



Your complete guide to natural dog care and training

Whole Dog Journal™



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On page 6. What’s in the bag? – We guarantee you’ll see items on our list that you’ll want for your first-aid kit.



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Time to Lose

Have you and your dog gained weight during the pandemic?

One of my sisters – the one who has three little dogs – lives just a few miles away from me. Even so, we talk on the phone more than we actually see each other, especially since the shelter-in-place orders went into effect. She’s an out-of-work chef, so over the past few months, there were quite a few occasions that she made too much amazing food for herself and her husband, and she brought leftovers to my house.



If you’re like me, you’ve gained weight during the pandemic – no going to the gym and way too much stress-eating. But am I going to turn down the amazing soups and salads and desserts that used to draw raves at the restaurants where my sister worked? I am not.

So I feel for my sister’s little dogs. They *live with* this incredibly talented, big-hearted, generous chef. How are they going to keep their figures? Well, with one exception, they are not. One of the three dogs, Lucky, has never had a big appetite and has always been on the slim side. (Lucky is a former stray I picked up off a roadside about three years ago. He went unclaimed for a month at our local shelter and then repeatedly flunked the shelter’s behavior evaluations. He also bit more than one kennel worker at the shelter. My sister had fallen in love with him based on the photos I took of him when I found him and had to work hard to convince the shelter that, biter or not, she would bring him around in no time, and she did! He truly earned his name.)

I thought of Lucky when I needed a model to demonstrate how to teach a dog to go into a crate, to accompany Training Editor Pat Miller’s crate-training article (page 10). It took me over an hour and a *lot* of treats to tempt the soaking wet, starving, tick-covered stray to get into my car on that rainy evening three years ago, and I’m sure he hasn’t been in a crate since he left the shelter. So I called my sister and asked to borrow him for a photo shoot. The resulting pictures are on page 11; Pat’s recommended techniques really work!

I drove to my sister’s house, she opened the door, and all three little dogs poured out, barking happily . . . and I was *astounded* at how fat the two little females had gotten since I had last seen them. “Pam!” I exclaimed.

“I know, I know!” she countered. “When they closed the park where we usually take our walks, it really set us back!”

I know, my sister knows, and probably you know, too: To control weight gain, one has to exercise *and* reduce caloric intake. If you need incentive, inspiration, or instruction, you’ll find it starting on page 16.

NK



What Fostering Can Do for Rescue Puppies

Thoughtfully shaping puppies requires a lot of time at home. Welcome to 2020's silver lining for homeless pups.

A pandemic has upended the globe, but here's a little bright spot: puppy fostering is experiencing a golden era. Record numbers of people are offering to host a rescue pup, and they're better positioned than ever to do a great job.

A shelter-like environment is always terribly risky for the youngest puppies. Enter the foster network, where volunteers provide in-home care for puppies who are not yet fully immunized. That can mean anything from enjoying one weekend with an 11-week-old pup to hosting a nursing mama and her litter for two months or more.

In normal times, many foster providers aren't at home enough to promise any "extras" beyond keeping a pup safe and healthy. Thanks to COVID-19, though, many families are around 24/7, and in search of a fun, interesting, rewarding activity. Making the most of the almost magical canine "socialization window" can be just the ticket. Puppies who are not yet 4 months old are so impressionable that even a few days spent in an enriching environment can pay dividends forever. How about that for a worthwhile "stay at home" project?

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH GOALS

The best foster providers do far more than meet puppies' physical needs; critically, foster families can also contribute to the puppies' behavioral development. Puppies who have gained a wide variety of experiences in a safe, supportive environment will be far better prepared for the next phase of their lives – ideally, adoption into a forever family – than pups who saw the same four walls and busy kennel workers in a shelter environment.



There are four big life lessons I aim to teach my foster pups – to date, my family has hosted 175 – and each of those educational goals is easier because of this pandemic. In terms of getting puppies off to the right start, foster providers can knock it out of the park by leaning into this stay-at-home moment.

■ LESSON #1: HUMANS ARE GOOD

A pup who is friendly and confident around people has a giant head start on a happy life. Frequent, relaxed interactions with different family members work beautifully to build the puppies' strong positive association with humans.

Let's say a family with three kids is fostering two skittish 9-week-old pups found under an abandoned porch. Normally, progress might be slow, with the family gone all day at work and school and engaged at night with sports and activities. But wait – now the parents are working from home, the kids are doing online school, and the activities are cancelled?

Captain Crunch & Cocoa Puff are enjoying the backyard with the author's daughter Grace, who was suddenly back in the nest this spring – just in time to enjoy and help socialize this litter. The more people who handle the pups, the better – a challenge with "shelter in place" policies, but easier to accomplish with each additional family member.

That's a bonanza for these puppies, whose days can now be packed with exposure. The pups can be set up in the middle of the action, perhaps in a pen in the kitchen. They can spend all day listening to five different human voices and getting used to how five different bodies move. The family can set a treat jar on the counter, so that each person can easily toss something yummy to the pups every single time they walk by.

Soon, instead of cowering in the back corner, those pups will be bounding over to interact. The transformation in behavior that could take weeks under normal circumstances might happen in two days.

Foster providers typically host nursing litters for a much longer time than the pair-of-pups scenario above. That offers even more chances to cement the "humans are good" lessons through the following actions:

- In the first weeks, foster providers can gently stroke the pups while they're nursing, linking human touch with the happy feeling of nursing from mom (assuming mom is comfortable with this, too).
- Providers can progress to careful, strategic holding of each pup, gently touching toes and ears while pups are content and comfy near their mama.
- As pups begin to see and hear, the potential for interaction deepens. Five different family members, each hanging out in the puppy pen a few times a day, offers ideal exposure to various voices, bodies, and scents.
- As the pups grow, each person can feed them, introduce them to toys, cuddle them, and carry them on "field trips" to different areas of the house. The more household members are involved, the better.

Here is Callahan's den design for a litter of 5-week-old foster puppies. It features six kinds of flooring: fleece blankets, terry towels, yoga mats, vinyl tile, newspaper, and pine pellets.



A dog-savvy cat is an incredible asset to puppy-fostering work. Ever calm, always standing his ground, Callahan's cat, Mr. Bojangles, teaches foster pups how to be civilized around cats. "You be nice and I'll be nice. If not, you might be sorry."

By the time they are 8 weeks old and ready for adoption, these lucky pups will be gazing at any approaching human with calm, happy expectation.

Of course, a key part of getting pups accustomed to humans is introducing them to strangers, and that's something that is challenging in this era of social distancing. Still, it can be done. Having dog-savvy friends drop by while you're hanging out in the yard with pups is a good start.

■ LESSON #2: NEW THINGS ARE FUN AND REWARDING

As pups approach 14 weeks old, biology tells them that anything they haven't seen before just *might* be a threat. While that might help a pup survive in the wild, it is devastating to surprised owners when their previously bouncy, friendly pup becomes fearful.

Foster providers can have a powerful impact on a puppy's future by strongly counteracting biology's lesson with this one: "New things are fun!" A big job for a puppy foster provider is to gently introduce as



many novel sights and sounds as possible.

Pre-pandemic, asking volunteers to find the time for this seemed over the top. But now, with a little too many hours at home to fill, showing puppies something new sounds like a nice distraction. Here are some sample approaches, all of which should include reaction monitoring. Foster providers should pair the novel experiences with something positive: the presence of mom, littermates, or treats. Pup still worried? Back up and try again another day, because the whole point is for the pup to feel comfortable.

- Redesign the puppy area every few days by shifting the angle of the pen wall, moving the bed, using different bowls, and switching out items that hang in sight.
- Add different toys and bedding every day, and offer a new sort of flooring every few days, such as tile, newspapers, towels, carpet, and wood.
- Carefully use TV and radio, at a comfortable volume, to help puppies get used to all sorts of sounds: kids screeching, cars honking, etc.
- Take pups on field trips to different spots inside and outside the house, so they get accustomed to new places.
- Introduce puppies (when safe) to any other resident pets.
- Hang outside with the pups, so that they experience different kinds of weather, bird sounds, neighbor dogs barking, lawnmowers, etc.
- Have family members sometimes wear different hats, coats, boots, or backpacks as they interact with the pups.

- Give each pup short sessions of being separated from her littermates. Start with just a couple or three minutes and increase as their comfort level and confidence grows.

Foster providers can't introduce puppies to every single thing they'll ever encounter, of course, but the goal is to bring them around so many things that novelty actually becomes an expected part of life.

■ LESSON #3: BEHAVIOR PAYS OFF

Pups want good things, namely food and fun. Unfortunately for them, they can't hop in the car and drive to the pet store. Instead, they need to go through us. The kindest thing a foster can do is begin to give them keys to the kingdom, by teaching them that if they perform certain types of behavior around humans, it really pays off. Here's how:

- When you approach a pen of puppies who are jumping and scrambling to get to you, wait just out of their reach. Somebody will get tired and sit down. The moment they do, pet or pick up only that one.
- Walk up to a lone pup with the food bowl. As he jumps to get it, hold the bowl over his head so he lands in a sit. The moment that he does, set the bowl down in front of him.
- You're in the puppy pile and everybody is wrestling for your attention, but one pup sits and holds your gaze. Give that one a treat and a cuddle, while you ignore the rest.

After a week of consistent moments like this – made ever so much more possible when you're home all day – you see puppies sitting in front of you whenever they're hoping for something. The light has gone on! Instead of jumping for that treat in your hand, they have figured out how to get you to give it to them.

