

HOUSEBREAKING

Teaching a dog to eliminate in an acceptable area can be as easy or as difficult as the human makes it (with a few exceptions!). Even with a very messy or problematic dog, there is rarely a need to face messes which really dismay you. If you follow the step by step procedures that you will soon encounter, the whole process should be mentally and physically painless for both you and your dog.

The first step in our program **MUST** be a careful check on the dog's health. A dog suffering from **ANY** physical problem may have difficulty controlling its' excretions. This is especially true when the physical problems involve the digestive or urinary tract. There are many physical problems which contribute to housebreaking problems such as cystitis, viral and bacterial infections, kidney disease, medication reactions, diabetes, colon problems, allergies, etc. Only your veterinarian can diagnose such problems. Worms, which are **NOT** usually seen in the stool, are one of the most common health problems affecting housebreaking. They are not only a health threat; they also cause irritation and irregularity. Before you begin formally working on housebreaking, have your dog completely checked by a veterinarian, If you begin a housebreaking program and you are not making progress due to loose stools, very frequent urination or true inability on the dog's part to hold itself, **PLEASE CHECK BACK WITH YOUR VETERINARIAN!** This same advice holds in the case of a dog that has been housebroken and suddenly backslides. Your first reaction in such cases needs to be concern, not anger.

The second consideration in a successful housebreaking program is diet, I will be the first to admit that I have encountered dogs that were in perfect weight and condition and were perfectly housebroken while eating what would normally be considered a terrible diet! I must also add that such cases are very rare. As an aside, I need to state that a fat dog is not proof of a good diet. Fat dogs lead a shortened life and much of that life may be fraught with health problems directly related to their obesity. Since our dogs don't buy or mix their own food, we must take the full blame for their weight problems when caused by poor or improper diet or under or over feeding. What I am about to say applies to all dogs but is especially significant to those who are not housebroken. You want to feed your dog a good balanced food that contributes to excellent health and low stool volume. Be a wise consumer and read your labels **INCLUDING TREATS!** Ingredients are always listed in the order of their quantity in the food. A quick scan of the labels on various canned and semi moist foods will show you how unbalanced they are. With the exception of prescription canned foods, canned foods are rarely, if ever, a good choice as the whole diet. They are often too rich and greasy and can lead to copious, loose stools. Semi moist foods may firm the stools but they often contain too much salt and sugar.

Dry foods are usually the best foods (unless you choose to follow the arduous path of home cooking which does require learning a great deal about canine nutrition). The best dry foods are not in grocery stores. You want to see meat as a primary ingredient and little or no soy. There is a huge difference between say, beef flavored foods and beef based foods. Again, read, study, and **LEARN!** Be aware that not all veterinarians chose to learn about nutrition in depth. I know a high number of excellent veterinarians who discovered that they had quite a learning deficiency in the area of canine nutrition and

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they have taken the time to study more to better be able to aid their clients. The blame here actually rests with the veterinary schools that do not stress nutrition for dogs and cats but for large animals and tiny lab animals!

Keep checking product labels as time goes by. Manufacturers may change ingredients to lower costs.

Feeding times are critical. Never feed an unhousebroken dog on a self-demand basis. As a matter of fact, in general, self demand feeding isn't a very good idea. Feed on a schedule so you can be constantly vigilant about eating habits and possible problems. Feed on a regular and fairly rigid schedule and be careful with snacks. Remember that what goes in on a schedule, usually comes out on a schedule.

If your dog is a fussy eater, use some tough love. Put a tiny amount of food down. If the dog eats, fine, if not, pick it up immediately. Feed nothing until the next meal. Try a tiny amount again. Do not increase the food or the frequency of the feedings until the dog is HUNGRY and eating whatever is offered quickly. This program is safe and with the exception of dogs suffering from health problems, can be used on all dogs. If you are in doubt, check with your veterinarian. You can also stop feeding from a bowl for a short while and require that the dog earn every bite by working for it. This is very helpful if you are simultaneously training and housebreaking. The drawback is the irregularity of the feedings.

Most older dogs only need to be fed once a day. Pups need to eat more frequently. My own "rule of thumb" is this: I feed very young pups 3-4 times daily for as long as they hungrily eat all food at all feedings. When my pup begins to lose interest in any feeding, I reduce the number of feedings by one. Please do be aware that a sudden loss of appetite can be a sign of illness. The assumption being made here is that your puppy is healthy. As always, when in doubt, see the puppy doctor! Following the same rule, when the pup begins to snub another feeding, I reduce again until I am feeding once a day. Some dogs always prefer eating twice daily and actually need two feedings. This is especially true when there are hunger based chewing problems to contend with. Other dogs do quite well on one feeding a day but all dogs do best with a snack of some kind about halfway through their day. This prevents excessive bile build up.

