

The Everyday Dog Care Handbook

Build useful routines, notice changes, and work well with your veterinary team.



The Everyday Dog Care Handbook

THE HAPPY DOG LIBRARY | FIRST EDITION

General education for companion-dog households. This book does not provide veterinary diagnosis, treatment, or an individualized behavior plan. Seek veterinary advice for health concerns and qualified help for persistent distress or unsafe behavior. No result or timetable is guaranteed. The professional organizations cited have not endorsed this publication.

Customer edition: personal household use. You may read on your devices and print pages for your household. Resale, public uploading, and distribution outside your household are not included. Linked third-party materials retain their own terms.

Contents

1. Know your dog's normal	3
2. Make prevention a shared plan	4
3. Teeth, coat, paws, and ears	5
4. Medication and recovery at home	6
5. Recognize when to seek urgent help	7
6. Turn care into a sustainable routine	8
Sources & further reading	9

1. Know your dog's normal

Good observation begins during ordinary days. Notice how your dog eats, drinks, moves, rests, eliminates, and responds to familiar activities. You do not need to perform a medical examination. You need a useful description of what is usual so that changes are easier to recognize.

Keep a brief baseline record. Include the normal diet, medications, activity pattern, and any established conditions. A short video of comfortable walking can help you explain later changes, provided recording never delays necessary care. Store records where a backup caregiver can access them.

Look for patterns without diagnosing them yourself. Drinking more, reduced interest in food, repeated scratching, disturbed sleep, or reluctance on stairs can have several causes. Tell your veterinarian what you observed, when it began, and whether it is getting worse. "She takes longer to stand after sleeping" is more useful than an unsupported diagnosis.

Schedule routine examinations according to the dog's age, health, and veterinary advice. Do not wait for an annual reminder if something changes sooner. Preventive visits are also a chance to discuss weight, dental care, behavior, and the practical realities of your household.

Prepare three questions

Before an appointment, write the three most important questions. Bring the medication list and food details, including supplements and treats. If money or transport is a constraint, say so early. Ask the team to explain priorities and the next step rather than leaving with a plan you cannot follow.

2. Make prevention a shared plan

Vaccinations, parasite prevention, screening, and reproductive-health decisions should be tailored with your veterinary team. Location, travel, age, exposure, and medical history matter. Avoid copying another dog's schedule or using leftover products without checking suitability.

Ask for a written schedule that names the product or procedure, due date, and responsible person. Use a calendar reminder and record completion. A reminder without confirmation can lead to one caregiver assuming another has already given a treatment.

Check labels and instructions carefully. Products intended for different species, weights, or circumstances are not automatically interchangeable. Store medicines and preventives securely, away from pets and children. If a dose is missed or accidentally duplicated, contact the veterinary team or appropriate poison service for instructions.

Discuss spaying or neutering individually, including timing, benefits, and possible tradeoffs for the particular dog. Breeding is not a necessary part of being a caring owner. It requires specialized planning, health evaluation, resources, and responsibility for the resulting puppies.

Update identification after moving or changing phone numbers. Check gates, fencing, and door routines even when the dog has never escaped before. Prevention includes ordinary household systems, not only medical products.

3. Teeth, coat, paws, and ears

Build care around comfort. Introduce equipment gradually, reward brief cooperation, and stop when the dog needs a break. If touch causes pain, sudden avoidance, or aggression, seek veterinary advice rather than restraining harder.

Dental care deserves a specific plan. Daily brushing with dog-appropriate toothpaste can help reduce plaque, but introduce it gradually and follow your veterinarian's advice, especially if the mouth may already be painful. Home care does not replace professional assessment or necessary treatment. Avoid human toothpaste and products not intended for dogs.

For coat care, select tools suited to the individual coat. Work gently in short sessions and check common friction areas such as behind the ears and around harness contact points. Tight matting can involve the skin; do not cut blindly with scissors. Ask a groomer or veterinarian to handle difficult mats safely.

Inspect paws after appropriate outings for visible irritation or debris. Learn nail care from a qualified professional if you are unsure. Begin by making paw handling comfortable and do not rush to trim every nail in one session. A cooperative-care routine can take time to establish.

Notice ear odor, redness, discharge, or repeated head shaking. These signs need assessment rather than improvised remedies. Use only the cleaning approach and product recommended for your dog's situation. Avoid pushing objects into the ear canal or putting household mixtures into a painful ear.