Looking to you for direction on how to get what they want is the cornerstone of beautiful canine-human communication and an



Don't be too quick to help foster pups navigate stairs, climb onto the sofa, or drag a heavy stuffed toy into their bed; learning to problem-solve and survive these mild frustrations is beneficial!

absolute gift to give to a pup and her future adopter.

■ LESSON #4: YOU GOT THIS!

In adult dogs, frustration and stress can lead to behavior problems, so it pays to help puppies learn to deal with those emotions. How? By giving them some practice. Fosters can have a powerful impact by allowing pups to experience *small* bits of stress that are quickly relieved every time:

- Deliberately let cabinet doors slam (gently at first!), pots clang, or a book drop now and then. The idea is not to startle and scare the puppies on purpose, but to gradually acclimate them to a normal, active household. Go ahead and vacuum, but at first, just for a few minutes at a time.
- As long as there are no health concerns, don't intervene in the scramble for the best teat on mama. That competition can help a pup learn to persevere through the next frustration.
- Don't rush to pick up the pup who has trouble climbing a step. Give encouragement instead. Once the pup gets over that step he's much more likely to approach the next obstacle with calm confidence.
- Set up little blockages on the way

to exciting things like food, people, or going outside. Some pups will quickly learn to find a way around that new pen or over that pile of towels, while others will sit and cry at the spot that used to be an opening. Offer support and company, but let the stymied pup solve the problem on her own.

It used to be hard for me to watch a pup feeling anxious or frustrated, so I'd jump in to fix everything. But now I sit back and think about how this tiny moment is helping to inoculate that pup against behavioral problems down the road, so I watch and smile.

GOOD FOR EVERY PUP

Of course, all puppies, not just foster puppies, will benefit from these four critical lessons. But there's something special about teaching foster puppies. It's a chance to do something good, for someone else. Sure, it's "just" a puppy, but you're helping set up a lifetime of happiness for that pup and a future owner. Right now, that feels particularly joyful. 🐾

Kathy Callahan is the author of the upcoming book 101 Rescue Puppies: One Family's Story of Fostering Dogs, Love, and Trust. She's also a Certified Professional Dog Trainer who specializes in puppyhood coaching in Alexandria, Virginia. See "Resources," page 24, for book purchasing and contact information.



HEALTH

Ready For Anything

Own a dog long enough and you will likely be tested by a canine medical emergency. Will you be ready to provide first aid? Here's a list of recommended items for dog first-aid kits.

The author keeps three first-aid kits packed and ready at all times. She loads the red backpack with the supplies she anticipates needing on whatever adventure she takes with her dogs, whether it's a long road trip or a mountain hike. The large duffel bag stays home and contains extra supplies and all the things on this list. The smallest bag is for human first aid!

Tico came running in from the backyard shaking his head. I noticed something was flying off him and I calmly wondered what he was shaking off; his Velcro-like fur often collects burrs and grass and leaves. But then I suddenly realized with alarm what was being spread all over my house: blood! Tico was bleeding!

Somehow – my best guess is a rose thorn – he received a tiny (less than ¼ of an inch) cut on the inside of ear and it was bleeding profusely. He wasn't too bothered, but it must have felt strange as it bled and he responded by shaking his head, decorating the walls, floors, furniture, and curtains with a red splatter pattern.

Almost as quickly as the injury had revealed itself to me, I was able to stop the

bleeding and sanitize and seal the wound. How, so fast? Because I have not one but *two* pet first-aid kits equipped and ready at all times.

I corralled him in the bathroom and grabbed the kit. After flushing the wound with a saline rinse and checking for foreign objects, I used a non-stick gauze pad to press against the injury and slow the bleeding. Soon it was down to a trickle and allowed for the application of liquid bandage, sealing the wound. No panic. No running around in circles looking for the equipment I needed, wasting time while Tico painted the walls with blood!

IN FAVOR OF BEING PREPARED

When I began assembling my pets' first-aid kits many years ago, I started with a human outdoor wilderness kit and added to it. As my kits grew, I decided to keep the human kit stored along with my pets' kits, as many of the items can be used for both. I keep these kits updated, packed, and ready to go, next to my even larger disaster preparedness kit.

Why *two* pet first-aid kits? One is a scaled-down version that I bring with me when taking my dogs on road trips and on backwoods hikes. It's contained in a small, red (making it easy to find) Victorinox Swiss Army backpack with lots of separate compartments and pockets that are convenient for keeping items organized.

The other, larger kit is contained in a larger gear bag that contains everything, and in extra amounts. (The kit that contains first-aid items for *humans*, which I bring along on hikes and other adventures, is the smallest of the three. Ha ha!)

I keep a small amount of basic wound-care supplies in the little red backpack at all times, and add or subtract more items before leaving the house with my dogs for an outing. The items I add will depend on where I'm going and what I will be doing with the dogs. Going hiking in the mountains? Anticipating scam-



bling over granite escarpments? I'd likely add a splint, extra cotton padding, and a couple rolls of stretchy, self-adhesive bandage material. If I'm headed for a long stay at a distant friend's house, I likely don't need the emergency space blanket, water purification tablets, headlamp, and dog sunscreen.

Soft gear bags with zippers work for me. Other people may prefer storing their kits in tool boxes, tackle boxes, or watertight storage bins. Before you buy a special container for your kit or kits, it's a good idea to assemble the contents first so that you know what size container you will need. All this stuff adds up!

FIRST-AID ITEMS

Below, and on the following pages, is a list of everything I have in one or both of my two pet first-aid kits, along with a short description of each item's use.

If the list looks ridiculously long, it is! But my dogs and I are active and we get outdoors a lot. You might have a less accident-prone dog! Also, I'm a "better to be safe than sorry" sort of dog owner; I like being prepared for anything that my crazy little dogs might throw my way. You could probably consider yourself well prepared with half of this stuff. Or, if you participate in dog sports or something like search and rescue with your dog,

you might need even *more* in your kit. Customize your kit for your individual needs.

It's often suggested that people go through their first-aid kits on New Year's Day each year, checking bottles for leakage, looking at expiration dates, and determining whether the supplies are present in adequate amounts. *When* doesn't matter, but you should go through your dog's kit at least once annually – and not just when it was needed. 🐾

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An Ambitious List of Useful First-Aid Items

✓ **Activated charcoal.** To absorb *only* ingested organic poisons, chemicals, or toxins. It is only for use in dogs that are *not* showing any clinical signs. *Never* administer to dogs who are vomiting, having tremors or seizures, unconscious or otherwise mentally altered. Always contact your veterinarian or animal poison control center before treating.

✓ **Antibiotic ointment.** Topical antibiotic ointments and sprays containing bacitracin, neomycin, and polymyxin, applied before bandaging, help prevent infections from developing in wounds. Avoid any product that contains a corticosteroid like hydrocortisone. Individual-use packs or sprays (which absorb faster, making it less likely for a dog to ingest) are ideal for pet first-aid kits.

✓ **Antihistamines (oral and topical).** The safest oral antihistamine that can be given to dogs is diphenhydramine (best known as

Benadryl). It's useful for any allergic reaction, especially the dramatic reaction to bee stings. While diphenhydramine is safe for most dogs, check with your vet for the proper dosage for your dog's weight. Make sure the product contains only diphenhydramine as the active ingredient and does not contain xylitol (this sweetener is toxic to dogs). Note: Your dog may become sleepy after this medication has been given. The topical form of diphenhydramine product (for external

use only) can also temporarily relieve pain and itching associated with bites and stings. It may be delivered as an "itch relief stick," spray, or gel.

✓ **Artificial tear solution.** To soothe irritated and inflamed eyes, supplement aqueous tear production and restore lubrication – especially after using eye wash. Individual-use packs are ideal for preventing contamination.

✓ **ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center number.** This is your best resource for any animal poison-related emergency, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year: (888) 426-4435. A consultation fee will apply.

✓ **Bandage tape.** For securing gauze wrap or bandage in place.

✓ **Battery-powered trimmer.** To trim fur away from wounds and to remove mats and sticky substances from fur (a safer option than using scissors). Battery-powered (because electricity may not be available) trimmers probably can't do double-duty as grooming clippers but are ideal for limited use in a first-aid kit. Remember to keep extra batteries in your kit.

✓ **Blood clotting powder.** Quickly stops bleeding of wounds. One brand, Clot It, is a non-staining, non-stinging blood-clotting powder made up of natural minerals designed to rapidly and painlessly stop bleeding in minor to severe external wounds. Clot It is odorless, does not clump, and has an unlimited shelf-life. It accelerates the body's natural coagulation processes, slows blood flow by constricting local vessels and capillaries, and rapidly absorbs plasma at the wound site.

✓ **Blunt-tipped bandage scissors.** Bandage scissors are angled-tip scissors with a blunt tip on the bottom blade, designed to safely lift bandages away from skin without gouging the skin. They may also be used to cut tougher material such as plaster and fabric.

✓ **Calendula ointment.** For external use to promote healing of cuts, scrapes, and minor burns. Formulated with the Calendula flower, commonly used for wounds, rashes, infection, inflammation, and more.

✓ **Camping pack towels.** These fast-drying tear-resistant towels not only pack down to a small size, they are also great for absorbing water and repelling dirt. Towels can also double as slings or stretchers to stabilize an injured animal and prevent further injury during transport.