The actual feeding schedule you use can be very important. If your dog will be home alone while you work, try to schedule your feeding time at the end of your workday. By doing this, the dog will have several chances to eliminate prior to your bedtime and more chances in the morning before you leave for work the next day. By thoughtfully examining your schedule and the effects it will have on the dog, you can make the job of waiting for chances to go potty easier on the dog.

Finally, we arrive at the section you have been awaiting – the actual instructions on housebreaking itself. **BEWARE!!!** If you have skipped ahead; if you somehow feel that you and your dog are exempt from the health and diet considerations I have mentioned,

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you could possibly be guilty of dog abuse if you glibly proceed. I BEG you to insure that your dog is healthy and being fed a perfect diet for him or her before proceeding.

You are about to ask your dog to do something you would never ask yourself or a child to do – to go all day and all night without ever routinely having a chance to eliminate. If I was to tell you that you could use the bathroom at home until it was time to go to work or to school but day in and day out, you could not go to the bathroom again until you returned home, how would you feel? Do you get a glimmer of why I say that without insuring that the health and diet are perfect, you could be guilty of dog abuse? You MUST insure that your beloved friend has everything possible going for it to help with this task.

I totally advocate the use of confinement in housebreaking unless improper confinement done previously has ruined the dog's innate desire to stay clean. This means, that in almost all cases, I recommend the use of dog crates as housebreaking training tools.

By nature, dogs are den animals. They like small enclosed areas to sleep/nest in. Dogs do not like to soil their dens and will try desperately to avoid doing so. Even little pups will crawl away from their sleeping areas to mess. When a dog messes in his "den" something has gone radically wrong. This will be covered later in this paper.

Many people shudder or turn pale at the thought of putting their beloved dogs into crates. Some will even follow this emotional reaction to the point of putting a supposedly unhousebreakable dog to sleep rather than crate it. I wish you could share the experiences of those who have resisted crating until circumstances forced them to try. These same people usually become the most stalwart defenders and proponents of crate usage. As they will tell you, when you use a crate properly, everything turns positive. The dog learns to relax in its' crate; messes in the house cease (sometimes instantly); homecomings become joyous reunions instead of angry confrontations and the entire household relaxes. The most common comment I hear from those who resisted crating is "why did I wait so long to try this?"

You cannot successfully crate train until the puppy has enough bowel and bladder control to be physically capable of holding itself. Most pups under 9 weeks need to be let out quite frequently and often do not have the ability to go 4-6 hours until they are 10-12 weeks of age.

Here's how it all works. In the beginning, the dog is to be crated at all times when you are away or unable to directly observe him/her unless the dog is outside in a securely fenced area. Here is a sample situation: The dog has been in its' crate overnight. In the morning, the owner gets up and without delay (no shower, coffee, yoga, etc.) takes the dog swiftly from the crate to the permanent area where elimination is to be allowed. This area may be newspapers in another room, the back yard, the park or the apartment balcony. Be kind, don't keep moving the bathroom! The dog is given 3-5 minutes to eliminate. This is not a playtime. While observing the dog during its' elimination time, which is something the owner must do at first, the owner should be quiet until the dog is

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actively eliminating. During the actual elimination, quiet praise should be given. If you are clicker training, you may click the dog as he/she eliminates and feed immediately after the dog finishes. Quickly, return to the house and give the dog some well-earned freedom. The amount of freedom you allow, both in distance from you and in time will vary depending on the age and predictability of the dog. If the dog does not eliminate when outside OR if you know through past experience that the dog has not fully evacuated itself, then the dog is immediately and unemotionally brought back inside and re-crated for at least 30 minutes. Repeat the elimination time again in 30 minutes after crating.

