

**Eat well.**  
**Play more.**  
**Live longer.**

Give your puppy all the ingredients  
for a healthy, happy life.

**#WeighUp**



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# Give your puppy the perfect start in life!

**We know how exciting it is to welcome a new puppy into your home. Equally, we understand how daunting it can feel to be responsible for their health and happiness. Diet and exercise plays a big part in ensuring your pup has a great start in life, so we've produced this guide to help you.**

Overweight dogs tend to have shorter lifespans, and are at a much higher risk of developing serious disease later in life. Despite this, worryingly, our 2021 PDSA Animal Wellbeing (PAW) Report found that only 56% of puppy owners\* thought overweight pets were likely to have a shortened lifespan, and 26% didn't believe that overweight pets were any more likely to suffer from serious diseases.

The first few months of your puppy's life are vital. To give them the best start in life, we need to help them to stay at a healthy weight.

## Lay the foundations for a happy and healthy future

Start as you mean to go on – if you feed your pup the right amount of a high quality puppy food and give them the correct amount of exercise from day one, they are likely to be the perfect weight and grow into a happy, fit adult dog. Dogs who aren't used to regular exercise and the correct diet for their age and lifestyle tend to gain weight, develop health problems as they age, and may find it difficult to adapt to a change in lifestyle later on if they need to lose weight.

## We can make a difference

By working together, we can give our pets the best start so they can go on to live long, happy, healthy lives. This handy guide includes diet, exercise and behaviour advice to help your puppy grow into a healthy dog.

Visit our  
**Pet Health Hub**  
for expert advice  
on how to care  
for your pet  
[here](#)

### Did you know

Overweight dogs may live up to 2.5 years less than those at an ideal weight\*\*



\*owners of a dog aged 1 year old or younger.

\*\* Salt C et al. Association between life span and body condition in neutered client-owned dogs. J Vet Intern Med 2018;1-11



## Eat well...

**Puppies need a balanced diet and the correct amount of food to help them grow into healthy adult dogs.**

They have different nutritional needs at each stage of their development, so it's essential you choose the right food to support them - from the moment they first come home to you at eight weeks old to when they're fully grown.

### What should I feed my puppy?

Puppies need a good quality, commercially available complete Food made especially for them - a specific puppy food designed to meet their nutritional needs and support their development. Look for the Pet Food Manufacturers Association label - members of this organisation meet extra quality standards above the legal minimum.

Complete puppy Food is available as wet or dry:

- **Wet Food** can be more palatable and provides additional moisture, which means less calories for the same volume of food.
- **Biscuits or kibble** can help to keep teeth clean and can also be used as treats.



You can visit our  
**PDSA Pet Store** to  
buy puppy food.

## Before you bring your puppy home

Ask your puppy's breeder:

- ✓ What food are they used to eating?
- ✓ How many times a day do they eat?
- ✓ What time of day do they eat?
- ✓ How much food are they eating?

Continue with the same food and routine when your puppy first comes home - they can get upset tummies from sudden diet changes.

If you want to change your puppy's diet:

- Give them a few weeks to settle in their new home before making any changes.
- Take it slowly, offer just a small amount of the new food at first.
- Gradually increase the amount of new Food offered and reduce their old diet.
- Aim to make the change over 7-14 days.

Puppies need puppy food. Adult dog food does not contain the correct balance of nutrients that your puppy needs for growth.





## How much and how often should I feed my puppy?

Puppies have small tummies, so their daily food allowance needs to be split into small meals fed regularly throughout the day. The feeding guide on your puppy food pack will tell you how much food your puppy needs daily for their age, depending on what their adult weight will be. Weigh this out and split into smaller portions - using digital scales to weigh your puppy's food is a lot more accurate than using a measuring cup. Here is a guide\* on how often you should feed your pup.

### How often should I feed my puppy?\*



Age	Feeding Guidance
8 to 16 weeks	Feed <b>4x</b> per day
16 weeks to 6 months	Feed <b>3x</b> per day
6+ months	Feed <b>twice</b> a day

\*Guideline only, individual puppy needs may vary

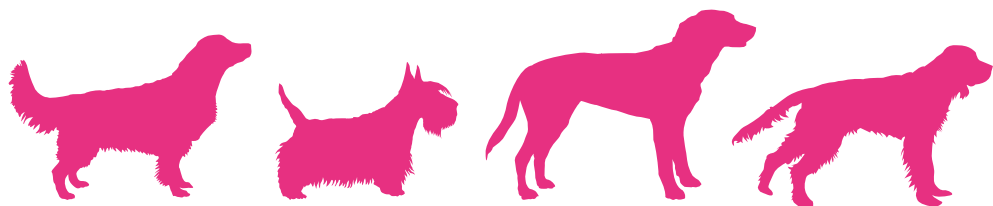
### Did you know

Feeding little and often helps to prevent your puppy from overeating, which can cause constipation or diarrhoea, as well as being uncomfortable for them.