✓ **Cold packs (instant).** The application of cold is an inexpensive and non-invasive method of reducing pain, swelling, and inflammation. Apply cold packs to injured area as quickly after the injury as possible (use on new injuries within 24 to 48 hours) for only 10 to 20 minutes at a time or until your dog's skin feels cold to the touch, stopping to examine the skin every 5 to 10 minutes. Make sure to use a barrier – such as a towel – between the cold pack and the body to avoid tissue damage.

✓ **Collapsible cup/disposable cup.** To mix solutions or hold water for cleaning a wound.



✓ **Cotton balls and cotton-tipped swabs.** For gentle and delicate cleaning of wounds and sensitive areas. To avoid damaging your dog's ears and eyes, never insert Q-tips or swabs into your dog's ears or eyes without first being shown how to do it safely by your veterinarian.

✓ **Cotton padding roll.** Provides a layer of soft cushioning bulk between primary bandage layer and wrap. Conforms to body contours and mild stretch and cohesiveness allows padding to stay in place.

✓ **Credit card-like card or piece of cardboard.** To scrape away a bee stinger attached to your dog (wasps and hornets do not leave a stinger behind). Do not use tweezers, as they may squeeze more venom out of the stinger sac into the skin. Sting sites can be soothed with a thick paste of baking soda and water, an antihistamine stick (like Benadryl), or with application of a cold pack.

✓ **Digital thermometer.** The ideal thermometer for checking your dog's temperature (the most reliable way is rectally) should be easy to use; work quickly (minimizing stress on both you and your dog); have a large, easy-to-read LCD display; and is easy to clean (wash with soap and water or use rubbing alcohol). Normal body temperature for dogs is 101° to 102.5° Fahrenheit (38.3° to 39.2° Celsius), but some dogs maintain a baseline temperature a little above or below the average, so it's a good idea to take his temperature when he's resting at home a few times in order to learn what "normal" is for him. If your dog's temperature rises above 104° F or falls below 99° F, this is an emergency and a visit to the veterinarian is required. We like the Vet Temp Rapid Flexible Digital Pet Thermometer, available in stores and online.

✓ **Disinfectant wipes.** Soap and water may not be accessible.

✓ **Emergency information about your dog, including:**

- A photo of your dog.
- A copy of your dog's medical records, including medications and vaccination history.
- Contact information for your veterinarian.
- "In Case of Emergency" number for someone who knows your dog in case you are incapacitated or unavailable.

✓ **Emergency warming blanket.** Sometimes referred to as a first-aid blanket, space blanket, Mylar, thermal, or weather blanket. Use in emergency situations to reduce heat loss in an injured or traumatized dog's body in case of shock.

✓ **Emergency whistle.** Use to call for your dog or alert others to your location.

✓ **Exam gloves.** To prevent infection, protect wound from contamination, and to protect wearer.

✓ **Extra collar and leash.** Slip leads are lightweight and non-bulky and can double as a muzzle.

✓ **Eyewash (sterile irrigating solution).** To flush and clean your dog's eye(s) to help relieve irritation, discomfort, itching, or remove loose foreign material. Can be helpful with allergies. Can also be used for cleaning wounds in the event that a clean wound flush is not available.

✓ **First-aid manual.** Provides instructions on how to handle myriad pet emergencies.

✓ **Flashlight or headlamp.** Provide a light source at night or whenever extra illumination is needed. Headlamps allow for hands-free examination. Don't forget extra batteries.

✓ **Flea comb.** Great for removing tick nymphs that are not attached but crawling over fur.

✓ **Gauze pads/sponges.**

Beneficial for wound-care applications such as controlling bleeding and general cleaning. It can also be used as a temporary absorbent dressing over wounds but be aware that these are **not** non-stick and could adhere to the wound and skin.

✓ **Gauze roll/wrap.** Can be used to wrap an injury, provide compression and pressure, as a primary dressing for wound care, or to cover and secure a primary layer. Can be used to secure limbs that require limited mobility. Can also be used to make a muzzle (dogs who are in pain may snap as their injuries are being treated).

✓ **Hand sanitizer.** Soap and water may not be accessible.

✓ **Hydrogen peroxide (must be 3%).** To induce vomiting in certain cases. Never induce vomiting without first speaking with a veterinarian or animal poison control. Hydrogen peroxide is not a good way to clean or disinfect a wound as it is detrimental to the cells responsible for healing the wound. Hydrogen peroxide is also an ingredient in the most effective deskunking formula (1 qt. 3% hydrogen peroxide, ¼ cup baking soda, 1 teaspoon liquid dish soap).

✓ **Liquid bandage/tissue adhesive.** For closing minor wounds, eliminating the need for bandages or in areas where bandage application is not feasible (like Tico's ear).

✓ **Lubricant.** To coat the thermometer to facilitate taking your dog's temperature rectally; water-based, individual-use packets are ideal.

✓ **Magnifying glass.** There are terrific little handheld, battery-operated, lighted magnifying glasses available for first-aid kits (a 30X magnification works well). Useful for close inspection of wounds and removing ticks. Remember to keep extra batteries in your kit.

✓ **Muzzle.** Injuries are painful and a dog in pain may try to bite, especially when you are trying to administer first aid. It's a good idea to prevent a bite by using a muzzle. The best muzzle is one that you have already fitted and trained your dog to be comfortable with. In an emergency, a leash, soft cloth, gauze roll, and towels are options for use. Check your first-aid book on how to use a makeshift muzzle. **Never** muzzle a dog who is vomiting.

✓ **Non-stick bandage pads.** Ideal for placement as the first layer over a wound. The ventilated film allows the wound to breathe and fluid be absorbed into the pad, and the non-stick covering prevents sticking to the wound and disrupting any healing process that has begun. Available in single-use packages and can be cut or trimmed to fit most wounds.

✓ **Notebook, leakproof pen, and Sharpie kept in a sealed plastic bag.** Keep notes about any treatments given your dog so that it can be relayed to your veterinarian. Sharpies are good for writing on a multitude of surfaces and are smudge-resistant.

✓ **Paw balm.** Used to protect paws from substances on the ground, keep them hydrated and healthy.

✓ **PawFlex bandages.** These bandages stretch, are disposable and reusable, and made from fabric that is water resistant, breathable, non-adhesive, and non-irritating. PawFlex has bandages currently available in six sizes to cover any wound, especially wounds around joints that can be difficult to protect. (See pawflex.com for purchasing information.)



✓ **Paw socks.** While a resourceful owner can modify a human hiking sock to cover an injured paw out on the trail, these commercial socks fit better and stay on without constant adjustments: see [ruffwear.com/collections/dog-boots/products/dog-socks-barkn-boot-liners](https://www.ruffwear.com/collections/dog-boots/products/dog-socks-barkn-boot-liners).



✓ **Pest repellent.** A flea/tick repellent should be applied to dogs prior to hiking or going other places that are of concern for exposure. In some backwoods locations, a topical repellent for flying insects (biting flies, gnats, and mosquitoes) is needed to prevent these insects from tormenting dogs by gathering on their faces in particular.

✓ **Plastic bags (sealable).** Great for putting over a bandaged limb to keep dry (secure with self-adhesive bandage), containing ice, or for storing a tick you just removed (add a little rubbing alcohol to preserve it, in case your veterinarian thinks it should be tested for infectious disease). Also, it can be helpful to store all liquid items in sealable plastic bags to mitigate any potential leak or spilling of contents.

✓ **Rubbing alcohol.** Use to wipe down thermometer, instruments, and tools before and after use.

✓ **Self-adhering bandages.** These bandages stretch, are strong, conforming, and flexible, and secure wound coverings in place. When properly applied with padding or gauze, the material can be used as a pressure bandage to inhibit bleeding. Available in a variety of widths from different makers (including 3M's Vetrap, Andover Healthcare's CoFlex, GOGO's Self Adhesive Bandage Wrap).

✓ **Splints.** To immobilize an injured limb for transport. Our favorite is the lightweight and durable SAM Splint, which is constructed of two layers of closed-cell foam with an aluminum interior. The material can be cut with ordinary scissors to adapt to any size and can be bent into any of three simple curves, becoming extremely strong and supportive for any fractured or injured limb.

Waterproof, reusable, and latex-free, it requires only a wrap or tape to secure an injured bone or stabilize a joint.

✓ **Sunscreen/sun protection.**

Dogs with white or light fur, thin coats, or exposed skin (such as pink or lightly-pigmented noses and ears)

are prone to sunburn and to other complications and diseases associated with sun exposure. Use protection when outdoors for long periods. Choose an appropriate sunscreen that does not contain zinc oxide or para-aminobenzoic acid (PABA), as these ingredients are toxic to dogs if ingested. There are also sun-protective clothing options available for dogs.

✓ **Syringes, 10 milliliters (ml).** For administering liquids orally to your dog and to clean and flush wounds.

✓ **Tape (duct and masking tape).** Innumerable MacGyver-like uses, including securing a temporary bandage or splint in the absence of stretchy self-adhesive or bandage tape. Be careful not to use directly on your dog's fur or skin as removal can be painful and cause more damage. You don't need 25 yards' worth; if you use these products around the house, save the last few feet on the roll for your first-aid kit.

✓ **Tick remover tool.** Once you have used a tool made expressly for tick removal, you'll never use tweezers for this purpose again. Place the removed tick in a sealable plastic bag with a little alcohol. Follow up by contacting your veterinarian to see whether she advises having the tick tested for its potential to have transmitted a disease to your dog (anaplasmosis, babesiosis, bartonellosis, ehrlichiosis, hepatozoonosis, Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain spotted fever).