If your schedule calls for a morning feeding, the feeding should follow the free time the dog earned by going outside. After eating, most dogs and especially pups, need to eliminate within 5-60 minutes. To be on the safe side, do not allow continued freedom after eating. If you know that your pup will need to eliminate immediately after eating, take him/her right back to the bathroom area and repeat the 3-5 minute program outlined above. If you are either uncertain of your dog's elimination habits or you know that it will be a little while before he/she will need to go out, either re-crate or tether your pup to you so that everywhere you go the pup goes and there can be no opportunity for the dog to wander away and make a mistake that you don't see. In either case, keep taking the dog out for 3-5 minutes until he/she eliminates. Take note of the time lapse between feeding and elimination and that will help guide you in the weeks to come once you see a pattern. The rest of your daytime schedule will be built around your schedule. Even if you are home all day, don't let the pup out every 20 minutes. Try to find a way to insure that in the beginning, your pup can be allowed access to the bathroom area every 4-6 hours. Set a routine and stick to it. Follow the 3-5 minute plan and immediately either reward with freedom in the house when elimination takes place OR re-crate instantly if the dog does not go. Your plan should be that your pup/dog can only be loose in the house immediately after it eliminates and then only for the amount of time you can totally trust the dog. When you reach the point where you are getting nervous, re-crate, tether or simply put the dog outside. In the midst of intense crate training, it is essential that your dog or pup get plenty of exercise! If you work, you will have to curtail your evening activities to give your dog the exercise that it needs.

In many households, work schedules make it impossible to let a dog out every 4-6 hours/ If your dog has the bowel and bladder control to hold itself while you are gone for longer periods, simply keep it in its' crate or in an outdoor kennel or fenced yard. If it cannot hold itself, to keep it crated would be inhumane and will cause the dog to develop filthy habits, as it would be forced to eliminate and sleep in it. Only young pups and dogs with health problems (including improper diet) cannot hold themselves all day. In the case of the young pup, we use a modified crate system. With a pup, set up a crate with an open door in a small room or playpen. Put newspaper everywhere except in the crate. The pup will quickly begin to sleep in the crate and mess outside of it. Within a short period of time, you should begin to see that the pup is no longer messing in the playpen area at all. This is nature working. The pup doesn't want to sleep close to his messes. When this time arrives, begin a traditional crating program. In the case of an unhealthy pet, we humanely devise some program that limits the areas in which the dog can mess without having to

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sleep in it. When the dog is healthy again, traditional crating resumes. This modified crating program can sometimes help older dogs who have been improperly crate trained or who have for whatever reasons, developed dirty crate habits.

Your afternoon and evening schedule should mimic your daytime one with the dog let out to eliminate just before bedtime. If the dog has been loose outside for some time and you do not know when it last eliminated, don't let it in and allow it to run free. You're asking to clean up a mess! When you let it in after such freedom, tether it to you or crate it until the next scheduled potty time outside.

A hint that fits here is to hang a small bell that you don't mind the sound of, on the doorframe where you usually let the dog out. Each time you take the dog to the door, take its' nose or paw and gently ring the bell. You can also teach the dog to ring the bell as a separate exercise using your clicker. Once the dog has learned that the way to communicate his/her need for the door to open is to ring the bell, housebreaking battles are more than 75% over! You may be lucky and own a dog that naturally barks or whines to go out but many dogs won't do this. Many poor dogs go the door and silently stare at it hoping that someone will open the door and when help does not arrive, they have accidents that they are punished for. That's not fair.

A crate should be used as a training tool with every effort directed towards weaning the dog from the crate. By using a crate, you set up both a schedule and clean habits for your dog. As the pattern/habit becomes set, you will begin to find that your dog can be trusted to be loose whenever you are home. You will still need to confine the dog whenever you are away from home or too busy to monitor his/her activities. **HOUSEBREAKING TAKES TIME!** Don't rush the procedure. No harm will come from delaying each step a bit too long. Great harm can come from letting the dog have freedom before patterns have been set deeply.

Once your dog has learned to eliminate on schedule and holds itself without errors when you are home, then it is time to try for overnight reliability. Bring the dog into your bedroom where, I'm certain, he has been crated all along. Because dogs are pack animals, they need to be with you, not isolated from you. Shut the door. The dog will perceive the situation as a sort of expanded crate. The chances are remote that housebreaking errors will occur. What is not so remote is that chewing might take place. Often dogs are ready for crate release on their housebreaking programs WAY before they are ready for release because of chewing problems! After 2-4 weeks of perfect behavior, try the dog loose in the house overnight by simply not shutting the bedroom door. Try this for 3 nights in a row unless chewing behaviors occur. You may find that the dog is perfect one night but errs on another night. An error at this level is not uncommon and is usually caused by stress or excitement or both. Don't make an issue of such a mistake. Simply clean it up without the dog seeing you do so. Use club soda on carpeting and white vinegar on tile. NEVER use any cleaning product that contains ammonia. You might also consider spraying the area with a good dog repellent. If accidents continue beyond the 3rd night, go back to the closed door for another month and then try again.