## Catering for different dog breeds

Dog breeds come in all shapes and sizes, from tiny Chihuahuas to giant Irish Wolfhounds, which means they have different nutritional needs.

Larger breeds mature more slowly and need puppy food that provides the right balance of nutrients to support bone and joint health throughout their growth which can take up to 2 years in giant breeds. Smaller breeds mature earlier, and have smaller teeth and weaker jaws, so they need a smaller puppy kibble containing the right nutrition for them.



## Treats for your pup

Treats are ideal for reward-based training. Saving special treats for training provides an excellent incentive for your puppy to learn good behaviours and habits. To keep your puppy healthy, you'll need to reduce the amount of food in their meals to compensate for the extra calories in treats. Keep their diet balanced by only feeding up to 10% of their daily allowance as treats - why not try using some of their daily biscuits or lower calorie treats for training?



## Human food scraps

Our vets advise you not to share your own meals and leftovers with your dog because:

- It can result in your puppy lacking vital nutrients.
- Many foods are high in fat, sugar and salt.
- Puppies may refuse to eat their balanced diet.
- Some human foods are poisonous, e.g. chocolate, grapes, onions and garlic.
- It can encourage begging behaviour during mealtimes.

### A healthier option

A small piece of plain steamed chicken breast or a flake of white fish is a perfect reward and low in fat.

### Feeding your puppy\*...



**CHIPS**



...is like you eating a **portion of battered fish**

\*Based on a 5kg puppy

## Neutered dogs need fewer calories

Many people believe that neutering makes their pets fat - that's not quite the case. Neutered dogs can be more prone to weight gain and generally need fewer calories, while also seeming to want to eat more. Diets designed specifically for neutered dogs will provide all the nutrients needed while also helping your dog to feel more satisfied with fewer calories.

You will need to adjust your puppy's food once they're fully recovered from their surgery. Changing to a new food should be taken slowly over 7-14 days, to prevent upset tummies.

Visit the **PDSA Pet Store** for our range of feeding accessories.