✓ **Waterproof storage bag or container.** For storing supplies such as bandages and gauze that can be damaged by moisture.

✓ **Water purification tablets.** Water purification tablets can ensure safer drinking water without having to rely on a heat source to boil water. They can provide protection against microbial regrowth and can keep water safe to drink for 24 hours without additional treatment. Products vary in regard to efficacy against pathogens, shelf life, and wait time.

✓ **Wound disinfectant/antiseptic.** To kill the types of bacteria and yeast that commonly lead to infections in dog wounds. Safe disinfectants include chlorhexidine diacetate solution (not scrub) and povidine iodine solution. But the pre-diluted strengths that are ready to use! If not pre-diluted (check the label!), the disinfectant will need to be diluted to the strength indicated on the label for safe use. Chlorhexidine diacetate should be diluted to a 0.05% solution, while the povidine iodine should be diluted to a 1% solution for safe and effective cleaning and disinfecting. If not diluted correctly, it can damage tissue.

✓ **Wound flush.** Used for cleaning/irrigating wounds. Premade sterile saline wound wash is available for purchase; the solution can be used to quickly, easily, and effectively clean a wound, remove debris, and dislodge bacteria from damaged tissues. Warm tap water, warm saline solution (made with one level teaspoonful of salt or Epsom salts to two cups of water), or saline eyewash can also be used. If possible, try to clip away the fur from around wounds before cleaning. Do *not* use hydrogen peroxide to clean wounds as it can inhibit the healing process.



Accidents happen! This is the author's terrier-mix, Tico, after the bleeding from a scratch on his ear flap had been stopped with first-aid care, but before all the blood had been washed away.



Crate Expectations

Once your dog is properly crate-trained, you have a valuable resource – respect it!

You're not seeing double! These two young German Shepherds like to play rough – and sometimes one or the other loses his temper and the play escalates into aggression. When their owner can't actively supervise their interactions, one (or both!) can cool their heels in a crate for a bit. As long as these active dogs get enough exercise and time out of their crates, they are content to spend quiet time in them.



I first learned about crate-training for dogs in the early 1980s and have been a big fan ever since. There are many advantages to having a dog who is comfortable in her crate, not the least of which is puppy housetraining and management. Imagine my surprise then, when I recently discovered an increasingly loud, visible and growing opposition to crating. Granted, there's an unfortunate amount of abusive crating out there, and that's certainly not acceptable, but the vehement anti-craters are essentially opposed to any crating, ever. Seriously? Never?

CRATING BENEFITS

There are so many benefits to appropriate crating that I can't list them all, but here are some of the most useful:

■ Puppy housetraining and management.

As mentioned above, housetraining for puppies (and even adult dogs) is greatly facilitated by the proper use of a crate. Since dogs have natural inhibitions against soiling their own dens, crating your pup for periods of time when she cannot be directly supervised, then taking her out to eliminate in her designated bathroom spot, can help her become reliably housetrained more quickly, with far fewer

accidents. Crating also minimizes puppy chewing/destructive behaviors when direct supervision isn't possible. Properly trained, most puppies and dogs can learn to see their crates as a very positive place.

■ **Restricted activity.** Most dog owners are familiar with the dreaded words from their veterinarian following surgery or some other intensive medical treatment: "Your dog needs to be on restricted activity." If your dog is already comfortable/happy being crated, a period of restricted activity is far less likely to be stressful to her (and to you!) and her rehabilitation is likely to be more successful. (See "Rest Easy," WDJ August 2015.)

■ **Transportation.** We know that there are significant risks posed by having loose dogs in a car – both from their potential to interfere with the driver and cause an accident, as well as the increased risk of injury or death to the dog if an accident occurs.

My own brother lost his lovely Australian Shepherd in a car wreck; she survived the accident but jumped out the smashed windshield and was killed by another car on the highway. A strapped-down crate (or a harness/seat belt combination) could have prevented her death.

■ **Canine classes and competition venues.** There are a variety of canine classes and competition venues where dogs are routinely crated when it's not their turn to work. It is generally expected that your dog can be crated when necessary.

■ **Behavior management.** There are many situations in which a crate can be of great benefit for behavior management.

For example, our small mixed-breed, Sunny, constantly competes with Kai (our Kelpie) for attention, and because Kai consistently defers to Sunny, he tends to lose out in the attention game. We crate Sunny at night and Kai sleeps on the bed, so he gets an extended period of time with his humans without having to compete.

If one of your dogs has food-guarding issues, feeding one or both dogs in their crates can eliminate this source of tension. Some adult dogs still need to be confined for management purposes when their humans aren't home, and some find their crates comforting during stressful events such as thunderstorms, fireworks, or visitors in the home. Others see it as the perfect place to stash their toys when they aren't using them.

■ **Décor.** No, I'm not kidding – there are actually some very stylish dog crates available that are useful

when performing a double service as end tables, sideboards, coffee tables, corner cabinets, and more – you can decorate your house while you crate your dog!

HOW TO CRATE-TRAIN

Here is a step-by-step guide for teaching your dog to love her crate. If at any time you get stuck in the process, don't hesitate to contact a qualified force-free professional for help:

1 Start by leaving the crate in its intended long-term location with a soft blanket inside and some toys and treats on the blanket. The best introduction to the crate is when your dog can choose to explore it on her own. (Be sure to tie the door open so it won't bang and frighten her.)

2 After she has had a chance to explore, with the crate door still tied open, toss some irresistibly yummy treats inside. If your dog is hesitant to go in after them, toss them close enough to the doorway that she can stand outside and just poke her nose into the crate to eat them. If you're training with a clicker or other reward marker, use your marker each time she starts to eat the treat.

3 Gradually toss the treats farther into the crate until she will step inside to get them. Continue to mark

each time she eats a treat. When she'll enter the crate easily to get the treats, mark and offer a treat while she's still inside. If she's willing to stay inside, keep marking and treating.

If she comes out, that's okay too, just toss another treat inside and wait for her to re-enter. Don't ever try to force her to stay in the crate.

4 When she will enter the crate without hesitation, start using a verbal cue (such as "Go to bed!") as she goes in, so that you will eventually be able to send her into the crate with just a verbal cue.

5 When she happily stays in the crate in anticipation of a mark and treat, gently move the door a little. Mark and treat. Gradually increase the movement until you are swinging the door all the way closed, using a mark (click or "Yes!") and giving a treat with each swing. Don't latch it! Mark and treat, then open the door.

Repeat this step, gradually increasing the length of time the door stays closed before you mark. Sometimes you can mark and reward without opening the door right away.

6 When your dog stays in the crate with the door closed for at least 10 seconds without any signs of anxiety, close the door, latch it, and take one



- A.** Tie the door open. Toss some treats inside.
- B.** Mark (click or "Yes!") every time she steps in as she starts to eat a treat.
- C.** Do not try to stop her from leaving!
- D.** Mark and treat when she stays inside.
- E.** Swing the door closed, mark and treat, open it again. Slowly increase the time you wait before giving the mark and treat.

step away from the crate. Mark, return to the crate, reward, and open the door. Repeat this step, varying the time and distance you leave the crate. Gradually increase the number of times you mark and treat without opening the door, but remember that a mark always gets a treat.

NOTE: Don't make each of your

dog's stays in the crate longer and farther away from you; intersperse longer stays with shorter ones. Some dogs will grow increasingly apprehensive if they realize that each time they are in the crate, they will be "stuck" there for a longer period each time. Randomize the duration of each stay.

MORE TIPS

It's a good idea to leave the crate open when you aren't actively training. Toss treats and your dog's favorite toys in the crate when she's not looking, so she never knows what wonderful surprises she might find there. You can even feed her meals in the crate – with the door open – to help her realize

Five Common Ways That Crating Can Be Abusive

Sadly, there are far too many readily available examples of improper and even abusive use of crates:

■ **Over-crating.** Some owners crate too much because they don't know any better. Just because your dog can "hold it" for 10 to 12 hours in his crate while you are at work, doesn't mean he should have to. Anyone who has to leave their must-be-crated dog home for longer than four to five hours needs to find other options for a mid-day break for the dog. (Young puppies shouldn't be asked to hold it longer than two to three hours during the day.) Options could include a family member, neighbor, or pet walker who can come by at mid day, a crate inside an exercise pen with the dog trained to use pee pads, or a well-run doggie daycare (young puppies generally should not go to daycare). Or perhaps a responsible friend, neighbor, or family member could provide daycare for your dog.

■ **Punishment.** A dog's crate should never be used as punishment – as in, "Bad dog, go to your crate!" The crate should be your dog's happy place – not a place you send her to in anger. (Of course, we don't advocate verbal or physical punishment anyway.) It is perfectly okay to use a crate as a temporary cheerful timeout: "Oh you need a break? Go to bed for a bit!" Nor should anyone, ever, punish the dog by thumping on the top of or shaking the crate.

■ **Teasing.** A crate should be a safe place as well as a happy place. No teasing allowed – from thoughtless or wicked humans or from other dogs. If your dog must be crated where there is human foot traffic, set an exercise pen around her crate as a generous "air lock" so no one can get to her.

