates.

And if your dog actually seeks out his crate to nap? Does that mean he loves it so much that he’d be okay in it for an entire day? Well, I have a favorite chair in the living room where I sometimes like to curl up and take a nap. My choosing to spend time relaxed in a space without budging for sometimes an entire hour is a far cry from being physically confined to that chair, unable to leave it to stretch, eat, drink, relieve myself, or just plain do something else. It’s time we rethink the use of crates and our dependence on them.

If the principal reason for using a crate to confine a dog during our absence is to avoid destructive or nuisance behavior, a better approach would be to address those behaviors through training, or through management that involves meeting the dog’s physical, emotional, and intellectual needs.



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other dogs' company, even just one day a week is a good step toward meeting his social and physical needs.

Keep in mind that not all doggie daycare operations are alike. Look for clean, well-designed locations with qualified staff who will manage interactions between the dogs and provide necessary rest periods. Also note that doggie daycare is not the right environment for young puppies. For more information about how to identify a quality daycare, see "Dog Daycare," WDJ November 2010.

■ **Come home for lunch** – if not every day, then as often as you can during the work week. If there are several family members in the household, consider taking turns coming home in the middle of the day to let the dog out to relieve himself and enjoy a short visit.

■ **Hire a dog-walking service.** Dog walkers have been around for ages, but in the last decade this industry has seen a surge in numbers, possibly because more people who work outside the home are recognizing the importance of addressing their dog's needs.

The types of services offered by professional dog-walkers can range from a quick home visit to a neighborhood walk, or even day training (when a trainer trains the dog in your home while you're at work). Again, a caveat is needed here; there are some horrible dog-walking services out there. For tips, see "Finding a Reliable Dog Walker," March 2014.

■ **Work from home on occasion.** Telecommuting is more popular than ever as technology makes it easy for folks to perform their professional tasks from a home office.

■ **Bring your dog to work with you.** Obviously, not everyone is in a position to do this. I frequently work with clients to treat their dog's separation anxiety, and this suggestion is almost always met with an immediate negative response, "No way, I can't do that." However, it turns out that sometimes, it is possible.

Unless you've actually looked into it by communicating directly with the person who's in the position to say yes or no, hold off before crossing the idea off your list of possible solutions. It may seem unlikely, but you may be very pleasantly surprised!

■ **Arrange for someone to go to your house and let your dog out.** Ask a neighbor, or your co-worker's teenage niece who loves dogs, or that kid down the street who does odd jobs. Not everyone is comfortable with the possible liabilities a scenario like this can present, but you may already have someone you trust to handle this type of task.

Naturally, your dog needs to be comfortable with someone walking into his home while you're out, and in the best of cases, he'll be thrilled to receive a midday visit!

## HIGHER COST, BUT WORTHWHILE BENEFITS

While some of these solutions involve an additional expense, consider it a normal part of owning a dog. When calculating a budget for expenses related to caring for a dog, owners may figure in the expenses for food, toys, maybe some grooming, and the occasional vet visit. All too often, though, money for training and other services like daycare, boarding, or dog walking tend to fall erroneously into the "luxury" category. In reality, these are essential services that contribute to meeting a dog's needs more completely.

Maybe we've been asking the wrong question all along. Rather than trying to figure out how to best stretch the amount of time we can leave our dogs alone, we should be trying to help our dogs get more out of every day. This idea might take some getting used to, especially since it suggests that our dogs aren't happy. Sometimes, though, it's good to question the status quo and ask ourselves if we can do better. 🐾

*Nancy Tucker, CPDT-KA, is a full-time trainer, behavior consultant, and seminar presenter in Quebec, Canada. See page 24 for contact information.*



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