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Once your dog passes the overnight hurdle, it is time to begin the process of weaning it out of its' crate while you are away. Don't be in a hurry to remove the crate completely. Remember, the crate is your dog's bed, den and sanctuary. Your dog may choose to sleep in its' crate with the door open, forever. I recommend that you leave your dog alone during the day for short periods only to start. If the dog behaves in ALL RESPECTS, begin to gradually lengthen the free time until you have achieved total freedom in the house. Treat the evenings as a separate training period. If desired, you might choose to work on evening freedom before daytime freedom.

There are some dogs who seem to be impossible to housebreak using a confinement method because they cheerfully will mess and then sleep or play in their messes. Such poor dogs are almost always the by-product of very poor beginnings such as pet shops, breeders who use wire mesh flooring, health problems, crating too long too early and/or confusion where the pup came to believe that messing made the crate door open. Such confused pups need extra care and understanding, not punishment. The modified crate method outlined earlier sometimes works perfectly. Sometimes, dogs that have developed filthy habits will be filthy in any kind of confined area. The best solution is to allow the dog a great deal of space outside so that it can re-establish the natural desire to mess in one area and sleep in another. Whenever possible, it is helpful to allow such dogs to run loose in a large fenced yard or spacious outdoor kennel. In that area, they can re-discover the joy of being clean and because they are outside, they are right whenever they eliminate. When such dogs are brought indoors, the use of a tether is mandatory as is the use of the bell by the door. Give the dog time, months if necessary, to establish the idea that being clean and away from its' excretions is good. Then, begin a program of crating that slowly asks the dog to hold itself over very gradually lengthening periods of time. Once the dog has learned to be clean again, a normal crate method can usually be used. There are exceptions. Severely traumatized dogs may never feel safe in a crate.

There is also a great deal to be said for the use of "Doggie Doors". In the majority of cases, a good doggie door can end housebreaking problems instantly. This is especially true when the door opens into a small laundry room or other small enclosed space. Such limited access to the house is a good idea especially when the dog being trained is apt to steal household treasures and take them outside. Humans must keep in mind that dogs who are housebroken via a doggie door method sometimes never develop the ability to hold themselves if they cannot have instant access to the outside.

Leg lifting is NOT a housebreaking problem! Neither is submissive urination. Both of these problems are best handled through other training methods. Leg lifting is territorial marking. This will often decrease or disappear when neutering takes place. Breeding usually makes it worse. Submissive urination is an INVOLUNTARY act which occurs when the dog is frightened or excited. Punishment ALWAYS makes the problem worse because the dog has no idea that it is urinating and cannot understand why it is being corrected. In its attempt to submit to your authority, the dog will involuntarily urinate even more if punished. A program consisting of obedience training to increase the dog's self confidence and self control and identifying and removing the human behaviors that trigger urination while ignoring the dribbles will accomplish a great deal.

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The reader should note that in the lengthy instructions given so far, virtually nothing has been said about corrections for errors. This is due to the obvious fact that 99% of all housebreaking errors are due to human mismanagement, not dog misbehavior. Also, there is built in punishment in the system. If a dog capable of holding itself messes in its' crate, the punishment is having to be trapped next to the mess. The dog on a tether will find itself flying outside if it starts to mess in the house.

The most common causes for accidents are:

1. Allowing the dog/puppy unobserved freedom too early in the program.
2. Snacks, unscheduled feedings or poor diet
3. Health problems including parasites.
4. Refusing to follow all of the steps in the program
5. **RUSHING THE PROCESS!**

All of the above are human errors for which the dog should not suffer. Keep in mind that the program as it is outlined is a positive one. By following it, you may never have an accident to clean up. When you err and accidents occur, you cause the entire process to slow and in the long run, the dog ends up crated longer.

Beyond an occasional bellow towards a pup who starts to squat in the wrong place, the only time to consider any form of punishment would be in a older, healthy, well fed dog caught in the act of eliminating in the house. Since after the fact correction does no good, if you don't catch the culprit, correction will have no meaning. In either case, ruling out health and diet issues and then returning to a few weeks of strict crating will generally solve the problem.

There are dogs that cannot stand to have any changes at all in their routines. Even time changes like daylight savings time or your work schedule changing can throw them. Other things like someone being home sick, school letting out or beginning, vacations, company can cause dogs like this to "backslide". If you know that your dog reacts negatively to schedule changes or stress, calmly use your crate for a week or so any time you can sense that the dog may become upset enough to have accidents. In other words, **PREVENT THE PROBLEM FROM HAPPENING!**

Good luck and remember that literally thousands of people have successfully housebroken their dogs by following this program.

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