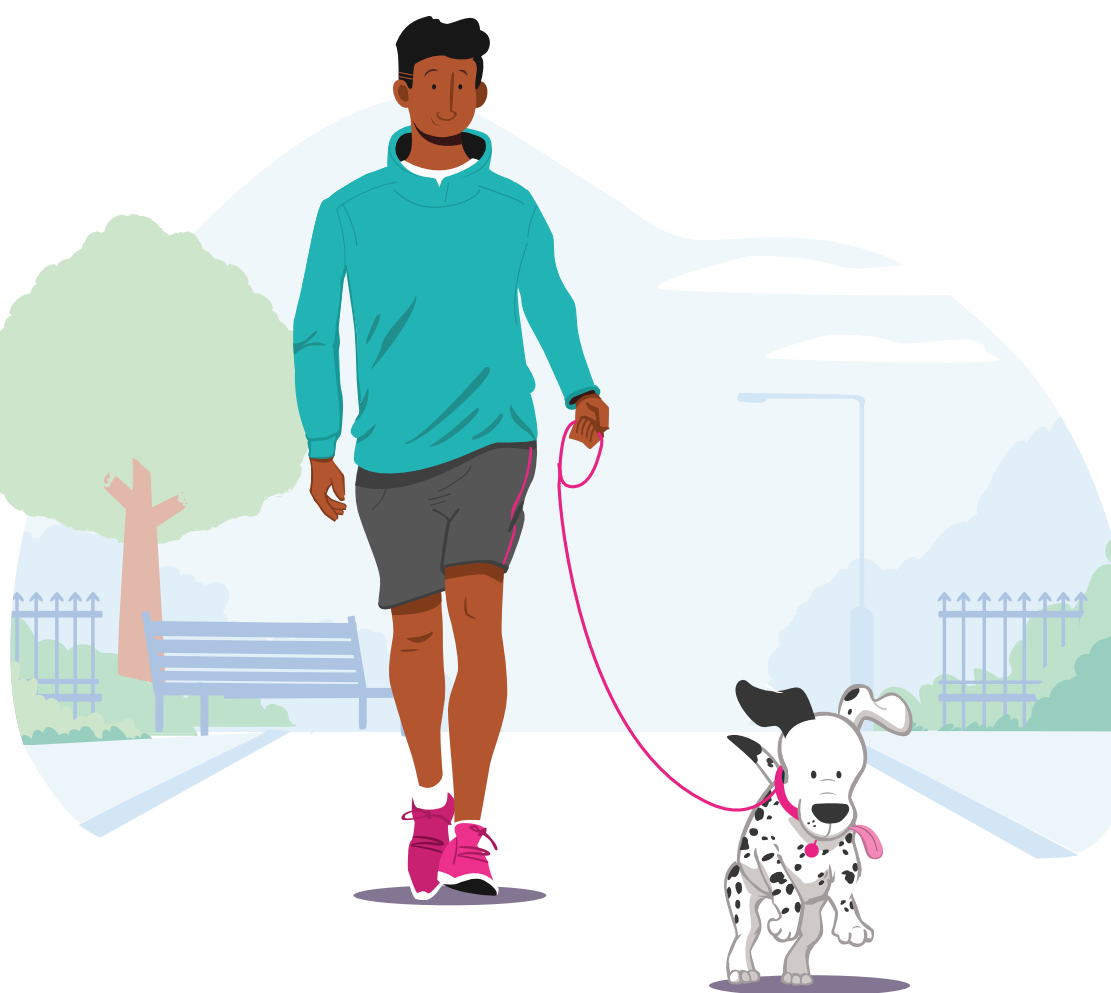
### Neutered dogs need fewer calories



**Reduce by**

**30%\***

\*Guideline only, individual dog needs may vary



## Play more...

**Puppies need daily exercise to keep them fit and healthy.**

Walks and playtime help your puppy to develop both physically and mentally, and provide an opportunity for you to build an unbreakable bond with them.

## How much exercise do puppies need?

Puppies need exercise to help their muscles and bones develop properly as well as for their mental health. The amount of daily exercise your dog needs depends on their breed, age, health, fitness and personality.

Your dog's breed plays a large part in their natural energy levels, and therefore exercise requirements. For example, a Border Collie, initially bred to work, will have higher energy levels than a Shih Tzu. It's a good idea to research what your dog may have been originally bred for to see how much exercise they could need, but no matter what breed you choose, all dogs love to exercise to have fun and keep their brains stimulated.

It's widely reported that puppies should get five minutes of walking time for each month of age. However, there's very little evidence to back this up and the type of exercise your puppy gets is much more important than clock watching! Use the table below only as a rough guide to start with and adjust according to your puppy's needs.

Age	Approximate time per walk*
2 months	10 mins
3 months	15 mins
4 months	20 mins
6 months	30 mins

**Aim for two or more walks daily, with playtime in between. Remember, as they get older, your puppy will need to exercise for longer.**

\*This is a starting point only

## Should I ever limit exercise?

Puppies need to exercise daily, but it's important to let them rest too. Think about your puppy playing with other dogs the same age - they would naturally take breaks and rest, so it's important that you let them do this too. Don't take them for fast walks, let them wander at their own pace and take their time. Always stop any activity with your puppy before they get too tired - never push them to do more than they are capable of.

You should also avoid any exercise that puts strain on your puppy's developing body. Jumping, leaping, turning, and fast running can all cause joint problems in the future.



Until your puppy has completed their vaccination course, they'll need to exercise at home to keep them safe from diseases.





## Your puppy's favourite games

Exercise for your puppy isn't just about walks! Through play, puppies learn new skills, begin to understand boundaries, and (of course) have lots of fun! Your puppy will tell you when they want to play by being active and alert; they may race around, bark at you or even start chewing the furniture! Keep games short and varied to help them stay interested, so you can work out what your puppy enjoys most.

Most puppies like to:

- Play with toys.
- Run through tunnels.
- Chase.
- Run across see-saws.
- Retrieve.
- Learn new tricks (sit, stay and rollover).

Avoid games that involve jumping, as this can damage developing bones and joints, a particular risk in larger breed dogs.