4. Medication and recovery at home

Ask the veterinary team to demonstrate any procedure you do not understand. Repeat instructions back in your own words: the medicine, amount, timing, duration, storage, and what to do after a missed or vomited dose. Never guess an adjustment or give a human painkiller on your own initiative.

Create a single medication log that everyone uses. Record the actual time given, not merely the intended time. Keep the original packaging and instructions together. If more than one caregiver is involved, agree on how handovers happen so that doses are neither skipped nor doubled.

For recovery, prepare the recommended resting area before the dog returns home. Arrange non-slip footing, safe access to water, and a practical toilet route. Follow the veterinary activity restriction even if the dog seems eager to do more. Ask what enrichment is compatible with the treatment plan.

Know the follow-up instructions and the signs that require an earlier call. If a wound changes, appetite falls, or the dog appears uncomfortable, describe the change promptly. Photographs may help when the clinic requests them, but images cannot replace an examination when one is needed.

Do not stop prescribed medication or add supplements because an online story sounds convincing. If the treatment seems difficult, ineffective, or unaffordable, contact the prescriber. A realistic revised plan is safer than an unreported improvisation.

5. Recognize when to seek urgent help

Difficulty breathing, collapse, major trauma, severe bleeding, repeated seizures, suspected poisoning, or a swollen abdomen with unproductive retching warrant urgent veterinary attention. This list is not exhaustive. If you are unsure whether a situation is urgent, call an emergency veterinary service and describe what you see.

Call ahead when possible so the clinic can advise on transport and prepare for arrival. Give the dog's approximate size, the event, current signs, and any known exposure. Keep packaging or a photograph of a suspected substance. Do not induce vomiting or give a home antidote unless a veterinary professional specifically directs it.

Heat illness is an emergency. Move the dog out of the heat, contact urgent veterinary care, and begin cooling while arranging transport according to professional guidance. Do not wait for apparent recovery before seeking advice. Preventive planning matters: avoid hot vehicles and adjust outings to weather and the individual dog's ability to cope.

An injured or frightened dog may bite. Keep your face away, reduce handling, and follow professional guidance. Do not reach blindly into the mouth, attempt unfamiliar procedures, or restrain in ways that interfere with breathing. Learn practical pet first aid through a suitable hands-on course before an emergency happens.

Maintain an emergency card with your regular clinic, nearest emergency hospital, backup caregiver, and relevant poison service. In the United States, ASPCA Poison Control is 888-426-4435 and Pet Poison Helpline is 855-764-7661; consultation fees may apply. Verify local services and numbers when you move or travel.

6. Turn care into a sustainable routine

A daily check can be simple: food and water, elimination, comfortable movement, appropriate activity, rest, and any medication due. Attach it to something already established, such as the evening meal. A routine you can maintain is more useful than a complex chart abandoned after three days.

Use a weekly review for supplies, grooming needs, appointments, and unusual observations. Wash bedding and bowls appropriately, inspect toys and equipment, and replenish the travel or emergency kit. Replace damaged items rather than waiting for them to fail during use.

Create a caregiver handover sheet. Include the familiar food and measured amount, medication instructions supplied by the veterinarian, safe handling notes, walking equipment, permitted activities, and emergency contacts. Be specific about known risks such as door-dashing, food guarding, or interactions with other animals.

Review care costs periodically. Ask your veterinary team which preventive priorities apply to your dog, and plan for both routine and unexpected expenses. Avoid spending on unnecessary accessories while essential care remains unresolved.

A sample calm care session

Invite the dog onto a familiar non-slip surface. Reward a brief look at the brush, make one gentle stroke if comfortable, and pause. Continue only while the dog is willing. Finish with a simple pleasant activity. Repeating this tiny successful session can build a more useful habit than an occasional long struggle.

Good care is a partnership between the people who know the dog's everyday life and the professionals trained to assess health. Your observations, questions, and follow-through are valuable parts of that partnership.

Sources & further reading

Selected professional resources supporting the safety and care approach. Accessed September 22, 2026. These references are not endorsements, and this collection has not received independent veterinary review.

R9 | American Veterinary Medical Association

Pet First Aid, 2025

<https://ebusiness.avma.org/files/ProductDownloads/mcm-client-brochures-pet-first-aid-2025.pdf>

R10 | AAHA

Dog and cat dental disease: professional cleanings and home care

<https://www.aaha.org/resources/your-pets-dental-care/>