■ **Misguided behavior modification.** A crate is the absolute wrong management or modification tool for most dogs with separation-related behaviors. (See "Amicable Separation," June 2020.) The outdated adage to leave your anxious, stressed, screaming dog

of any age alone and crated until they are quiet is hideous advice and likely to make your dog's anxiety even worse. Dogs with moderate-to-serious separation stress are truly panicking when they are left alone, and dogs with these behaviors are notorious for not crating well.

Your job when crate training is to make it positive enough that your dog never has to bark in protest. If that's not possible, there is likely a stress element involved, and you need to address that before you can even begin to crate-train.

■ **Hoarding.** Bad breeders, rescue groups, shelters, and even foster providers sometimes keep dogs in crates 24 hours a day, with occasional bathroom breaks if they are lucky. These are situations that are better referred as "hoarders." No dog should live in his own urine and feces in a crate. No dog should live in a crate 24/7 even if he does get out often enough to avoid soiling his den. Period.



State inspectors did not cite Kabeara Kennels in Lockport, Illinois, for any violations in December 2019, but photographs taken during the inspection show puppies crowded in cages. The dogs did not appear to have any bedding or solid flooring, and many did not appear to have enough room to turn around or lie down without walking over other dogs in the cage. While these conditions may be legal in Illinois, we would not consider them humane. Photo courtesy of the Humane Society of the United States "Horrible Hundred" report on problem puppy mills, May 2020; photo taken by the Illinois Department of Agriculture.

that her crate is a truly wonderful place. With the door open, she can choose to relax in her crate whenever she wants.

There are many dogs and puppies who can do the whole crate training program in one day. Others may need practice over several days before they are completely comfortable entering and staying in the crate, and a few will take weeks or more. If your dog or puppy is one of the slower-to-love crating, you may need to use an exercise pen, instead, to contain her for management purposes.

If at any time during the program your dog whines or fusses about being in the crate, try to wait for a few seconds of quiet, then mark and reward. (If she won't stop fussing, she is probably stressed and you will need to let her out despite her fussing.) Then, back up a step or two in the training program; you have made it too hard for her.

When she is doing well at that level again, increase the difficulty in smaller increments, and vary the times rather than constantly making it harder. For example, instead of going from five seconds to 10 to 15, start with five seconds, then seven, then three, then eight, then six, then four, then eight, and so on.

If, however, you believe your dog has a separation-related behavior, stop the crate training and consult a qualified force-free professional.

Once your dog is crate-trained, you have a valuable behavior management tool for life. *Respect it.* If you abuse your dog by keeping her confined too much, for too long a period of time, or by using it as punishment, you can easily ruin all the good work you've done, and lose the use of this invaluable tool. You really don't want to do that!

IF ALL ELSE FAILS, USE OTHER OPTIONS

So, if you crate (and I do!), do it right. Consider whether you have other options, either temporary or long term. When we first adopted our dog Sunny, he had not been crate trained and he had some (fortunately mild) sep-

Proper Crating

There are a number of things you can do to make your dog's crating experience more successful and more positive for her.

- *If your dog has had past unpleasant experiences with crating, consider changes. If you were using an airline crate, try a wire crate. Try offering two or three different types of crates and see if she shows a crate-style preference. If she was crated in the living room, try the den. If she gets aroused by outside stimuli, move the crate away from the front door to an isolated, quiet location in the house.*
- *Make sure your dog's crate is placed in an environmentally comfortable location. You may not realize that the sun comes through the living room window and hits the crate at 1 p.m., causing your dog to overheat, or perhaps there's a draft from an open window that makes her uncomfortably cold. Try putting several crates in different locations and see if she shows a location preference.*
- *Respect your dog's preference for bedding. She may love a cushy comforter to lie on while crated – or she may prefer the coolness of a bare crate floor. Accommodate her wishes! Try offering two crates with different types of flooring/bedding and see if she chooses one over the other.*
- *Consider giving your dog more spacious accommodations. When housetraining, we want the crate to be just large enough to stand up, turn around, and lie down comfortably, so she can't soil one end and rest comfortably in the other. After she is housetrained, however, there is no need to keep her in a small space. If you have the room, give her luxury accommodations!*



Some dogs prefer a bare crate to one with bedding, especially in hot weather. If you can, offer him two crates, each offering a different type or amount of bedding, to determine his preference.

aration-related behaviors that ruled out crating as an option. For the first few months, he slept in an exercise pen next to my bed, initially with my arm draped over the side to reassure him that I was close by.

Over a period of weeks, I was gradually able to remove my arm from the pen and start moving the pen farther and farther from the side of the bed. Our bedroom is really too small to comfortably accommodate a crate, so he was eventually crate-trained and now sleeps happily in his crate.

However, Sunny is still not 100% trustworthy loose in the house, so when I leave him alone, he is shut in my office (spacious compared to

a crate!) to keep him out of trouble, usually with his brother Kai, and all is well. We've even been able to remove the barriers that were originally put in place to prevent him from chewing up all my books. Be a creative minimalist with your crate use! 🐾

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CONSUMER
ALERT

Safe Choices for Chewing in a Crate

Usually, dogs are crated when we can't supervise them closely – and unsupervised dogs should receive only the safest chews.



Kong toys of an appropriate size, filled with canned food, and then frozen, is our favorite thing to serve to dogs in a crate. If your dog has ever chewed up a Kong toy, however, it should be eliminated from the list of things you can leave him with, unsupervised, in a crate.

Dog owners tend to think of crates as safe havens for their dogs or puppies – a place where they can stash a puppy for a short time to keep him from chewing household items or chasing the kids. Even owners of adult dogs sometimes use crates to protect their dogs, preventing them from escaping the house or from getting into a fight with another dog in the house, as just a couple examples. The overall idea is that the crate is a place where the dog or pup will be safe while we need to take our attention elsewhere and are unable to supervise him for a short amount of time.

However, owners are often advised to give their puppies or dogs a toy, bone, or chewie to make being in the crate more enjoyable and to help pass the time. And if the item that is given to the dog or puppy is dangerous to his health, then that unsupervised time in the crate is absolutely *not* safe. It may, in fact, present a *bigger* danger to him than being loose in the house without the item.

If you will be walking away from your crated dog or pup, even just to take a shower or a Zoom meeting, your choices for a crate-safe chewie or food-dispensing toy are somewhat limited.

GO BIG!

If the item you give your dog is meant to be chewed, it should be far too large for the dog to swallow, even after a good long session of chewing. Don't give *any* dog something that can be completely chewed up to a swallowable size in less than an hour.

The problem, however, is finding items that are large enough. I have been dismayed, again and again, to see chew items designated for "large" dogs that are smaller than anything I would give to a five-pound Chihuahua.

Many of the chewie products on the market can be chewed up and swallowed by an aggressive chewer in 10 minutes or less. If your dog can chew the item to a swallowable size in less than an hour of dedicated chewing, it's not safe to give to him unsupervised.

Lots of people buy dried beef "pizzles" for their dogs, and they are often sold in 12-inch lengths. But have you noticed that most dogs can chew these down to three or four inches within 15 minutes or so? At that point, these (and similar chew items) are in danger of being swallowed and causing the dog to choke! While a few dogs will keep chewing until the item is small enough to be safely swallowed, others will gulp it down when it's definitely still long enough to pose a choking hazard if swallowed. For this reason, we wouldn't recommend an item like this be used in a crate!

There is a *single* rawhide product on the market that I occasionally buy for my strong-chewing large dogs (about 70 pounds each) and for any puppies or adolescent dogs I happen to be fostering: Wholesome Hide's 10-inch Retriever Roll. These chews are made in Illinois of a single sheet of very thick rawhide. It takes a lot of work to chew off small pieces of the rawhide to consume, which is

good, because we don't want any dog to consume very much rawhide in any one sitting. If Wholesome Hide made even *larger* rolls, I would buy those, instead, even for small dogs. If it takes days of on-and-off-again chewing for my large dogs to reduce the product to the size at which I throw it away, it will take a small dog more than a week to do so – and that's great! Providing something that is ridiculously large will slow the dog's rawhide consumption and prevent choking.

BONES

We don't approve of giving dogs dried bones – neither the sterilized, bleached white ones that are devoid of tissues or marrow, nor the decidedly *not* sterile, dried bones that have tissue still attached to them and marrow present inside them. The former bones are too hard; dogs invariably try to crack them open and are at a high risk of cracking their molars on them. While the latter bones are softer, they contain enough moisture to host pathogenic bacteria such as *Salmonella*.

If you are going to give your dog a bone to keep him happy, it should be fresh (or fresh-frozen). Ideally, these still have tissue still attached to them; the act of chewing, licking, and tearing at these tissues is incredibly helpful for scraping plaque from a dog's teeth.

Unfortunately, it's difficult to find bones that have tissue still attached to them, unless you are lucky enough to have access to an old-fashioned butcher who still cuts up carcasses. Industrial "big meat" practices utilize most bones for other purposes,

If you give your dog rawhide, it should be gigantic, thick, and not filled with small pieces. He should have to work hard for long periods to chew any tissue off the roll.

and the few that do make it into supermarkets (and even commercial suppliers of raw diets who sell raw bones) usually lack these tissues.

Also, bones should be given only to dogs who have proven, thorough many supervised trials, that they can chew bones safely – not super aggressively, and not intent on quickly swallowing as much bone as they can. Even then, we'd give a large, fresh, meaty bone to an experienced bone-eating dog in a crate only if the crating period was not going to be more than an hour or so; bone-chewing should be supervised.