Spot the signs when they've had enough and need a break. When your puppy starts to lose interest, don't try and force them to play; let your pup take a well-earned rest. Young puppies use lots of energy playing and growing, so they need lots of sleep.

Remember, a full-on, crazy playtime may make your puppy get over-excited, which can also be a sign they need to take a break and rest!



You can visit our  
**PDSA Pet Store** for  
our range of  
dog toys.



## Your first walkies together

Once your puppy's fully vaccinated, you'll be able to take them for walks!

Walks allow your puppy to experience all the new sights, sounds and smells in their world, so let them take their time to explore. There'll be many stops and starts as new things like cars and lorries, dogs and children catch their attention, which can be exciting but also overwhelming for your four-legged friend.

The early days of walking should be a positive experience to help your pup gain confidence. So when they react calmly to a new experience, give them praise and a treat to reward their behaviour.

Be careful not to force your puppy into a situation that they feel uncomfortable with. Look out for body language such as licking lips, yawning and looking away, which can be a sign that they don't feel comfortable. Never punish a puppy if they don't do what you want - this will cause them real worry and concern and potentially damage the trusted bond between you.

Puppies need gentle, low-impact exercise while their bones and joints grow, so opt for short gentle strolls rather than fast-paced marches. If your puppy likes to run, let them but at their own pace not yours.



# Best behaviour

The habits we help our puppies learn in their first few months can have a big impact on their future health and happiness.

If their needs aren't met, puppies can start to look for other things to keep them occupied and their behaviour can become destructive. If your puppy is showing unwanted behaviours, try to understand why they're happening - read our vets' top tips below.



## Beat the boredom

If your puppy isn't getting enough mental and physical stimulation, they may feel bored and develop destructive behaviours like chewing. Try increasing their daily walks or visiting some new places.



## Make mealtime fun

Your puppy's meal doesn't have to be fed in a bowl - puzzle feeders and toys stuffed with food help keep them occupied for longer and can help to reduce overeating. Or why not try placing their food allowance around your home, so they have to search for it.



## Bad habits

Habits such as begging for food can become hard to break if your puppy learns that they get rewarded with a tasty treat when they put on the puppy dog eyes or even scratch at your leg. Keep pups away from the table while you're eating so you're not tempted to give them tidbits from your plate.



## Avoid confusion

Try not to confuse your puppy as they learn. If you give a puppy an old shoe to chew, they will think that it's ok to chew all shoes. If your puppy jumps at your dressing gown belt or other interesting dangling things, tie them up to stop your puppy learning to jump up.

Remember that puppies want to please, so give them the best chance at getting it right and simply ignore when they make a mistake.



## Socialisation

Socialisation helps your puppy become a happy, friendly and confident adult. Ensure experiences during their socialisation period (up to around 16 weeks) are positive; this will help them understand what to expect and how to react in situations later in life.

**Find out more about socialising your puppy.**



## Rewards

Reward-based training using treats is the best way for your puppy to learn about how you want them to behave. The treats need to be exciting enough for your puppy to want them, but they only need very small pieces at each training session to keep the calories down. Once they understand the command, you can reduce how often they get the reward, but remember to still give treats every now and then to remind them!

**You can visit our PDSA Pet Store for a range of dog treats.**



## Pre-vaccinations

Think about ways to gradually expose your puppy to new sights and sounds before they're fully vaccinated. Maybe you could carry them down the street for a walk or have friends over. The more experiences they encounter, the easier it is for them to cope when they grow up.

Everything will be new to your puppy when they're tiny, so it's easy for them to get overwhelmed. If your pup becomes tired, stressed or overexcited, let them rest.



## Leaving your puppy alone

Your puppy needs to be comfortable being without you. Start by leaving them for a few minutes, then gradually build up the time until they're happy to be left alone for longer periods.

Adult dogs must not be left alone for more than 4 hours, and puppies for much less time than this. Puppies can become distressed if left alone for too long, which can massively impact their emotional health and cause problems with their toilet training too.



## Creating a routine

Your pup must get used to your usual routine. While it can be tempting to play with your new puppy all day, they need to get used to regular bedtimes, alone time, exercise and mealtimes.



## Training

Training classes are great for socialisation and exercise. You will learn lots of new skills and how to work together as a team, helping you to understand each other. Look for an ABTC accredited trainer who uses positive reinforcement techniques.





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after your pet

## #WeighUp

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how to care for your pet

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