

Getting out and about with your new puppy



Those first few weeks with your new puppy can seem super frustrating – you really want to be taking your puppy everywhere. Still, the risks of them contracting disease mean you are limited to Puppy Class, backyard activities and trips in the car until their primary course of vaccinations are completed.

Before long, your puppy will have had its final puppy vaccination and will have been cleared by your vet. Now is the time to get your puppy out and about. This is an integral part of the socialisation process and is an excellent opportunity to make sure your puppy gets to see the sights and sounds it is likely to experience throughout its life.

Keeping your puppy safe

Before you head out, make sure that your puppy is wearing a correctly fitting collar with some clear identification attached. Puppies grow so fast that you will end up making a lot of adjustments to their collar in a very short amount of time. Within a few months, you may even need to move to the next sized collar.

Before you head outside, make sure you inspect the collar for wear and tear and ensure it fits securely, and make sure your leash has no damage that might cause it to break.

Although your puppy will be microchipped (which can help get your puppy home should it become lost), you also want some form identification that can be read without a scanner. A collar tag or a collar that has the dog's name and your phone number on it is ideal.

Remember that collar bells and heavy tags can be quite distressing to young puppies, so try to find a solution that is appropriate to the size of your pup and does not make too much noise.



Puppies do not come with any road sense, and at this age, your recall will not yet be reliable. Make sure that you do not let your new puppy off the leash in any place where it could run into traffic, or stray onto a road should it get frightened or distracted.

Look for safe, fenced areas and take the opportunity to practice 'coming when called' everywhere you go, use a long line if needed, and always reward your pup heavily for getting it right.

The dangers of the 'Dog Park'

Many people head to the local dog park or off-leash area as soon as their puppy is cleared to go out. The dog park sounds like a great idea, and there are always lots of dogs about, and it looks like great fun. However, at this young age, it is important that your puppy does not have any bad experiences.

Unfortunately, many of the dogs in these areas are often poorly supervised by their owners (who often meet for a chat). They may also be poorly trained (not coming back when called by their owners). Although their owners may think their dogs are friendly, often they are rude, in your face, and unrelenting – all things that may scare your young puppy. Bigger dogs may frighten your puppy just due to their size – and if the first experience your puppy has of a big dog is that dog running at full speed towards it – they may become very fearful.

Instead, look for places that are relatively quiet, where there are no dogs loose, and where there are plenty of options should you need to change direction or move your puppy to a safer place. Make sure you pack your puppy's toys and some high-value treats so you can reward your puppy for calm behaviour, nice leash manners, and paying attention to you even when there are distractions.

Puppies are learning all the time, so these walks are more about the experiences than the exercise. Let your puppy sniff, stop for a game, practice some recalls, and maybe even ask people who stop to have a chat or admire your new puppy to give your pup a treat (as long as it is not jumping all over them).

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Appropriate exercise

Puppies need exercise, but they are still growing their muscles and skeleton. Studies have shown that too much heavy exercise at an early age can cause long-term damage to the puppy's bones and joints. For this reason, it is important not to over-exercise your puppy until it reaches physical maturity (depending on the breed this could be 12-18 months of age).

Until this time, your puppy can go for a short walk, play with other friendly dogs and even climb and jump small obstacles it encounters. It should not be doing any hard or fast exercise (no jogging or running with you, no running beside a bike, no long-distance hikes), and should not be encouraged or allowed to jump larger heights where the landing may stress developing bones and joints.

If you have a high-energy breed, look to tiring it out in other ways – mental stimulation with training and concentration, or scent type activities are VERY tiring and maybe the answer to burning off some energy safely.

By this age, your puppy will have finished puppy class, and it is a good idea to continue into a juvenile or beginner class at your local obedience or training club. Ask your puppy class instructor for a recommendation or head to the Dogs Victoria website to find an affiliated training club near you.

Travelling with your puppy

If you plan to travel with your dog, then now is the time to get your puppy used to getting in the car and going places. By law, all dogs need to be safely restrained within a vehicle whilst they travel. This means you will have to introduce your puppy to wearing an appropriate restraint or harness or have it get used to travelling in its crate.

Not all dogs are great travellers, and some get carsick. If your pup is having trouble with nausea in the car, there are a variety of strategies you might be able to try. Puppies often become less concerned if the trips are short and result in a positive event – like a walk at the park, or a visit with friends. Some do better if they can see out of the car windows, others do better if they have no view at all.

The chances are that you travelled by car to your puppy class or your vet visits, so your puppy will have several shorter trips already under their belt, and you can work towards longer trips over time.

If you are having problems with travel sickness, speak to your vet about medications that may help.

Holidays and your dog

These days there is an increasing number of people who include their pets in their holidays. Maybe the dog can join the family camping trip, or stay overnight at a pet-friendly motel or holiday house.

If you plan to do this, you need to teach your pup the skills it will need to make the holiday fun for everyone. Teaching your dog to travel and sleep calmly in a crate or pen is a great thing to teach all dogs.

Crate training has a host of benefits – it helps with toilet training, it helps with training calm behaviour, it helps with travel – in your vehicle or someone else's - and it means the dog has a familiar place to rest even when away from home. This in turn reduces the stress and novelty of an unfamiliar place because the crate is the same as at home.

If you cannot take your pet with you on holiday, then you will need to make other arrangements well ahead of time – you may choose to have a pet-sitter care for your animals or may choose the safety and security of a boarding kennel.

If you plan to board your dog at any stage during its life, you can certainly prepare it for this by booking it in for a day visit or single night stay at a time when the boarding kennel is not too busy. This way, your puppy can become accustomed to a night away in a strange environment, well before you have to board them there for a more extended period.