MISCELLANEOUS CHEWS

What about dried pigs' ears and snouts, beef hooves, tendons, and all the other miscellaneous dried animal parts found in the pet store aisles? Nope. We wouldn't give a dog any of these items in a crate when we are not close by and actively supervising. Too many of these items can be chewed to sizes that can be choked on in a short time.

FOOD-DISPENSING TOYS

Stuffing food into a toy such as the original Kong is the safest option for most dogs who benefit from having something in their crate to keep them occupied and happy.

By filling your dogs' Kongs with canned food or a raw diet and then freezing the toy, it takes longer for the food to melt and for the dog to completely empty the toy. Or you can use kibble mixed with peanut butter, cream cheese, or yogurt – anything healthy and sticky enough to make the dog have to work at licking and manipulating the toy to try to reach and eat all the food.

This bone is too small; the dog can get it between his molars, risking a slab fracture. It's also small enough that he might try to swallow it – and large enough to choke him if he tries.



However, you still have to make sure that the toy is of an appropriate size (too big to be swallowed) and toughness (chew-resistant), and that your dog will empty the food from the toy in a safe manner, not progressing to chewing the toy after the food is gone. Run a number of trials while supervising him to determine what type of food keeps your dog working at the task the longest.

There are many types of "food puzzles" (which require the dog to manipulate sliding covers or remove pegs to reach food treats) and balls or cubes that will dispense kibble when knocked around by the dog. These are not generally safe for most dogs to use without supervision, and certainly not appropriate for use in the close confines of a crate.

AGGRESSIVE CHEWER?

Nothing is 100% safe. We've heard of dogs who are able to chew up even the toughest Kongs – the black ones, intended for the strongest chewers. If you have one of these dogs, crating him with a scattered handful of kibble might be the only safe solution. It won't last as long as some of these other options, but it will be the safest choice for him. 🐾

Nancy Kerns is the editor of WDJ.



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Don't Wait to Help Your Dog Lose Weight

It's never too late to take steps to improve your dog's health, mobility, and quality of life.



Even an extremely obese dog's quality of life can improve a lot with a little weight loss. A reduction of even just a few pounds might mean the difference between mobility and immobility – and that can mean the difference between continence and incontinence, especially later in life.

In 2013, the American Medical Association defined obesity in humans as a disease. The veterinary medical profession is also pushing to have obesity in companion animals similarly designated. In October 2019, the Association for Pet Obesity Prevention (APOP) released a position statement (the “Global Pet Obesity Initiative”) calling for a uniform definition of obesity in companion animals, a universal body condition score system, and a definition of obesity as a disease. The release found wide support from veterinary health-care organizations all over the world.

Chances are, if your dog is carrying extra pounds, she doesn't feel good. The impact of even a little excess weight is exponentially greater and more concentrated in dogs than it is in humans. Canine obesity can not only cause a number of diseases and exacerbate others, but it also impairs normal

body functions. Overweight dogs are predisposed to developing metabolic irregularities, abnormal functions in many organ systems, diabetes mellitus and insulin resistance, hypertension, diseases of the kidneys, liver, and skin, arthritis, bladder/urinary tract issues, joint and ligament problems and other orthopedic issues, thyroid imbalances, respiratory conditions, heart failure, and chronic inflammation.

Research has also demonstrated a connection between obesity and cancer, but it is not clear how it increases cancer risk. One theory is that excess fat around vital organs increases damaging inflammation. Over time, chronic low-level inflammation can cause DNA damage that leads to the development of cancer.

Dogs who are overweight or obese also live shorter lives – on average, 2½ years less than dogs with a healthy body condition. A study published in 2018 examined records for more than 50,000 client-owned, neutered dogs

across 12 popular breeds over a 20-year span and found that overweight body condition was associated with a shorter life span in all 12 breeds. The magnitude of the effect varied, being least for large-breed dogs (5 months) and greatest for dogs of the smallest breed (more than 2 years).

The good news is that a lot of these health concerns can be prevented, mitigated, or eliminated by proper nutrition, an active lifestyle, and maintaining a healthy weight.

MANY FACTORS AFFECT A DOG'S WEIGHT

Energy is measured in calories, and calories are essential for a body to function. Excess energy, however, is stored as body fat and occurs when more calories are consumed than are used by the body.

Fat storage can be a useful hedge against

leaner times ahead for some animals. For example, bears spend their non-hibernating days searching for food and eating as much as possible so that this extra weight (stored energy) is available for the body to use for basic bodily functions while they hibernate. They do this because food is not readily available during the lean cold winter months. In hibernation, their bodies reduce their physiological processes to their most minimal level, using the stored energy to survive.

In contrast, our dogs have food available year round and therefore don't have any need for storing extra energy. In fact, that extra weight can be detrimental.

Besides the amount of food, there are other factors that can affect the weight of a dog. Calorie density (the number of calories in a serving) and the digestibility of food can also play a role. Non-food related factors that can affect weight include genetics, lifestyle and activity level, stage of

life, climate, and even some diseases.

In October 2019, *Preventative Veterinary Medicine* published a Danish study that looked for obesity risk factors.² Researchers found that neutering increased the risk of obesity in male dogs, but females were at risk regardless of whether they were intact or spayed. Interestingly, as dogs aged, the study noted that the risk of obesity increased in older female dogs but *decreased* in senior males.

The same study found that owner behavior is an important factor in canine weight management. Overweight owners tended to give treats freely as a snack or when the owner is eating, whereas non-overweight owners usually dispensed treats for training purposes only. This suggests that the health of pets and owners is interconnected – and that weight management plans for both dog and owner might be more successful if they were jointly undertaken!

BODY CONDITION SCORE

Because the ideal weight of a dog varies based on breed, size, and age, and the dog's condition is more important than how much he weighs, a body condition score (BCS) provides for a more meaningful measurement than the dog's weight alone.

BCS guidelines call for an assessment of condition at certain locations on a dog's body; these assessments can then be categorized into a score. The nine-point scale ranges from 1 to 9. A score of 1 indicates the dog is extremely thin, and score of 9 indicates extremely obese. Scores of 4 and 5 are considered ideal.

The difference between each point on the nine-point chart represents approximately 10 to 15%. Generally speaking, a dog is considered overweight when the level of excess body fat is greater than or equal to 15% of ideal; while obese is loosely defined as being 30% above optimal.

An overall BCS score gives an



Body Condition Score





1 **3**



5 **7**



9

UNDER IDEAL

- 1 Ribs, lumbar vertebrae, pelvic bones and all bony prominences evident from a distance. No discernible body fat. Obvious loss of muscle mass.
- 2 Ribs, lumbar vertebrae and pelvic bones easily visible. No palpable fat. Some evidence of other bony prominences. Minimal loss of muscle mass.
- 3 Ribs easily palpated and may be visible with no palpable fat. Tops of lumbar vertebrae visible. Pelvic bones becoming prominent. Obvious waist and abdominal tuck.

IDEAL

- 4 Ribs easily palpable, with minimal fat covering. Waist easily noted, viewed from above. Abdominal tuck evident.
- 5 Ribs palpable without excess fat covering. Waist observed behind ribs when viewed from above. Abdomen tucked up when viewed from side.

OVER IDEAL

- 6 Ribs palpable with slight excess fat covering. Waist is discernible viewed from above but is not prominent. Abdominal tuck apparent.
- 7 Ribs palpable with difficulty; heavy fat cover. Noticeable fat deposits over lumbar area and base of tail. Waist absent or barely visible. Abdominal tuck may be present.
- 8 Ribs not palpable under very heavy fat cover, or palpable only with significant pressure. Heavy fat deposits over lumbar area and base of tail. Waist absent. No abdominal tuck. Obvious abdominal distention may be present.
- 9 Massive fat deposits over thorax, spine and base of tail. Waist and abdominal tuck absent. Fat deposits on neck and limbs. Obvious abdominal distention.

German A, et al. Comparison of a bioimpedance monitor with dual-energy x-ray absorptiometry for noninvasive estimation of percentage body fat in dogs. *AJVR* 2010;71:393-398.

Jeusette I, et al. Effect of breed on body composition and comparison between various methods to estimate body composition in dogs. *Res Vet Sci* 2010;98:227-232.

Kealy RD, et al. Effects of diet restriction on life span and age-related changes in dogs. *JAVMA* 2002;220:1315-1320.

Lafamme DP. Development and validation of a body condition score system for dogs. *Canine Pract* 1997;22:10-15.

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12 Canine Weight-Loss Tips

1. Measure food out in daily portions and use that food for treats as well as meals.
2. Never guess at amounts. Use a food scale.
3. Become familiar with the caloric measurements of your dog's food.



4. Avoid processed treats; instead, seek out healthy single-ingredient treats (such as fresh vegetables and fruit) – and know how many calories they contain!

5. Use play, praise, petting (only in forms the dog enjoys), or attention instead of treats to reward good behavior.

6. Some dogs use food-seeking behavior as a way to seek attention. Try substituting play, petting, and other forms of interaction instead of giving in to that request for a snack.

7. Walk with your dog. Slowly increase distance as your dog builds stamina.

8. Play with your dog! Look for toys that interest your dog and encourage movement.

9. If your dog gets bored with a toy, put it away to bring out at a later time and try a new one.



10. If your dog likes to play with other dogs, schedule play dates with appropriate play partners.



11. Place your dog's food bowl in a different place at every meal; turn "going to find the bowl" into a "search and find" game.

