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[Home](#) > House Training Your Puppy

## House Training Your Puppy



Puppies need to be house trained in order to understand that it's not okay to eliminate in your house. House training is a simple process, but one that must be carried out positively (without punishment that scares the puppy) and consistently, following two main guidelines: 1) prevent indoor accidents through confinement and close supervision, and 2) take the puppy outside on a frequent and regular schedule and reward him for eliminating where you want him to go. House soiling can occur in any location in the home but sometimes pet parents will notice that their puppy soils more in certain locations, such as infrequently used rooms or on a specific kind of surface. Very young pups (under 12 weeks old) don't have complete bladder control and might not be able to hold it very long. Older puppies who have had accidents might not have been house trained completely.

### Why Puppies You Thought Were Housetrained Might Have Accidents

#### Too Young to Be Fully House Trained

Some puppies, especially those under 12 weeks of age, haven't developed bladder or bowel control yet.

#### Incomplete House Training

Many puppies simply haven't learned where to eliminate—or they haven't learned a way to tell their people when they need to go out. Some puppies house soil only under specific conditions. For example, your puppy may soil when he's home alone for long periods of time, first thing in the morning, sometime during the night, only when you're not watching or only in infrequently used rooms. Other puppies may urinate or defecate whenever they feel the need to go.

#### Breakdown in House Training

Sometimes puppies who seem to be house trained at one point regress and start soiling in the house again.

## Other Reasons Your Puppy Might House Soil

### Urine Marking

If your puppy is over three months of age and urinates small amounts on vertical surfaces, he may be urine marking. Young dogs engaging in this behavior often raise their hind legs when urinating. For more information about this problem, please see our article, [Urine Marking](#) <sup>[1]</sup>.

### Separation Anxiety

If your puppy only soils when he's left alone in your home, even for short periods of time, he may have separation anxiety. If this is the case, you may notice that he appears nervous or upset right before you leave him by himself or after you've left (if you can observe him while he's alone). To learn more about this problem, please see our article, [Separation Anxiety](#) <sup>[2]</sup>.

### Submissive/Excitement Urination

Your puppy may have a submissive/excitement urination problem if he only urinates during greetings, play, physical contact, scolding or punishment. If this is the case, you may notice your puppy displaying submissive postures during interactions. He may cringe or cower, roll over on his belly, tuck or lower his tail, duck his head, avert his eyes, flatten his ears or all of the above. For more information, please see our article, [Submissive Urination](#) <sup>[3]</sup>.

## Medical Causes for House Soiling

It's always a good idea to visit your puppy's veterinarian to rule out medical causes for house soiling. Some common medical reasons for inappropriate urination and defecation follow.

### Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)

Puppies with urinary tract infections usually urinate frequently and in small amounts. They may also lick their genital areas more than usual.

### Gastrointestinal Upset

If your puppy was house trained but now defecates loose stools or diarrhea in your house, he may have gastrointestinal upset for some reason.

### Change in Diet

If you've recently changed the amount or type of food you give your puppy, he may develop a house soiling problem. Often, after a diet change, a puppy will defecate loose stools or diarrhea. He may also need to eliminate more frequently or on a different schedule than before the diet change.

### Miscellaneous Medical Causes

Other medical causes include abnormalities of the genitalia that cause incontinence (loss of bladder control), various diseases that cause frequent elimination and medications that

cause frequent elimination.

## How to House Train Your Puppy

House training is accomplished by rewarding your puppy for eliminating where you want him to go (outside) AND by preventing him from urinating or defecating in unacceptable places (inside the house). You should keep crating and confinement to a minimum, but some amount of restriction is usually necessary for your puppy to learn to “hold it.” (To learn how to crate train your puppy, please see our article, [Weekend Crate Training](#) [4].)

## How Long It Will Take

Some puppies learn where and where not to eliminate at a very young age, while others take longer to understand. Most puppies can be reasonably housetrained by four to six months of age. However, some puppies are not 100% reliable until they are eight to twelve months of age. Some puppies seem to catch on early but then regress. This is normal. Keep in mind that it may take a while for your puppy to develop bowel and bladder control. He may be mentally capable of learning to eliminate outdoors instead of inside, but he may not yet be physically capable of controlling his body.

## How Often Your Puppy Needs to Go Out

All puppies are different, but a puppy can usually only hold his waste for the same number of hours as his age in months. (In other words, a four-month-old pup should not be left alone for more than four consecutive hours without an opportunity to go outside.) He can last longer at night, however, since he’s inactive (just like we can). By the time your pup is about four months old, he should be able to make it through the night without going outside.

