

Puppy Wellness Checklist: For Puppies (Approx. 8 Weeks to 6 Months) 🐕✅

Bringing a puppy home is an exciting adventure! The first few months are crucial for their development, health, and setting the foundation for a well-adjusted adult dog. Use this checklist to ensure you're providing the best possible care for your new furry family member.

1. Veterinary Care & Preventive Health 🩺

Frequency: Critical during this stage; follow vet's schedule closely

[] **Initial Vet Check-up:** Schedule within a few days of bringing puppy home.

[] **Puppy Vaccination Series:** Ensure all rounds of core vaccines (Distemper, Parvovirus, Adenovirus) are completed, following your vet's schedule.

[] **Rabies Vaccination:** Administer as required by law and vet's recommendation.

[] **Kennel Cough (Bordetella) Vaccine:** Discuss if appropriate for your puppy's lifestyle (e.g., puppy classes, daycare).

[] **Parasite Screenings:** Multiple fecal exams to check for intestinal parasites (worms, giardia, coccidia).

[] **Deworming:** Administer as recommended by your vet based on screenings.

[] **Heartworm Prevention:** Start monthly preventative as recommended by your vet.

[] **Flea & Tick Control:** Start appropriate preventative as recommended by your vet.

[] **Spay/Neuter Discussion:** Talk to your vet about the optimal timing for this procedure.

[] **Microchip:** Ensure puppy is microchipped and registered with your contact information.

[] **Weight Monitoring:** Regular weigh-ins at vet visits to ensure healthy growth.

2. Nutrition 🍽️

Frequency: Daily

[] **High-Quality Puppy Food:** Feed a complete and balanced diet specifically formulated for puppies (AAFCO compliant). Choose a formula appropriate for their expected adult size (e.g., small, medium, large/giant breed).

[] **Portion Control:** Measure food accurately according to manufacturer guidelines, adjusting for growth and activity. Avoid overfeeding.

[] **Consistent Feeding Schedule:** Feed 3-4 times daily (as recommended for young puppies), then gradually reduce to 2-3 times daily as they grow.

[] **Puppy-Safe Treats:** Use small, soft, puppy-appropriate treats for training. Limit treat intake to avoid upsetting their digestion or contributing to weight gain.

[] **Fresh Water:** Ensure constant access to clean, fresh water.

[] **Avoid Harmful Foods:** Absolutely no chocolate, grapes/raisins, xylitol, onions, garlic, etc. (Puppies are prone to ingesting things!).

3. Exercise & Physical Activity

Frequency: Daily (age-appropriate)

[] **Multiple Short Play Sessions:** Engage in several short bursts of play throughout the day (e.g., 5-10 minutes per session).

[] **Age-Appropriate Exercise:** Avoid over-exercising young puppies, especially large breeds, to protect developing joints. No forced long runs or excessive jumping.

[] **Controlled Walks:** Short, positive walks on a leash in safe areas (after vaccinations are complete). Focus on exposure to new sights and sounds.

[] **Safe Play Area:** Ensure a secure and safe environment for play (e.g., fenced yard, puppy-proofed indoor space).

[] **Mental Stimulation:** Combine physical activity with mental challenges (e.g., gentle fetch, simple hide-and-seek).

4. Training & Mental Stimulation

Frequency: Daily & Ongoing

[] **Potty Training:** Establish a consistent schedule, positive reinforcement for going outside, and quick clean-up of accidents.

[] **Crate Training:** Introduce crate positively as a safe, comfortable den.

[] **Basic Obedience:** Start teaching "sit," "stay," "come," "down," and "leave it" using positive reinforcement. Keep sessions short and fun.

[] **Leash Training:** Introduce collar/harness and leash positively, allowing puppy to get used to wearing them.

[] **Bite Inhibition:** Teach puppy to control their bite pressure (through yelping and disengaging).

[] **Socialization:** Safely expose puppy to a wide variety of positive experiences: different people, sights, sounds, textures, and vaccinated, friendly dogs (e.g., puppy classes).

[] **Mental Enrichment:** Provide appropriate chew toys, puzzle feeders, and rotate toys to keep them engaged.

[] **Address Nipping/Chewing:** Redirect inappropriate chewing onto acceptable toys.

[] **Puppy Classes:** Enroll in positive reinforcement puppy classes for training and socialization.

5. Grooming & Hygiene

Frequency: Weekly to Daily (depending on needs)

[] **Brushing:** Brush regularly to accustom them to grooming and manage shedding.

[] **Bathing:** Bathe as needed with puppy-specific shampoo. Make it a positive experience.

[] **Nail Trims:** Introduce nail trims early and frequently to get puppy comfortable. Trim small amounts regularly.

[] **Ear Checks:** Gently check ears weekly for redness, odor, or discharge.

[] **Eye Care:** Gently wipe away any eye discharge.

[] **Oral Care:** Start gently handling puppy's mouth and introducing a puppy toothbrush/finger brush with puppy toothpaste.

[] **Handling Practice:** Accustom puppy to being touched all over (paws, ears, mouth) in preparation for vet visits and grooming.

6. Safety & Environment 🏠🐾

Frequency: Constant

[] **Puppy-Proof Home:** Securely store all toxic substances (cleaners, medications, chemicals), remove toxic plants, and electrical cords.

[] **Hazardous Objects:** Keep small objects, plastic bags, strings, and choking hazards out of reach.

[] **Secure Area:** Ensure puppy has a safe, designated space (crate, puppy pen) when unsupervised.

[] **ID Tag & Microchip:** Ensure puppy wears an ID tag with current contact info and is microchipped and registered.

[] **Supervision:** Constant supervision, especially in new environments or when exploring.

[] **No Hot Cars:** Never leave a puppy in a car, even for a short time.

7. Socialization & Emotional Well-being ❤️🐕

Frequency: Daily & Ongoing (especially during critical window: 3-16 weeks)

[] **Positive Experiences:** Expose puppy to a wide variety of positive sights, sounds, smells, people (all ages, appearances), and safe, vaccinated dogs.

[] **Gentle Handling:** Handle puppy frequently and gently to accustom them to human touch.

[] **Quality Time:** Spend dedicated time playing, cuddling, and interacting with your puppy.

[] **Comfort & Security:** Provide a safe, comfortable, and predictable environment.

[] **Patience & Positive Reinforcement:** Be patient with accidents and missteps; always use positive, reward-based methods.

[] **Monitor Stress:** Learn to recognize signs of fear or stress in your puppy and avoid overwhelming them.

By consistently following this checklist, you'll be giving your puppy the best possible start in life, helping them grow into a healthy, well-behaved, and happy adult dog. Enjoy these precious puppy moments!