12. Use a food-dispensing toy (like Paw 5's "Wooly" snuffle mat, seen here) so that your dog gets exercise and enrichment while eating.

owner more information about what the dog's whole body does look and feel like – and how, specifically, it should look and feel. While frequent weigh-ins are helpful for detecting small losses (or gains) in a dog's weight, the BCS helps describe both the problem and the goal.

VETERINARY HELP REQUIRED

The first step to addressing your dog's weight condition is a wellness visit to your veterinarian. If you are finally facing the fact that your dog is obese, don't put her on a weight-reduction program without veterinary input first; there may be an underlying health condition that is responsible for the excess weight. For example, hypothyroidism, hyperadrenocorticism, and Cushing's disease can be associated with weight gain; these and other conditions must be ruled out as possible causes or contributors to your dog's weight issue.

Your veterinarian should test for diabetes; obesity can complicate blood-sugar regulation. If your dog is diabetic, the condition needs to be stabilized prior to embarking on a new diet and monitored throughout the process so adjustments to medication can be made. If medications are not adjusted appropriately, it can lead to hypoglycemia, which can be fatal.

Your veterinarian can work with you to assess your dog's body condition, muscle condition, and lifestyle, and evaluate any other concurrent health conditions that might need to be addressed in concert with the dog's new diet and exercise plan.

Importantly, your vet will also calculate how many calories you should feed your dog each day. Few people seem to understand that the recommended feeding amounts on dog food labels are based on dogs' ideal weight. They feed the amount indicated on the label for the dog's current weight, which makes him get even fatter!

Ask your veterinarian to help determine what your dog's ideal weight should be, how many calories your dog should eat to achieve that weight, and precisely how you should adjust from your current feeding regimen to a more appropriate amount. (Hint: If you cut your dog's food in half overnight, you may see the quick emergence of unpleasant behaviors, such as counter-surfing, getting into the garbage, aggression with your other dogs over food, and so on.)

Your vet also may consult with or refer you to a board certified veterinary nutritionist to help determine the best feeding options for your dog. Diplomates of the American College of Veterinary Nutrition (ACVN) are extensively trained in the nutritional management of both healthy animals and those with diseases. These specialized veterinarians are uniquely qualified to formulate commercial foods and supplements, formulate home-prepared diets, manage the complex medical and nutritional needs of individual animals, and understand the underlying causes and implications of specific nutritional strategies that are used to prevent and treat diseases.

DIET AND EXERCISE

The three basic strategies to losing excess weight are reducing caloric intake, increasing exercise, and a combination of the two. Weight loss is usually best achieved by the latter.

Ideally, a dog's weight-reduction program will be designed so that the dog receives enough calories to support his ideal weight, achieve weight loss, and keep him comfortable throughout the program. When his caloric intake is reduced to a more appropriate level (sufficient to support the energy needs of his ideal weight, but not enough to support his *extra* weight), his body will start to pull energy from the stored weight.

Low-calorie, fiber-rich foods (such as green vegetables) can be beneficial to the success of a weight loss plan; they not only help dogs feel fuller and reduce the sensation of hunger, they reduce the caloric density of a diet

Kissy's Journey Back to Health

Kissy, a 9-year-old Scottish Terrier/Poodle-mix, entered the Dogwood Animal Rescue Project (DARP, a nonprofit, foster-based animal-rescue group located in Sonoma County, Calif.) in mid-April 2020. When she arrived, it was obvious that she had a lot of extra weight on her small frame; on the body condition score (BCS) scale, she scored at 9. She was so heavy she had difficulty walking – even stepping over a two-inch barrier was a challenge. It was also immediately apparent that she was aptly named: Jessica, her foster provider, describes her as a sweet, gentle girl who always wants to give kisses, but a little shy.



Kissy's intake photo.

Kissy's veterinary evaluation found she had dental disease, so she underwent cleaning with extractions. Jessica also noticed that Kissy was drinking an excessive amount of water and was lethargic; the vet determined that she had a urinary tract infection (UTI). Not long after she was started on antibiotics to treat the UTI, her energy level increased

and her demeanor became much happier and more outgoing. It was impossible to determine if secondary health issues were causing Kissy's obesity (the results of her Cushing's test, for example, were inconclusive) or if the obesity was causing secondary disease. Either way, she needed to lose weight, so a veterinary-supervised program was put in place.



Kissy and her foster mom.

Kissy's diet consists of precisely measured food given to her twice a day and periodic treats of carrots and green beans. Jessica started her on slow walks. At first, Kissy did not seem to understand what a walk was! With gentle training and encouragement from Jessica's other two dogs, Kissy is discovering the joy of walking and is starting to sniff and take in the adventure.

In addition to her individual short walks – which are getting longer and longer as her health improves – Jessica includes her on more vigorous outings with her dogs by bringing Kissy along in a stroller. She's easy going but doesn't want to be left out of the fun! Jessica also found that Kissy loves to chase balls and that was initially part of her exercise routine. Unfortunately, Kissy was experiencing lameness in a rear leg and has been diagnosed with a torn anterior cruciate ligament (ACL). Until that can be resolved (possibly with surgery, after she has lost more weight), her exercise is limited to walking.

With the change in diet and gentle exercise, Kissy has lost 4 pounds in six weeks; this has improved her health and her future and her world has blossomed. DARP will continue to provide the care she needs until she is placed in a permanent home. For updates about Kissy, visit DARP's Facebook page: [facebook.com/DogwoodAnimalRescue/](https://www.facebook.com/DogwoodAnimalRescue/). As we go to press, DARP is accepting applications for Kissy's adoption. To apply, or to support DARP's mission (rescue, rehoming, spay/neuter, education), see [dogwoodanimalrescue.org](https://www.dogwoodanimalrescue.org).



so that a larger volume of food can be fed.

When food needs to be reduced over prolonged periods, specialized diets may be prescribed to ensure that nutrition deficiencies do not occur. Good nutrition is necessary for maintaining optimal health and for managing certain diseases.

Exercise is important for general health, but that's not the only reason it helps: Muscles burn more calories than body fat, and increasing exercise helps build muscle mass.

Work closely with your veterinarian to develop a safe and appropriate exercise plan, too. If your dog is not accustomed to exercise, do not begin with a vigorous new regimen as it can be dangerous. Slow and steady tends to work best, with increases as your dog becomes healthier.

REASONS TO GO SLOW

Canine weight loss programs can be long-term projects and healthy weight maintenance is lifelong. While the length of time it takes a dog to return to an ideal body weight varies, don't be surprised if it takes nine months or more to reach that goal. Focus on incremental successes, such as an improvement in BCS or reduction of a health problem.

Keep in mind, too, that it doesn't

take a lot of weight loss to make a dog feel better. Even modest losses can be of benefit. A 2010 study found that there were discernable improvements in the mobility of obese dogs with concurrent arthritis after just a 6% weight loss.

A position paper published by the University of California-Davis School of Veterinary Medicine ("Nutritional Management of Weight") recommends that dogs lose no more than 2% of their body weight per week. If the loss rate exceeds this, dogs may feel hungry and engage in food-seeking behaviors. Worse, their metabolism may slow (which makes weight loss more difficult) and muscle mass may be lost as the body burns muscle tissue for energy instead of body fat. After beginning a weight-loss program, periodic rechecks and weigh-ins are necessary to ensure that the approach is working and continues to work; often a plan will require tailoring to maintain optimal efficacy.

YOU HAVE ONE JOB

In 2017, *PLOS One* published the results of a three-month observational study of weight loss in 926 overweight dogs conducted at 340 veterinary practices in 27 countries. The dogs were fed a commercially available dry

or wet weight-loss diet; the amounts fed were determined according to the dog's estimated ideal weight.

The short duration of the study did not permit most dogs to reach their target weight, but even so, owners reported positive changes including improved activity and quality of life. But the study *also* highlighted the problem of owner noncompliance. The success of a weight-loss program depends on owners; maintaining owner compliance often proves to be a challenge for veterinary professionals. In this study, nearly 40% of the owners who enrolled their dogs did not complete the trial, similar to retention rates of other field weight-loss studies.

It is our responsibility to protect our dogs – we all agree on that. So remember: By keeping your dog lean, you are helping to prevent him from developing debilitating diseases and live a longer, healthier, and happier life. Keep that in mind when he's begging for treats, and give him a carrot! He'll be the better for it. 🐾

Barbara Dobbins, a former dog trainer, writes about dogs and studies canine ethology. She lives in the San Francisco Bay area with her dogs, Tico and Parker (a 5 and a 4 on the body condition scale, respectively).

Dog Weight Loss Resources

- **Dog Food Logic**, by Linda P. Case, M.S. Dogwise Publishing, 2014
- **Walk a Hound, Lose a Pound: How You & Your Dog Can Lose Weight, Stay Fit, and Have Fun**, by Phil Zeltzman and Rebecca A. Johnson. Purdue University Press, 2011
- **American College of Veterinary Nutrition**
acvn.org/frequently-asked-questions/#Overweight
- **Association for Pet Obesity Prevention (APOP)**
petobesityprevention.org
- **The Global Pet Obesity Initiative Position Statement**
petobesityprevention.org/about/#GPOI
- **UC Davis Veterinary Medicine, Small Animal Nutrition**
vetmed.ucdavis.edu/hospital/animal-health-topics/weight
- **World Small Animal Veterinary Association Global Nutrition Committee**
wsava.org/committees/global-nutrition-committee/





Life Lessons Learned From Training Dogs

Discovering the power of an affirming feedback loop.