## House Training Steps

1. Keep your puppy on a consistent daily feeding schedule and remove food between meals.
2. Take the puppy outside on a consistent schedule. Puppies should be taken out every hour, as well as shortly after meals, play and naps. All puppies should go out first thing in the morning, last thing at night and before being confined or left alone.
3. In between these outings, know where your puppy is at all times. You need to watch for early signs that he needs to eliminate so that you can anticipate and prevent accidents from happening. These signs include pacing, whining, circling, sniffing or leaving the room. If you see any of these, take your puppy outside as quickly as possible. Not all puppies learn to let their caretakers know that they need to go outside by barking or scratching at the door. Some will pace a bit and then just eliminate inside. So watch your puppy carefully.
4. If you can’t watch your puppy, he must be confined to a crate or a small room with the door closed or blocked with a baby gate. Alternatively, you can tether him to you by a leash that does not give him much leeway around you (about a six-foot leash). Gradually, over days or weeks, give your puppy more freedom, starting with freedom a small area, like the kitchen, and gradually increasing it to larger areas, or multiple rooms, in your home. If he eliminates outside, give him some free time in the house (about 15 to 20 minutes to start), and then put him back in his crate or small room. If all goes well, gradually increase the amount of time he can spend out of confinement.
5. Accompany your puppy outside and reward him whenever he eliminates outdoors with praise, treats, play or a walk. It’s best to take your puppy to the same place each time

because the smells often prompt puppies to eliminate. Some puppies will eliminate early on in a walk. Others need to move about and play for a bit first.

6. If you catch your puppy in the act of eliminating inside, clap sharply twice, just enough to startle but not scare him. (If your puppy seems upset or scared by your clapping, clap a little softer the next time you catch him in the act.) When startled, the puppy should stop in mid-stream. Immediately run with him outside, encouraging him to come with you the whole way. (If necessary, take your puppy gently by the collar to run him outside.) Allow your pup to finish eliminating outside, and then reward him with happy praise and a small treat. If he has nothing to eliminate when he gets outside, don't worry. Just try to be more watchful of him in the house in the future. If your puppy has an accident but you don't catch him in the act and only find the accident afterward, do nothing to your pup. He cannot connect any punishment with something he did hours or even minutes ago.

### Additional House Training Tips

- Clean accidents with an enzymatic cleanser to minimize odors that might attract the puppy back to the same spot.
- Once your puppy is house trained in your home, he may still have accidents when visiting others' homes. That's because puppies need to generalize their learning to new environments. Just because they seem to know something in one place does NOT mean that they'll automatically know that thing everywhere. You'll need to watch your puppy carefully when you visit new places together and be sure to take him out often.
- Likewise, if something in your puppy's environment changes, he may have a lapse in house training. For example, a puppy might seem completely house trained until you bring home a large potted tree—which may look to him like a perfect place to lift his leg!

House training does require an investment of time and effort—but it can be done! If you're consistent, your hard work will pay off. Hang in there! If you need help, don't hesitate to contact a qualified professional, such as a Certified Professional Dog Trainer (CPDT), a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (CAAB or Associate CAAB) or a board-certified veterinary behaviorist (Dip ACVB). To find one of these experts in your area, please see our article, [Finding Professional Help](#) <sup>[5]</sup>.

### What NOT to Do

- Do not rub your puppy's nose in his waste.
- Do not scold your dog for eliminating indoors. Instead, if you catch him in the act, make a noise to startle him and stop him from urinating or defecating. Then immediately show your dog where you want him to go by running with him outside, waiting until he goes, and then praising and rewarding him.
- Do not physically punish your puppy for accidents (hitting with newspaper, spanking, etc.). Realize that if your puppy has accidents in the house, you failed to adequately supervise him, you did not take him outside frequently enough, or you ignored or were unaware of his signals that he needed to go outside.
- Do not confine your puppy to a small area for hours each day, without doing anything else to correct the problem.
- Do not crate your puppy if he's soiling in the crate.
- If your puppy enjoys being outside, don't bring him inside right after he eliminates or he may learn to "hold it" so that he can stay outside longer.
- Do not clean with an ammonia-based cleanser. Urine contains ammonia. Cleaning with ammonia could attract your puppy back to the same spot to urinate again. Instead, use

an enzymatic cleaner. You can find one at some grocery stores or any major pet store.

**Tags:**

[Dog Behavior - House Training](#) [6]

[Dog Behavior - Puppy](#) [7]

**Animal:**

[Dogs](#) [8]

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**Links:**

[1] <http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/urine-marking-dogs>

[2] <http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/separation-anxiety>

[3] <http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/submissive-urination>

[4] <http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/dog-behavior/weekend-crate-training>

[5] <http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/finding-professional-help>

[6] <http://www.aspca.org/taxonomy/term/362>

[7] <http://www.aspca.org/taxonomy/term/361>

[8] <http://www.aspca.org/taxonomy/term/119>