When I first started to learn about training, it was in the world of competitive dog obedience. In that specialized niche, dog training was mostly separate from everyday life. You trained the dog to do difficult but stylized stuff. It was a sport, a competition, a mini-culture. I jumped in, competing with several dogs. This changed the course of my life a bit, adding new interests, activities, and friends.

But a friend used to tease me and ask why this training didn't include anything practical. Why didn't it teach my dogs not to jump on her when greeting? I would weakly tell her about the Canine Good Citizen classes and test, which are a great step in the right direction in the obedience world. But I also knew in my heart that a dog could easily pass the CGC at that time and have poor manners in real life. (I know because I did it with two dogs!) There was something missing.

I only gradually learned about another type of dog training – one that is based on the science of learning but is *also* all about practicality. This type applies to everything from helping dogs get along in human homes to agility to search and rescue. (It applies beautifully to competitive obedience as well.) It considers the ethics of changing functional behaviors. It encourages us to learn about dog body language so that we may better perceive our dogs' response to training and other situations. This type of training emphasizes enriching our dogs' lives even as we may need to change some human-unfriendly behaviors.

It help us realize that the laws of learning apply to humans too. Professional dog trainers train humans as much as they train dogs.

This was the new-to-me world of training that I had hoped was out there. This was the missing piece. And

when I finally found it, the lessons I learned caused sea changes in my life, my beliefs, and my behavior.

Here are three of the many things I've learned:

1 Perceive the dog (or person) in front of me.

I tend to live in my head. My friends tell me they could rearrange the furniture in my house and I wouldn't notice. I believe my thoughts. So when things go counter to my expectations, I don't always notice right away.

A potent example of this happened when I took in my once-feral puppy, Clara. She had grown up wild to the age of about 11 weeks; her mother had a litter of puppies in

The author's formerly feral puppy, Clara. Despite her seemingly innocent puppy charm, the time that Clara had spent fending for herself in the world made her a tougher customer than she appeared.



the woods and I and other people in the neighborhood were feeding the mother in hopes of catching and rescuing the whole family. The puppy came in my house – completely ignoring me and slipping past me through the door – because she heard my dogs barking. She started to engage with them and I closed the door behind her – captured! In the space of an hour she had accepted my dogs and me, too.

When Clara accepted me, I assumed that would extend to the rest of the human race. She was young and she had turned the corner very quickly with me. Plus, she was a puppy! Puppies are fun; puppies are joyful. Puppies return our love for them!

The next day I put her in my car to take her to the vet for an exam and vaccinations. On the way, I stopped at a friend's house to show her my new puppy. My friend stuck her head in the car and Clara growled – and *not* a cute growl. But I didn't believe what my ears heard! I encouraged my friend to look in again and reach her hand out. This was met with louder and lower growls. Yikes!

That's what it took to make me let go of my "puppy" preconception. I finally noticed that this puppy was extremely uncomfortable and doing rather un-puppyish things.

Clara's extreme case forced me to learn and relearn this lesson: Perceive the actual dog in front of you, instead of your preconceived idea of the dog in front of you. I have become more observant because of her!

But *you* don't need a feral puppy to make this mistake. When you plan an outing with your dog that you're sure she'll like, how long does it take you to notice if she is *not* enjoying it?

If you're like me, you might have had a picture all fixed in your head of the wonderful time you were going to have together. It can sometimes take a while to notice that your beloved dog is not happy. She may not like the noise or the water or the other dogs or whatever and she has been trying to drag you back to the car. Oh! There is a real dog here on the end of my leash, and she's not acting like the imaginary one in my head!

THE DOG IS OKAY

Interestingly, it works the other way as well. A dog might actually be okay when we assume she is distressed. I had this experience with my elderly dog Cricket after she developed canine cognitive dysfunction. Dementia, in humans and in dogs, is a tragedy. It is terrible and heartbreaking to see your loved one's cognitive functions fail. My Cricket did go through what

appeared to be a period of anxiety in the early and middle stages of her dementia. But she was fortunate because as the disease progressed, she got *less* distressed, not more. But it took me a while to catch up with this and believe it.

For a long time, I would experience a wave of sympathy and grief when Cricket walked in circles, forgot what she had just done, or zoned out in a corner. But I came to believe, through careful observation and what we know of dog cognition, that she wasn't suffering when she did these things.

Unlike me, she didn't remember her former capabilities and grieve them. She didn't show frustration or anxiety as the disease progressed. The dog in front of me was impaired, but she was actually doing okay.

2 See the good. This sounds simple enough. Most of us know the benefits of "seeing the good in the world" and looking on the bright side. But that's not what I'm talking about. I'm not talking about attitudes or the big picture. I'm talking about the *little* picture.

In positive reinforcement-based training, we set the stage for the behaviors we want. When our dogs perform them, we reinforce with food, play, and other things that work for that particular dog. But we have to *see* the behaviors first. We have to pay attention.

One method of developing a new behavior is capturing. With this method, we are on the lookout all the time for a behavior we want in a specific context. We look for the moment our dog bows, does a fold-back down, or checks in with us in a tough situation. We reinforce it. We are looking for what we want, rather than reacting to all the stuff we don't want.

After a while, capturing can gen-



These folks are watching the conclusion of a bicycle race. As each bike whizzes by, people ring cowbells and cheer. This dog's owner hasn't yet realized that her dog is stressed by all this, even though the dog is trying hard to say she would like to leave.

eralize – for the human! We aren't looking for just that one behavior anymore. We notice all sorts of cool and helpful stuff that our dogs do.

It's easy to notice the bad stuff; we are wired that way. It's a survival issue. If our forebears missed seeing the stand of blackberries, the ripe pecans on the ground, or the excellent fishing hole, they might've gone hungry. Usually, however, they got another chance. But if they missed noticing the coiled snake or the rip tide – well, they weren't anyone's forebears.

This is not to say that positive reinforcement is flimsy. Far from it. We have to eat eventually, after we finish hiding from the tigers. We have to do it regularly or we die. It's just that things that are dangerous or unpleasant grab us by the amygdala.

But I learned to notice when my dog did the right thing, the pleasant thing, or the safe thing. And this habit spread slowly to the rest of my life. I started noticing the good more, and that led to behavior change on *my* part. I not only noticed the good, but also encouraged it.

It meant going out of my way to say, "Thank you" – and not only in rote social situations, but in circumstances where a little observation told me that the person had gone out of their way to do something kind or helpful. It meant seeing common ground with difficult people. It meant sticking up for someone I disagreed with if they were arguing politely and fairly. It meant complimenting perfect strangers if I liked how they were interacting with their kids, their parents, or their animals.

Finally, it made me examine my values carefully. What is "good," to me anyway? If I'm going to encourage people in certain behaviors, I'd better have thought things through!



Humans are hard-wired to notice problems and imperfections. It takes a lot of practice to learn to notice (and reinforce) all the tiny good things our dogs do – even when we know that the more we reinforce the behaviors we want, the more the dog will do them.

Most adults have been bopped on the head by reality many times when trying to change habits. Yet we still can buy the idea that we should be able to change a dog's behavior instantly when said behavior is currently working great for the dog. And even if we are taking our time to train the dog well and the dog is a happy participant – we are *still* working against habits.

What I have learned from dog training and behavior science and by paying attention is that changing an ingrained behavior can be slow. When I see how difficult it can be for me, it gives me more patience with my dogs (and with people, too!).

COMPLEMENTARY LESSONS

These three lessons enhance each other. Not being hampered by preconceptions (#1) helps me see the good in a situation (#2), and patience (#3) helps me shape the good that is already there into something better. This is true for dog training, people training, and my own personal growth. 🐾

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Dog trainer Eileen Anderson writes about behavior science, her life with dogs, and training with positive reinforcement on her blog (eileenanddogs.com). Her book, Remember Me? Loving and Caring for a Dog with Canine Cognitive Dysfunction, won a Dog Writers Association of America Maxwell Award for 2016. See page 24 for book purchasing and contact information.

3 Have patience with behavior change. I can remember the days when I thought I should be able to change my dog's behavior instantly, if only I knew the right trick or could buy the right gizmo. Abracadabra, and the dog no longer jumps over the fence into the garden. There is some kind of disconnect in our culture about that. Because even if we haven't heard of things like learning theory, positive reinforcement, or extinction, we are probably familiar with habits.

We know habits are hard to change – and I'm not even talking about addictions, just everyday habits! How long does it take you to consistently remember to take the new route to work because of the long-term construction happening on your usual route? What about that time four weeks into the new route when you were daydreaming and went the old way again?

How many times do you try to flip on a light switch when you know your power is out? How long does it take to change your posture because of your physical therapist's instructions? To breathe differently?



What's ahead...

► **Adopt or Shop**

People are often made to feel as if they've done something wrong if they buy a puppy, but purchasing from a good breeder is a great move for many families. The trick is identifying a good breeder.

► **No Surfing**

"Counter surfing" (taking food from kitchen counters and tables) vexes owners and can even threaten a dog's life. Here's how to deal with this bothersome behavior.

► **When You Can't Just Ignore It**

Five reasons that "ignoring" unwanted behaviors often fails to extinguish those behaviors.

► **What is "One Health"?**

It shouldn't be surprising that overweight or sickly dogs often live with overweight or sickly humans. This approach focuses on improving the health of the entire household.

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